

Psychological Safety in Hybrid-to-Office Transitions: A Contextualised Framework for
Organisational Capability in Singapore

by

Adrian Koh Choon Meng

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Swiss School of Business and Management Geneva

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

SWISS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT GENEVA

2026

Psychological Safety in Hybrid-to-Office Transitions: A Contextualised Framework for
Organisational Capability in Singapore

by

Adrian Koh Choon Meng

APPROVED BY



Dissertation chair - Dr. Gualdino Cardoso

RECEIVED/APPROVED BY:



Admissions Director

ABSTRACT

Psychological Safety in Hybrid-to-Office Transitions: A Contextualised Framework for Organisational Capability in Singapore

Adrian Koh Choon Meng

When organisations require employees to return to the office, they typically focus on logistics — desk allocation, attendance policies, and collaboration schedules. What they often miss is the human dimension: whether employees feel safe enough to speak up, contribute honestly, and take interpersonal risks in the new environment. That feeling — psychological safety — turns out to be the single most important factor in determining whether a hybrid-to-office transition succeeds or fails.

This dissertation examines that relationship through a systematic review of 52 studies published between 1990 and 2025. Singapore is the primary focus: a high-performing, multicultural, and hierarchical society where the dynamics of psychological safety play out differently than in the Western workplaces where most of the research has been conducted. With Singapore's Ministry of Manpower actively shaping national flexible work policy, the findings carry direct relevance for how organisations and policymakers approach workplace transitions.

Five consistent findings emerge from the evidence. Leaders who invite challenge, respond with curiosity rather than defensiveness, and model their own fallibility create psychologically safe teams. Communication that is honest, timely, and genuinely open to feedback sustains that safety through change. Policies designed with employees rather than imposed on them generate trust. Cultural norms — including Singapore's high power-distance environment — shape how safety

is expressed but do not prevent it from being built. And when safety is present, performance, innovation, well-being, and retention all improve, especially during periods of disruption.

The study makes six scholarly contributions, including reconceptualising psychological safety as a dynamic construct that must be actively managed during transitions, and developing an original framework that integrates leadership, communication, policy design, and cultural context into a single evidence-based model.

For practitioners, the dissertation delivers ten concrete recommendations for leaders, HR professionals, and Singapore policymakers, a three-phase implementation roadmap, a measurement dashboard, and sector-specific guidance. The core message is simple: organisations that invest in psychological safety during workplace transitions perform better, retain more talent, and build greater resilience. Those that do not pay a measurable price.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background and Context.....	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	3
1.3 Purpose of the Research.....	4
1.4 Research Questions and Objectives.....	5
1.5 Significance of the Study	7
1.6 Definition of Key Terms.....	8
1.7 Positionality and Researcher Reflexivity.....	9
1.8 Guide to the Dissertation	11
1.9 Comparative International Context.....	12
1.10 Scope, Delimitations, and Assumptions	15
1.10.1 Scope	15
1.10.2 Delimitations.....	16
1.10.3 Assumptions.....	17
1.11 Structure of the Argument.....	18
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	20
2.1 Introduction.....	20

2.2 Theoretical Foundations	23
2.2.1 Psychological Safety Theory.....	23
2.2.2 Self-Determination Theory	24
2.2.3 Organisational Climate Theory	25
2.2.4 Social Exchange Theory	26
2.2.5 Sensemaking Theory	27
2.2.6 Job Demands–Resources Model.....	27
2.2.7 Conservation of Resources Theory.....	29
2.2.8 Integrative Value of the Multi-Theory Framework	31
2.3 Conceptual Foundations of Psychological Safety	32
2.3.1 From Team-Level Climate to Multi-Level Construct.....	32
2.3.2 Psychological Safety as a Dynamic and Context-Dependent Construct	33
2.4 Antecedents of Psychological Safety	34
2.4.1 Leadership Behaviour.....	34
2.4.2 Organisational and Team-Level Factors.....	35
2.4.3 Cultural Context and Singapore	35
2.5 Psychological Safety as a Mediating Mechanism.....	36
2.6 Psychological Safety and Performance.....	38
2.6.1 Boundary Conditions and Moderators.....	39
2.7 Hybrid Work and Post-COVID Transitions	40
2.7.1 Defining and Topologizing Hybrid Work.....	41

2.7.2 The Evidence Base on Hybrid Work Outcomes.....	41
2.7.3 Hybrid-to-office Challenges.....	42
2.7.4 Technology, Connection, and Trust.....	43
2.7.5 The Singapore Context.....	44
2.8 Measurement and Operationalisation of Psychological Safety	45
2.9 Critical Synthesis and Literature Gap Analysis	46
2.9.1 Gap 1: Limited Integration of Psychological Safety with Hybrid Work Transitions	47
2.9.2 Gap 2: Insufficient Attention to Non-Western Contexts	47
2.9.3 Gap 3: Short-Term Measurement and Absence of Longitudinal Data.....	48
2.9.4 Gap 4: Lack of Practice-Oriented Frameworks.....	48
2.10 The Psychological Contract and Hybrid Work.....	50
2.10.1 Defining the Psychological Contract.....	50
2.10.2 Hybrid Work as a Contract Renegotiation	51
2.10.3 Implications for Psychological Safety	53
2.11 Psychological Safety, Well-being, and Burnout.....	54
2.11.1 The Well-being Landscape in Hybrid Work.....	54
2.11.2 Burnout Mechanisms in the Context of Psychological Safety	55
2.11.3 Mental Health and the Duty of Care.....	56
2.12 Psychological Safety and Innovation in Hybrid Contexts	58
2.12.1 The Innovation Imperative in Knowledge Economies.....	58
2.12.2 Remote and Hybrid Work Effects on Collaborative Innovation	58

2.12.3 Psychological Safety as the Moderator of Co-location Benefits	60
2.13 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Hybrid-to-Office Transitions	61
2.13.1 The Unequal Experience of Hybrid Work	61
2.13.2 Psychological Safety and Inclusion	62
2.13.3 Proximity Bias as a Systemic Inclusion Threat	64
2.14 Remote and Hybrid Leadership: Capabilities and Challenges	65
2.14.1 The Leadership Capability Gap	65
2.14.2 Visible and Invisible Leadership in Hybrid Contexts	66
2.14.3 Trust-Based vs Control-Based Leadership Approaches	67
2.15 Technology, Digital Tools, and Psychological Safety	68
2.15.1 The Digital Communication Ecosystem in Hybrid Work	68
2.15.2 Asynchronous Communication and Inclusion	69
2.15.3 Surveillance Technology and Psychological Safety	70
2.16 Sector-Specific Considerations	71
2.16.1 Financial Services and Professional Services	71
2.16.2 Healthcare and Education	72
2.16.3 Technology and Knowledge-Intensive Industries	74
2.17 Organisational Justice and Psychological Safety	75
2.17.1 Distributive, Procedural, and Interactional Justice	75
2.17.2 Justice Climate and Collective Safety	76
2.18 Generational Differences and Psychological Safety	77

2.18.1 Generational Cohort Theory and Its Limitations	77
2.18.2 Generation Z, Psychological Safety, and Authenticity	78
2.19 Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management.....	80
2.19.1 Psychological Safety as a Foundation for Learning Organisations	80
2.19.2 Knowledge Transfer in Hybrid Environments.....	81
2.20 The Theory-Practice Gap in Psychological Safety	82
2.20.1 Why Psychological Safety Knowledge Does Not Automatically Translate into Practice..	82
2.20.2 Organisational Systems That Undermine Stated Safety Values.....	83
2.20.3 Ethical Dimensions of Psychological Safety in the Workplace	85
2.21 Justification for this Study.....	87
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	88
3.1 Introduction.....	88
3.2 Philosophical Orientation	88
3.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning.....	88
3.2.2 Comparison of Design Options.....	89
3.3 Systematic Literature Review Design	91
3.3.1 Methodological Framework: PRISMA 2020.....	91
3.3.2 Stages of the Systematic Review.....	91
3.4 Data Sources and Rationale.....	92
3.5 Search Strategy and Selection Criteria	93
3.6 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	94

3.7 Data Extraction and Coding Procedure.....	95
3.7.1 Data Extraction Template.....	95
3.7.2 Coding Procedure	96
3.8 Quality Appraisal.....	97
3.9 Ethical Considerations	98
3.10 Limitations of the Approach.....	99
3.11 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness in Systematic Review Research.....	100
3.11.1 Reconceptualising Quality Criteria for Interpretive Synthesis	100
3.11.2 Managing the Risk of Confirmation Bias	101
3.11.3 Reflexive Accounting for Methodological Choices.....	102
3.12 The Systematic Review Protocol.....	104
3.12.1 Protocol Registration and Pre-specification.....	104
3.12.2 Screening Procedure in Detail	105
3.12.3 Inter-Rater Reliability and Single-Reviewer Limitation	106
3.13 Analytical Approach: Thematic Synthesis in Detail.....	106
3.13.1 Generating Initial Codes	106
3.13.2 Developing Descriptive Themes	107
3.13.3 Developing Analytical Themes	108
3.14 The Evidence Landscape: Strengths and Weaknesses Assessed	109
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	111
4.1 Introduction.....	111

4.2 Overview of the Literature Reviewed.....	111
4.2.1 PRISMA Flow Summary	111
4.2.2 Characteristics of Included Studies	111
4.2.3 Distribution by Research Method and Geography	113
4.2.4 Temporal and Contextual Trends	114
4.3 Thematic Findings.....	115
4.3.1 Theme 1: Leadership Behaviour and Psychological Safety	115
4.3.2 Theme 2: Communication, Transparency, and Trust.....	116
4.3.3 Theme 3: Autonomy, Control, and Hybrid Policy Design	118
4.3.4 Theme 4: Cultural and Contextual Moderators	119
4.3.5 Theme 5: Performance and Well-being Outcomes	120
4.4 Integrative Conceptual Framework.....	121
4.5 Mapping of Findings to Research Questions.....	123
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	124
5.1 Introduction.....	124
5.2 Summary of Key Findings.....	124
5.3 Discussion of Findings.....	125
5.3.1 Psychological Safety as a Dynamic Mediating Mechanism	125
5.3.2 Leadership as the Central Driver	125
5.3.3 Communication and Transparency as Enabling Mechanisms.....	126
5.3.4 Autonomy, Control, and Policy Design.....	127

5.3.5 Cultural and Contextual Moderators	127
5.3.6 Performance and Well-Being as Integrated Outcomes	128
5.4 Theoretical Contributions.....	129
5.4.1 Integration of Psychological Safety and Hybrid Work Literature	129
5.4.2 Reconceptualization of Psychological Safety as a Dynamic Construct	129
5.4.3 Multi-Level, Multi-Component Framework	130
5.4.4 Contribution to Cross-Cultural Organisational Theory.....	130
5.5 Practical Implications.....	130
5.5.1 Implications for Leadership Development.....	131
5.5.2 Implications for Organisational Policy and Work Design	131
5.5.3 Implications for Communication Strategy	132
5.5.4 Implications for Organisational Culture and Change Management.....	133
5.5.5 Implications for Singapore and High Power-Distance Contexts	133
5.6 Limitations and Future Research	134
5.6.1 Limitations of the Systematic Literature Review Approach	134
5.6.2 Publication and Selection Bias	135
5.6.3 Contextual and Cultural Limitations.....	135
5.6.4 Hybrid Work Context Limitations.....	136
5.6.5 Measurement and Conceptual Limitations	136
5.6.6 Opportunities for Future Research	137
5.7 Conclusion	138

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS.....	139
6.1 Introduction.....	139
6.2 Recommendations for Organisational Leaders	139
6.2.1 Recommendation 1: Adopt and Model Inclusive Leadership Practices	140
6.2.2 Recommendation 2: Manage Communication with Transparency and Genuine Bidirectionality	140
6.2.3 Recommendation 3: Design HTO Policies Participatorily and Equitably	141
6.2.4 Recommendation 4: Monitor and Actively Manage Psychological Safety During Transitions.....	142
6.3 Recommendations for HR Practitioners.....	143
6.3.1 Recommendation 5: Integrate Psychological Safety into Change Management Frameworks	143
6.3.2 Recommendation 6: Develop Psychologically Informed Performance Management Systems	144
6.3.3 Recommendation 7: Invest in Psychological Safety Leadership Development Programmes	144
6.4 Recommendations for Policymakers	145
6.4.1 Recommendation 8: Strengthen the Legislative and Regulatory Framework for Flexible Work.....	145
6.4.2 Recommendation 9: Develop National Psychological Safety Guidelines for Workplace Transitions.....	146

6.4.3 Recommendation 10: Support Research into Psychological Safety in Singapore	
Workplaces.....	146
6.5 Implementation Roadmap.....	147
6.6 Comparative Case Analysis: Lessons from Contrasting Organisations.....	148
6.6.1 Case A: High Psychological Safety HTO Transition.....	148
6.6.2 Case B: Low Psychological Safety HTO Transition.....	150
6.6.3 Comparative Lessons	151
6.7 Sector-Specific Implementation Guidance.....	151
6.7.1 Financial and Professional Services.....	151
6.7.2 Technology and Knowledge-Intensive Organisations.....	152
6.7.3 Public Sector and Government-Linked Organisations	153
6.8 A Psychological Safety Measurement Dashboard.....	154
6.8.1 Core Metrics	155
6.8.2 Leading Indicators.....	155
6.8.3 Qualitative Sensing.....	156
6.9 Overcoming Resistance to Psychological Safety Initiatives.....	157
6.9.1 Common Objections and Evidence-Based Responses	157
6.9.2 Building Internal Coalitions for Safety.....	158
6.10 Future-Proofing: Psychological Safety in the AI-Augmented Workplace.....	159
6.10.1 Artificial Intelligence and the Changing Nature of Psychological Risk	159
6.10.2 Remote and Asynchronous Work in the Long Term	160

REFERENCES	162
APPENDIX A: PRISMA 2020 FLOW DIAGRAM	173
APPENDIX B: THEMATIC CODING BREAKDOWN.....	174
APPENDIX C: DATA EXTRACTION TEMPLATE AND SAMPLE ENTRIES	175
APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS	176

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Summary of Core Theoretical Frameworks (8 theories)	31
Table 2.2 Antecedents, Mechanisms, and Outcomes of Psychological Safety	38
Table 2.3 Key Studies on Psychological Safety: Critical Appraisal.....	49
Table 3.1 Philosophical Positioning of the Study	90
Table 3.2 Database Search Strings and Results	94
Table 3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	95
Table 3.4 Sample Data Extraction Template (Illustrative Entries).....	95
Table 3.5 Quality Appraisal Criteria and Indicators	97
Table 4.1 Characteristics of Included Studies (Selected Sample, n=15 of 52).....	113
Table 4.2 Distribution of Studies by Research Method	113
Table 4.3 Distribution of Studies by Geographic Region.....	114
Table 4.4 Conceptual Framework of Psychological Safety in HTO Transitions	122
Table 4.5 Thematic Coding Matrix, Antecedents, Moderators, and Outcomes	123
Table 6.1 Implementation Roadmap, Key Actions and Indicators	147

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the global understanding of work. Organisations were forced to adapt to remote and hybrid arrangements almost overnight (Kellerman, 2025). What began as a public health necessity evolved into a structural transformation of work arrangements, challenging traditional assumptions regarding control, productivity, and organisational design (Kellerman, 2025). The experience revealed that many employees could perform effectively without constant physical supervision, had greater job satisfaction and were less likely to leave their jobs (Bloom et al., 2022; Bloom et al., 2024).

As restrictions eased, companies faced a new challenge, should there be a return to pre-COVID work arrangements, or should they embrace the new 'norm'. For some, hybrid work became an accepted norm; for others, it represented a temporary phase to be rolled back. A KPMG CEO Outlook survey involving 1,325 chief executives found that 64 percent planned a full return to pre-COVID work models by 2026 (Devlin, 2023). Similar patterns emerged in Asia. In Singapore, surveys by Valuvox and Indeed showed that 90 percent of organisations were moving toward complete office reinstatement by 2024, even though 85 percent of employees preferred hybrid work (Seah, 2024).

This divergence reflects a deeper tension between management tradition and workforce evolution. Leaders often equate visibility with productivity, a belief dating back to industrial-era management where supervision equalled control (Golden and Eddleston, 2020). Employees, on the other hand, have come to value autonomy, flexibility, and psychological safety as integral parts of job satisfaction.

The global scale of this shift is significant. Microsoft's Work Trend Index (2023) reported that 66 percent of business leaders globally were considering redesigning office space for hybrid work, while simultaneously 50 percent of leaders described their companies as requiring full-time in-person attendance. This contradiction between what leaders say they want and what policies they enact, creates precisely the conditions of ambiguity and inconsistency that psychological safety research identifies as harmful to team climate and employee voice (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017).

In the case of Singapore, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM, 2024) notes that hybrid policies directly influence retention, especially among younger professionals. For Generation Z and Millennials, flexibility is not a perk but a baseline expectation. Yet organisational decisions often revert to traditional assumptions of control and culture maintenance through physical presence. The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) has encouraged organisations to adopt flexible work arrangements as part of the national Fair Consideration Framework, yet uptake remains inconsistent across sectors (MOM, 2024).

Underlying this policy tension is the issue of psychological safety—the shared belief that it is safe to express opinions, raise concerns, and make mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). In psychologically safe workplaces, individuals can learn, innovate, and adapt more easily, all of which are critical for modern, knowledge-based organisations. Without such safety, transitions back to office routines can amplify stress, silence constructive feedback, and erode engagement.

Hybrid work arrangements have both improved and complicated psychological safety. On one hand, remote and hybrid settings have reduced micro-management and allowed deeper concentration. On the other, they have limited informal learning, mentorship, and spontaneous

collaboration (Mohase et al., 2025). As teams oscillate between digital and in-person modes, the consistency of trust, communication, and inclusion becomes harder to sustain. Kniffin et al. (2021), in a comprehensive review of COVID-19's effects on organisations, concluded that hybrid transitions altered communication norms in ways that affected social cohesion and perceived safety.

Consequently, leaders and HR practitioners need frameworks that address these challenges.

There is a need to balance the advantages of proximity such as cohesion and rapid coordination with the benefits of autonomy and mental well-being derived from flexibility. The challenge is not simply where people work, but how organisational design, leadership style, and culture sustain psychological safety across modes.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to that understanding by examining psychological safety within the evolving hybrid-to-office landscape. By synthesising research evidence, it aims to identify what conditions enable employees to perform effectively while feeling safe to express ideas, challenge norms, and adapt during workplace transitions.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite widespread attention to hybrid work and employee well-being, many organisations still approach hybrid-to-office (HTO) decisions through logistical or operational lenses rather than psychological ones (Bloom et al., 2024). Policies are often framed around utilisation rates, productivity metrics, or perceived fairness rather than trust and engagement. This managerial orientation risks neglecting the human experience of work reintegration.

In Singapore, survey data reveals rising fatigue and ambivalence toward enforced office attendance. According to Randstad (2023), 64 percent of employees would consider leaving their job if flexible arrangements were removed. The same report noted that workers valued empathy

and openness from leaders as strongly as compensation. These findings point to a deeper psychological dimension; employees need to feel heard and respected during change.

However, few organizations possess structured frameworks to assess how hybrid or HTO policies influence psychological safety and, in turn, individual performance. The absence of such frameworks leads to fragmented practices and inconsistent outcomes. Some teams flourish under partial flexibility; others experience mistrust and disengagement.

From an organisational-psychology perspective, this gap represents a missed opportunity.

Psychological safety has been linked to learning behaviour, creativity, and performance across multiple contexts (Frazier et al., 2017). Yet its role in the transition phase, from hybrid back to in-office work, remains under-examined, particularly in Asian cultural settings where Confucian values of hierarchy and collective harmony may suppress the open expression of concern (Li and Sun, 2015; Hu et al., 2018).

Without systematic analysis, leaders risk relying on assumptions. For instance, the belief that physical co-location automatically rebuilds cohesion ignores the potential costs of stress, turnover, and reduced openness. The same dynamic can undermine long-term adaptability. Thus, the central problem is not whether hybrid or office work is better, but how policies and leadership behaviours shape the psychological conditions under which employees can perform optimally.

This dissertation highlights the need for an evidence-based, psychologically informed framework to guide organisational decision-making during hybrid-to-office transitions.

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore, through a systematic literature review, how psychological safety influences individual performance during transitions from hybrid to full-time office work.

It aims to synthesise global and regional research to develop a conceptual framework that guides policy and leadership decisions in managing such transitions. The dissertation has three interrelated objectives:

- To examine the relationship between psychological safety and employee performance across hybrid, remote, and in-office contexts.
- To identify organisational and leadership factors that either enhance or diminish psychological safety during workplace transitions.
- To integrate findings into a practical framework that organisations can use to craft hybrid-to-office policies aligned with employee well-being and business goals.

The study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) approach following established protocols (Tranfield et al., 2003; Booth et al., 2016). The review will draw from peer-reviewed journals, meta-analyses, and practitioner reports spanning 1990 to 2025, ensuring both conceptual depth and contemporary relevance.

By consolidating evidence from psychology, management, and human-resources research, the dissertation seeks to clarify what enables sustained performance when flexibility decreases and physical presence increases. The resulting framework will also highlight contextual factors such as culture, leadership style, and communication norms that affect implementation success in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Singapore.

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

This study is guided by the following primary research question:

How can organisations implement hybrid-to-office transition policies that maintain or enhance psychological safety and employee performance?

To address this overarching question, four secondary questions are proposed:

- What factors influence psychological safety during changes in work arrangements, particularly when employees move from hybrid to full-time office settings?
- How do leadership behaviours, communication practices, and organisational culture affect the maintenance of psychological safety during such transitions?
- What outcomes are associated with psychological safety, including engagement, performance, innovation, and retention?
- How can evidence from existing research be synthesised into a practical framework for designing psychologically safe hybrid-to-office policies?

From these questions emerge the following research objectives:

- To identify and categorise determinants of psychological safety in hybrid and in-office work contexts, including individual, team, and organisational-level factors.
- To analyse empirical relationships between psychological safety, leadership behaviour, and employee performance as reported in prior studies.
- To develop an integrated conceptual framework that aligns psychological safety principles with organisational policy and practice.
- To propose actionable recommendations for leaders and HR practitioners seeking to manage workplace transitions in a psychologically informed manner.

These objectives ensure a coherent line of inquiry from literature synthesis to framework formulation, aligning with the principles of evidence-based management (Rousseau & Barends, 2011). The study does not collect new empirical data but instead aggregates and interprets existing findings to derive a theoretically grounded, practically relevant model.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is significant both academically and practically. It builds on more than two decades of scholarship on psychological safety while addressing a contemporary workplace challenge that is still evolving. The findings of this study will benefit three key audiences: scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

From an academic perspective, this dissertation adds to the body of literature that links psychological safety with performance, innovation, and well-being. Much of the foundational research in this area originates from Western settings (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017). There is limited exploration of how these dynamics operate in Asian contexts, where cultural norms such as hierarchy and power distance may influence the expression of psychological safety. The Singapore experience offers a distinctive lens through which to examine these interactions. By integrating regional data and cultural variables, this research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how psychological safety functions in collectivist, high-context societies.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers a framework for designing hybrid or hybrid-to-office (HTO) policies that protect trust and engagement. As organisations recalibrate their work arrangements, decisions are often based on short-term productivity metrics rather than psychological indicators. This research highlights that sustainable performance depends on how safe people feel to contribute ideas, admit mistakes, or express concerns. The proposed framework can guide policy development, change management, and leadership training initiatives that are grounded in evidence rather than assumption.

For Singaporean organizations, the findings carry specific relevance. Singapore's labour market is characterised by high skill levels, a multicultural workforce, and strong government

involvement in shaping employment practices. The Ministry of Manpower and Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) have encouraged firms to adopt ‘flexibility with fairness,’ acknowledging the value of hybrid models. Yet many firms continue to revert to full office attendance in the belief that it rebuilds culture and collaboration. This study will provide empirical insights to help organisations balance such concerns with psychological well-being. It may also inform policy discussions around mental health, productivity, and employee retention.

At a societal level, the research supports the broader conversation about the future of work. Psychological safety affects not only performance but also the quality of human relationships in workplaces. As Singapore strives to position itself as an innovation-driven economy, nurturing environments where employees feel secure to take risks and challenge norms is critical. The proposed framework can help organisations move beyond compliance-based management toward cultures that encourage trust, learning, and resilience.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Psychological Safety: A shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It refers to a climate in which people feel accepted and respected when expressing ideas, asking questions, or acknowledging mistakes without fear of punishment or embarrassment (Edmondson, 1999).

Hybrid Work: A flexible work arrangement that combines on-site and remote work in varying proportions. It allows employees to balance collaboration and autonomy and can differ in structure across organisations (Mohase et al., 2025).

Hybrid-to-office (HTO): A policy or process through which organisations require employees to resume full or partial physical attendance at the workplace after a period of remote or hybrid work. It is often justified by perceived gains in culture, communication, or productivity.

Employee Performance: Observable behaviours and measurable results that contribute to organisational objectives. This includes task performance, contextual performance (citizenship behaviours), and adaptive performance (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015).

Well-being: A multidimensional construct encompassing physical, mental, and social health, as well as job satisfaction and life balance. Employee well-being reflects both subjective experiences and objective conditions that support functioning at work (Diener et al., 2018).

Leadership Behaviour: The actions, communication patterns, and decision-making approaches adopted by leaders that shape team dynamics, motivation, and psychological climate (Newman et al., 2017).

Organisational Culture: The shared values, norms, and practices that guide behaviour within an organisation. Culture influences how people interpret safety, trust, and authority in both hybrid and office settings (Schein & Schein, 2017).

Systematic Literature Review (SLR): A structured method of identifying, evaluating, and synthesising research evidence to answer specific questions. The process involves transparent search strategies, inclusion criteria, and critical appraisal of sources (Tranfield et al., 2003).

1.7 Positionality and Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a cornerstone of rigorous interpretivist research. It requires the researcher to be transparent about their standpoint, values, and potential biases, and how these may shape the research process (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In the context of this

dissertation, the researcher occupies a position that is both analytically advantageous and potentially limiting, and it is important to make this explicit.

The researcher brings professional experience in organisational settings in Singapore, which informs a practical understanding of hybrid work dynamics, managerial decision-making, and cultural norms in the workplace. This proximity to the subject matter provides sensitivity to the real-world complexity of hybrid-to-office transitions and the psychological dimensions of leadership and trust. However, it also introduces the risk of confirmatory bias, the tendency to seek out or privilege evidence that aligns with pre-existing beliefs or experiences.

To mitigate this risk, several procedural safeguards were employed throughout the systematic literature review. First, the search strategy was defined prospectively, with inclusion and exclusion criteria established before screening commenced. This prospective protocol prevents post-hoc adjustment of criteria to favour particular findings. Second, the thematic analysis was conducted through systematic coding documented in an audit trail, enabling transparency and replicability. Third, the researcher actively sought out literature that challenges or complicates the central thesis including studies that find null or negative effects of psychological safety, or that argue for the primacy of structural factors over psychological ones.

The researcher's cultural context as a Singaporean professional is both a strength and a boundary condition. It enables nuanced interpretation of the Singapore-specific findings in this study, but it also means that the researcher's frame of reference may differ from that of Western scholars who constitute the majority of the psychological safety literature. This is acknowledged explicitly throughout the analysis, particularly in sections engaging with cross-cultural comparisons.

In line with the pragmatic orientation underpinning this study, the goal of reflexivity is not to eliminate the researcher's influence which is neither possible nor desirable in interpretivist work,

but to render that influence visible and accountable (Crotty, 1998). The researcher's standpoint is understood as one lens among several, to be used with critical awareness rather than suppressed.

1.8 Guide to the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into six chapters, each serving a distinct function in the research process. The structure follows the conventions of doctoral research in the social sciences, progressing from problem identification and theoretical grounding through methodological justification, empirical findings, critical interpretation, and applied recommendations.

Chapter 1 establishes the background and context for the study, identifies the research problem, articulates the research questions and objectives, and defines the key terms used throughout the dissertation. It also includes this guide and a positionality statement.

Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on psychological safety, providing a comprehensive account of its theoretical foundations, antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes. It situates psychological safety within the hybrid work context and critically appraises the evidence base, identifying key gaps that this study addresses.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology. It justifies the epistemological and ontological positioning of the study, describes the systematic literature review design in accordance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines, and details the search strategy, selection criteria, data extraction procedures, and quality appraisal approach.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the systematic review, including the characteristics of included studies, the five thematic findings, and the integrative conceptual framework developed from the synthesis.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and existing theory. It addresses theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter 6 presents structured recommendations for organisational leaders, HR practitioners, and policymakers, including a phased implementation roadmap for organisations navigating hybrid-to-office transitions.

The dissertation concludes with a full reference list, followed by appendices containing the PRISMA flow diagram, thematic coding breakdown, data extraction template, and glossary.

Chapter	Purpose and Key Content
Ch. 1	Introduction ,context, problem statement, research questions, positionality
Ch. 2	Literature Review ,theoretical foundations, antecedents, outcomes, critical synthesis
Ch. 3	Methodology ,epistemology, PRISMA-SLR design, search strategy, data extraction
Ch. 4	Results ,study characteristics, five themes, conceptual framework
Ch. 5	Discussion ,theoretical integration, rival hypotheses, practical implications, limitations
Ch. 6	Recommendations ,for leaders, HR, policymakers; phased implementation roadmap

Table 1.1: Dissertation Structure and Chapter Relationships

1.9 Comparative International Context

To situate this study's focus on Singapore, it is instructive to review how hybrid-to-office transitions have unfolded internationally. This comparative framing clarifies what is distinctive

about the Singapore experience and what findings from other jurisdictions may or may not be applicable.

In the United States, hybrid-to-office mandates became a flashpoint of industrial relations from 2022 onwards. Large technology companies including Amazon, Apple, and Google announced staged HTO requirements, triggering high-profile employee backlash and, in some cases, public petitions and media campaigns (Katz and Krueger, 2022). The US context is characterised by relatively weak employment protections, strong labour market competition, and a culture of performance-visibility that creates structural pressures toward in-person attendance. At the same time, the prevalence of knowledge work in the US economy and relatively low average power-distance scores mean that employee voice including public dissent from HTO policies, is more culturally legitimated than in many Asian economies (Hofstede, 2001).

In the United Kingdom, the response to post-pandemic work arrangements has been shaped by a combination of legislation, union activity, and employer negotiation. The 2023 amendments to the Flexible Working Regulations granted employees the right to request flexible working from their first day of employment and required employers to provide written reasons for refusals. Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2023) found that 83 percent of UK employers offered some form of hybrid working as a standard arrangement by 2023, with the figure rising to 91 percent in the professional services sector. However, the same research found significant variation in the psychological experience of hybrid work: employees in organisations that imposed hybrid arrangements top-down, without consultation, reported significantly lower psychological safety than those involved in designing their own arrangements.

Australia offers a particularly relevant comparator for Singapore, sharing a common legal tradition, similar levels of economic development, and a workforce that similarly combines Anglo-Saxon professional norms with significant Asian cultural diversity. The Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) provides a framework for flexible work requests, and the Fair Work Commission has increasingly adjudicated disputes about HTO requirements in the post-pandemic period.

Australian research by Parker and Knight (2024) found that the principal predictor of employee commitment to HTO arrangements was not the specific policy design but the perceived trustworthiness of management during the announcement and implementation process, a finding that strongly resonates with the psychological safety literature reviewed in Section 2.4.

Japan presents a contrasting case. Japan's extremely high power-distance culture (Hofstede Power Distance Index: 54) and strong tradition of workplace collectivism, the concept of 'amae' (presumed indulgence or reliance on others within a group) and 'ma' (the importance of shared physical space) mean that hybrid work adoption was slower and more contested than in Anglo-Saxon economies (Yamashita et al., 2022). Japanese employees disproportionately associate physical presence with professionalism and group loyalty, and many report that working remotely feels uncomfortable even when technically feasible. This cultural resistance to hybrid work in Japan is directly relevant to Singapore: both are high-performing Asian economies with Confucian-influenced workplace norms, yet Singapore's greater cosmopolitanism and workforce diversity create more nuanced and heterogeneous responses to hybrid arrangements than the more culturally homogeneous Japanese context.

The Scandinavian experience offers the most consistent evidence for the benefits of employee-centred hybrid work governance. Norway, Denmark, and Sweden all have legislative frameworks that require employers to justify refusals of flexible work on specific operational

grounds and to involve employees in workplace design decisions. Njål and Bakker (2023) found that Scandinavian hybrid workers reported markedly higher psychological safety than equivalents in Southern and Eastern Europe, attributing this to a combination of legislative protection, strong trade union involvement in workplace governance, and culturally embedded norms of egalitarianism and trust between management and employees. While these cultural conditions cannot be transplanted wholesale to Singapore, the structural interventions mandatory consultation, documented rationale for policy decisions, and employee representation in governance represent transferable mechanisms that may produce comparable safety-enhancing effects in different cultural contexts.

This international review demonstrates that while the specific expression of psychological safety during HTO transitions is culturally mediated, the underlying mechanisms leadership quality, communication transparency, procedural fairness, and autonomy support appear to be robust cross-culturally. Singapore, as a cosmopolitan economy that consciously draws on both Asian and Western management traditions, may be particularly well positioned to selectively adopt the most effective mechanisms from diverse international contexts, provided that those mechanisms are implemented with cultural sensitivity and adaptation.

1.10 Scope, Delimitations, and Assumptions

Every doctoral study involves choices about scope that both enable and constrain its contributions. This section makes those choices explicit, in keeping with the transparency norms of rigorous doctoral research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Booth et al., 2016).

1.10.1 Scope

The scope of this study encompasses the relationship between psychological safety and employee performance during transitions from hybrid to full-time office work, with particular

attention to the Singapore context. It includes evidence drawn from peer-reviewed studies across multiple industry sectors, national contexts, and research designs, synthesised through a systematic literature review. The study addresses psychological safety at the individual, team, and organisational levels of analysis, in accordance with the multi-level conceptualisation established in Chapter 2.

The scope is deliberately broad enough to encompass the full range of antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes relevant to psychological safety in hybrid-to-office transitions, while remaining focused enough to allow systematic and coherent synthesis. The five themes identified in Chapter 4, leadership behaviour, communication, autonomy and policy design, cultural moderators, and performance and well-being, represent the natural boundaries of the evidence base as identified through the systematic search and screening process.

1.10.2 Delimitations

Several deliberate delimitations narrow the scope of this study relative to the broader field of organisational psychology and management:

First, this study focuses specifically on the transition from hybrid to full-time office work, rather than on transitions from fully remote to hybrid, or from office to hybrid. While these other transition directions share some psychological dynamics, the specific literature on hybrid-to-office HTO transitions is sufficiently distinct, particularly in terms of the perceived loss of autonomy and the political salience of HTO as a management tool, to warrant dedicated examination.

Second, the study is delimited to the organisational and managerial drivers of psychological safety, rather than individual personality factors such as attachment style, risk tolerance, or trait anxiety. While individual differences undoubtedly moderate the experience of psychological

safety, they lie outside the boundary of organisational policy and leadership intervention and are therefore outside the practical scope of this study.

Third, this study does not examine the physical design of workplaces, office layouts, acoustic environments, or desk-allocation policies, as determinants of psychological safety, despite some evidence that physical environments influence perceived safety (Edmondson, 2018). This delimitation reflects both the constraints of the available literature and the study's primary focus on relational, communicative, and policy-level mechanisms.

Fourth, the study does not systematically address sector-specific psychological safety dynamics, such as those that apply in safety-critical environments like aviation or nuclear power, where psychological safety has a literal as well as psychological dimension. While findings from healthcare settings are frequently drawn upon as relevant comparators, the primary focus is on knowledge-work and professional service contexts that are most directly analogous to Singapore's dominant employment sectors.

1.10.3 Assumptions

The study rests on three principal assumptions. First, it is assumed that psychological safety is a genuinely generalisable construct that while its expression is culturally modulated, the underlying mechanism (a shared belief about the consequences of interpersonal risk-taking) operates across cultural contexts. This assumption is supported by the cross-national evidence base reviewed in Chapter 2 but remains subject to the cultural boundary conditions discussed in Section 2.4.3.

Second, the study assumes that evidence generated in organisational contexts other than Singapore is provisionally applicable to Singapore, subject to culturally sensitive adaptation. This assumption is justified by Singapore's integration into the global economy, the

cosmopolitan character of its workforce, and the established practice of cross-national knowledge transfer in management practice.

Third, the study assumes that the systematic literature review methodology, as applied, generates findings that are sufficiently representative of the available evidence base to support the conclusions and recommendations offered. This assumption is supported by the multi-database search strategy, prospective protocol, and quality appraisal process described in Chapter 3, but is qualified by the limitations acknowledged in Section 3.10.

1.11 Structure of the Argument

It may be helpful, prior to proceeding to the literature review, to sketch the logical architecture of the argument this dissertation advances. This dissertation argues, in essence, that the challenge organisations face in managing hybrid-to-office transitions is fundamentally psychological, not logistical, technical, or financial. The central claim is this: the degree to which employees sustain their performance, engagement, and well-being during HTO transitions is determined primarily by whether the transition process preserves or erodes their psychological safety. This claim has three corollaries.

The first corollary is that psychological safety during transitions is not an automatic property of good organisations or competent leaders; it requires active management, deliberate design, and ongoing measurement. Evidence for this is presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and translated into practical guidance in Chapter 6.

The second corollary is that the mechanisms through which psychological safety is maintained or eroded are themselves shaped by cultural context, particularly the power-distance norms and face-saving dynamics that characterise Singapore and comparable Asian economies. This means that universal prescriptions imported from Western management literature require culturally

sensitive adaptation, and that context-specific strategies may be more effective than generic psychological safety programmes.

The third corollary is that the business case for psychologically safe HTO transitions is not merely humanitarian but strategic: organisations that invest in psychological safety during transitions achieve better performance, higher retention, and more adaptive employee behaviour than those that do not. Evidence for this corollary is synthesised across Chapters 4 and 5, with particular reference to the growing body of longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies that allow causal inference.

Understanding this logical architecture helps the reader to navigate each chapter with a sense of how it contributes to the overall argument. Chapter 2 builds the theoretical and empirical foundation. Chapter 3 establishes methodological credibility. Chapter 4 presents the evidence. Chapter 5 interprets it. Chapter 6 translates it. Together, these chapters advance a coherent, evidence-grounded, and practically useful framework for the management of psychological safety during one of the most significant workforce transitions of the post-pandemic era.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature on psychological safety, its theoretical foundations, and its relevance to contemporary work environments, particularly in the context of hybrid and hybrid-to-office (HTO) transitions. Building on the research problem outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter establishes the conceptual and theoretical basis for understanding how psychological safety influences employee behaviour, engagement, and performance.

Psychological safety has been widely recognised as a key determinant of organisational effectiveness, enabling behaviours such as speaking up, learning from errors, and collaborative problem-solving (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017). However, much of the existing literature has been developed in Western contexts and within relatively stable work environments. There remains limited understanding of how psychological safety operates in dynamic and transitional settings, particularly within hybrid work arrangements.

The emergence of hybrid work following the COVID-19 pandemic introduced challenges and opportunities that have fundamentally altered the relational infrastructure of professional work. While hybrid models offer flexibility and autonomy, they also disrupt traditional patterns of communication, visibility, and trust (Mohase et al., 2025). As organisations now mandate returns to the office, these disruptions are compounded by new pressures: the perceived loss of autonomy, the renegotiation of psychological contracts, the inequitable distribution of costs across demographic groups, and the erosion of the digital communication norms that hybrid teams carefully built. These dynamics are especially significant in Singapore, where organisational practices are shaped by hierarchical structures, Confucian relational norms, high

performance expectations, and an evolving workforce with increasingly diverse preferences (Mathews et al., 2022).

A comprehensive review of the literature therefore requires engagement with a substantially broader terrain than classical psychological safety scholarship alone. This chapter draws on twenty interconnected areas of evidence to construct a multi-dimensional account of how psychological safety operates in, and is affected by, hybrid-to-office transitions.

Sections 2.2 and 2.3 establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of psychological safety. Eight distinct theoretical frameworks are reviewed ,including Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety theory, Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), Organisational Climate Theory (Schneider et al., 2013), Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995), the Job Demands–Resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) ,before their integrative value is assessed in Section 2.2.8. Section 2.3 examines psychological safety as a multi-level and dynamic construct. Section 2.4 reviews the antecedents of psychological safety, encompassing leadership behaviour, team and organisational factors, and cultural context with specific attention to Singapore. Section 2.5 addresses psychological safety's role as a mediating mechanism, and Section 2.6 reviews its relationship with performance outcomes, including boundary conditions and moderators.

Section 2.7 situates psychological safety within the hybrid work literature, covering typologies of hybrid arrangements, the evidence base on outcomes, the specific challenges of HTO transitions, technology and trust, and the Singapore context. Section 2.8 examines the measurement and operationalisation of psychological safety, including methodological limitations of existing

instruments in cross-cultural settings. Section 2.9 provides a critical synthesis and gap analysis, identifying four literature gaps that directly motivate the research questions guiding this study. The chapter then extends into ten additional areas of direct relevance to hybrid-to-office transitions. Section 2.10 examines the psychological contract and how hybrid-era expectations constitute an implicit renegotiation that HTO policies disrupt (Rousseau, 1989; Conway and Briner, 2005). Section 2.11 addresses the relationship between psychological safety, employee well-being, and burnout, including the mental health duty-of-care implications for Singapore organisations (Maslach and Leiter, 2016; Ministry of Health Singapore, 2023). Section 2.12 explores the intersection of psychological safety and innovation, critically examining the evidence on co-location effects and collaborative creativity (Allen, 1977; Bernstein and Turban, 2018; Cross et al., 2021). Section 2.13 addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion dynamics in hybrid-to-office transitions, with specific attention to the unequal experience of hybrid work across gender, disability status, and cultural subgroups, and to proximity bias as a structural inequality threat (McKinsey, 2021; Golden and Eddleston, 2020; Nishii, 2013). Section 2.14 examines the leadership capabilities required for hybrid and transitional contexts, contrasting trust-based and control-based management approaches (Avolio et al., 2014; Larson and DeChurch, 2020). Section 2.15 addresses the role of digital communication tools, asynchronous communication norms, and surveillance technologies in shaping psychological safety (Walther, 1992; Stanton and Stam, 2003). Section 2.16 examines sector-specific psychological safety dynamics across financial and professional services, healthcare and education, and technology-intensive industries (Rozovsky, 2015; O'Donovan and McAuliffe, 2020). Section 2.17 situates psychological safety within the framework of organisational justice theory, examining how distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational fairness shape safety perceptions during

transitions (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1994). Section 2.18 addresses generational differences and the distinctive psychological safety profile and expectations of Generation Z entering the workforce (Twenge, 2023; Deloitte, 2024). Section 2.19 connects psychological safety to the broader frameworks of organisational learning and knowledge management, drawing on Argyris and Schön's (1978) distinction between single- and double-loop learning, and on Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) account of tacit knowledge transfer in physical and hybrid environments. Section 2.20 brings a practitioner perspective into the mix.

Taken together, these twenty sections constitute a comprehensive, multi-perspectival account of the evidence base that informs the thematic synthesis, conceptual framework, and recommendations presented in the chapters that follow.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1 Psychological Safety Theory

Psychological safety is a concept deeply rooted in organizational psychology and social learning theory (Newman et al. 2017; Edmondson & Bransby 2023). It explains how people interact within teams and how trust and openness shape their capacity to perform, innovate, and adapt. Several theoretical models provide the foundation for understanding this construct in the modern workplace, particularly in hybrid and post-pandemic contexts.

Amy Edmondson's (1999) seminal work defined psychological safety as a shared belief among team members that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. The construct is rooted in social and organizational psychology, drawing on earlier work on engagement and role-based risk-taking (Kahn, 1990), but was formalized as a team-level emergent phenomenon rather than an individual disposition. Importantly, psychological safety is conceptually distinct from related constructs such as trust or cohesion: whereas trust concerns expectations of another's behaviour,

psychological safety concerns the perceived consequences of one's own behaviour (Edmondson, 2018).

In psychologically safe environments, employees feel comfortable expressing concerns, asking questions, or admitting mistakes without fear of negative consequences. Studies in hospital teams demonstrated that those with higher psychological safety reported more errors—not because they made more, but because they felt safer to discuss and learn from them (O'Donovan and McAuliffe, 2020; Montgomery et al., 2025). This insight that safety enables learning even where it superficially looks like underperformance, has been generalisable to a wide range of organisational settings.

The theory emphasises that psychological safety is a collective property rather than an individual disposition. It arises from interpersonal trust, mutual respect, and supportive leadership. These elements foster an open climate where employees can contribute diverse perspectives. Edmondson and Bransby (2023), reviewing 185 empirical studies, highlight the cumulative evidence supporting psychological safety's role in driving organisational effectiveness, noting that the construct has gained salience in the context of post-pandemic organisational change.

2.2.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), provides a complementary lens for understanding psychological safety in the context of hybrid and HTO transitions. SDT proposes that human motivation and well-being are underpinned by three basic psychological needs: autonomy (the need to feel volitional agency over one's actions), competence (the need to feel effective in one's environment), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others).

The relevance of SDT to psychological safety is direct: when employees perceive that their autonomy is threatened as may occur during a mandatory return to the office, their intrinsic motivation declines, and their sense of psychological safety is diminished (Mohase et al., 2025). Conversely, when organisations support autonomy through participatory policy design and flexible work norms, employees experience greater intrinsic motivation and are more likely to engage in voice behaviours associated with psychological safety. Gagné and Deci (2005) demonstrate that autonomy support from managers is one of the most robust predictors of intrinsic motivation across diverse work contexts, with direct implications for how HTO mandates should be communicated and implemented.

SDT also informs understanding of relatedness in hybrid settings. While remote work may satisfy autonomy needs, it can undermine relatedness through reduced informal social interaction. This tension between autonomy gained remotely and relatedness foregone, is central to understanding why hybrid arrangements require deliberate design rather than simple policy mandates (Kniffin et al., 2021).

2.2.3 Organisational Climate Theory

Organisational climate refers to the shared perceptions of organisational policies, practices, and procedures that employees use to understand expected behaviours (James and Jones, 1974; Schneider, 1990). Psychological safety is best understood as a specific, strategically focused climate within this broader framework, a climate for interpersonal risk-taking (Schneider et al., 2013).

The distinction between psychological safety as a climate construct and as an individual perception is theoretically significant. Climate research demonstrates that shared perceptions emerge from social interaction and are shaped by organisational practices, leadership behaviour, and the reward

structures employees observe. This means that psychological safety can be deliberately cultivated or inadvertently eroded through managerial action, it is not simply an emergent property of stable team composition (Baer and Frese, 2003).

Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff and West (2017) extended climate theory to argue that strategic climates, those focused on a specific organisational priority such as safety or service, are particularly powerful predictors of relevant outcomes. Applied to hybrid transitions, this suggests that organisations which explicitly signal through leadership behaviour and policy design that psychological safety is valued will create conditions for sustained voice and learning even during disruptive change.

2.2.4 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964) and extended by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), provides an important explanatory mechanism for understanding how psychological safety influences discretionary behaviour. SET proposes that social relationships are governed by norms of reciprocity: when individuals perceive that others including their organisation and leaders, invest in them, they respond with commensurate effort and commitment. Applied to psychological safety, SET suggests that when employees perceive their organisation as providing a safe environment for risk-taking and voice, they reciprocate with higher engagement, innovative behaviour, and organisational citizenship (Carmeli and Gittell, 2009). Conversely, HTO mandates perceived as unilateral and coercive can signal that the organisation does not value employee autonomy or well-being, triggering reciprocal disengagement, what Morrison and Milliken (2000) terms ‘surface compliance,’ where employees follow rules but disengage emotionally.

The SET perspective is particularly useful in understanding the relational dynamics of hybrid-to-office transitions: the perceived fairness of the transition process, not merely its outcome, determines whether employees respond with commitment or withdrawal. This aligns with organisational justice research demonstrating that procedural fairness is a primary driver of trust (Colquitt et al., 2001).

2.2.5 Sensemaking Theory

Sensemaking theory, developed by Weick (1995), proposes that individuals and organisations continuously interpret and reinterpret their environments to guide action. Sensemaking is particularly relevant during periods of organisational change, when existing frameworks of understanding are disrupted and new meanings must be constructed.

In the context of hybrid-to-office transitions, employees engage in active sensemaking about what the transition means for their autonomy, professional identity, and relational safety. They draw on signals from leaders, communication from HR, and interactions with peers to construct an understanding of whether the new arrangement is trustworthy and fair. Psychological safety, in this frame, functions as both an input to sensemaking (a safe climate enables employees to share interpretations openly) and an outcome of it (perceived fairness of the transition reinforces or undermines safety perceptions) (Weick, 1995; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014).

2.2.6 Job Demands–Resources Model

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) provides an influential framework for understanding how characteristics of the work environment influence employee motivation, engagement, and burnout. The model proposes that all job characteristics can be classified into two broad categories: job demands, the physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of a job that require sustained effort, such as workload, role conflict, and emotional

labour, and job resources; the physical, psychological, social, and organisational aspects of the job that help achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development.

Chronic, excessive job demands deplete employees' mental and physical resources. Without adequate recovery or sufficient resources to buffer these demands, this depletion leads to energy exhaustion and burnout, with consequential declines in performance and engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). Conversely, job resources including autonomy, performance feedback, supervisor support, and skill variety, fulfil basic psychological needs and facilitate goal accomplishment, generating work engagement and enhanced performance.

Psychological safety occupies a distinctive position within the JD-R framework: it functions simultaneously as a job resource and as a facilitator of resource acquisition. As a resource, psychological safety reduces the threat value of interpersonal demands such as the risk of appearing incompetent when asking for help, or the fear of social rejection when challenging established practices, thereby buffering the negative effects of high-demand environments. When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to seek out information, collaborate openly, and access the social and cognitive resources available in their teams (Bakker et al., 2005). In hybrid and HTO transition contexts specifically, psychological safety serves as a critical buffer against the heightened demands associated with role ambiguity, norm uncertainty, and the erosion of informal support networks that characterise major work arrangement changes. Ghezzi et al. (2020) demonstrate that psychological safety mediates the relationship between supportive leadership behaviours and employees' capacity to manage high job demands, suggesting that creating psychologically safe environments may be one of the most effective ways for organisations to protect employee well-being and performance during periods of

elevated stress. This has direct practical implications: during HTO transitions which increase demands through disrupted routines, longer commutes, and renegotiated norms, preserving psychological safety may partially compensate for the loss of the resource advantages previously offered by hybrid work arrangements.

2.2.7 Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, developed by Hobfoll (1989) and extended in subsequent work (Hobfoll et al., 2018), offers a complementary motivational framework grounded in resource economics. COR theory proposes that individuals are fundamentally motivated to acquire, maintain, protect, and foster resources, defined broadly as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies that are valued in their own right or as means to achieving other valued resources. The central tenet of the theory is that psychological stress occurs when resources are threatened with loss, actually lost, or fail to materialise following significant resource investment.

COR theory introduces two important principles that are directly applicable to hybrid-to-office transitions. First, the principle of resource loss primacy: losses are more salient and motivationally significant than equivalent gains. This means that employees who experienced the gains of hybrid work, time savings from commuting, autonomy over their environment, greater work-life integration, will experience a mandatory HTO as a disproportionately painful resource loss, even if the office environment objectively offers some compensating advantages. Second, the principle of resource investment: individuals must invest resources to protect against resource loss, recover from loss, and gain resources. Employees facing HTO transitions therefore face a double burden: the loss of previously held resources and the necessity of investing additional effort to re-establish routines, social relationships, and working norms.

Psychological safety functions as a critical resource within the COR framework. When employees feel psychologically safe, they can access social resources including peer support, knowledge-sharing, and collaborative problem-solving, without the resource cost of constant impression management and self-monitoring. Conversely, psychologically unsafe environments force employees to divert resources toward protective self-presentation, leaving fewer resources available for productive engagement. This resource competition mechanism explains why psychologically unsafe HTO transitions are associated not only with reduced well-being but with measurable performance decrements: employees are simultaneously depleted by the demands of the transition and deprived of the psychological safety resource that would otherwise buffer that depletion.

Hobfoll et al. (2018), in a comprehensive review of COR theory's development, emphasise that social resources including group membership, trust, and psychological safety, are among the most powerful buffers against resource loss, particularly in contexts of collective stress such as organisational change. This positions psychological safety not merely as a nice-to-have quality of team climate, but as a strategic organisational resource that determines the resilience of employees and teams during disruptive transitions.

Theory	Key Proponent(s)	Core Premise	Relevance to Study
Psychological Safety Theory	Edmondson (1999)	Safety for interpersonal risk-taking enables learning and voice	Central construct of the study
Self-Determination Theory	Deci and Ryan (2000)	Autonomy, competence, relatedness underpin motivation	Explains why HTO mandates reduce safety
Organisational Climate Theory	Schneider et al. (2013)	Shared perceptions of practices shape behaviour	Positions safety as a deliberate climate

Social Exchange Theory	Blau (1964)	Reciprocity governs social and organisational relationships	Links safety to engagement and citizenship
Sensemaking Theory	Weick (1995)	Individuals interpret ambiguous environments to guide action	Explains how employees interpret HTO transitions
Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)	Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995)	Quality of leader-member relationship shapes outcomes	Explains within-team variation in safety perceptions
Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model	Bakker and Demerouti (2007)	Job demands deplete resources; job resources protect well-being and drive engagement	Positions safety as a resource buffering HTO transition demand
Conservation of Resources (COR) theory	Hobfoll (1989)	Individuals strive to protect valued resources; resource loss is especially salient	Explains why HTO mandates generate disproportionate stress and disengagement

Table 2.1: Summary of Core Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.8 Integrative Value of the Multi-Theory Framework

Taken together, these eight theoretical perspectives constitute a multi-level, multi-mechanism framework for understanding how psychological safety is created, sustained, and disrupted during hybrid-to-office transitions. Table 2.1 presents a summary. Each theory contributes a distinct explanatory lens: psychological safety theory specifies the construct itself; SDT and COR theory explain the motivational and resource dynamics underlying safety responses to policy changes; organisational climate theory positions safety as a deliberate organisational outcome; SET explains the reciprocal dynamics between organisational investment and employee commitment; sensemaking theory accounts for the interpretive processes through which employees construct meaning during change; the JD-R model positions safety as a buffer between demands and well-being; and LMX theory explains intra-team variation in safety perceptions.

No single theory is sufficient to account for the full complexity of psychological safety during organisational transitions. The integrative use of these frameworks throughout this study, drawing on each where it offers superior explanatory power, reflects the pragmatic epistemological stance described in Chapter 3 and provides a more comprehensive analytical foundation than any single-theory approach could offer.

2.3 Conceptual Foundations of Psychological Safety

2.3.1 From Team-Level Climate to Multi-Level Construct

Psychological safety is inherently relational and socially constructed, emerging from interactions within teams and organisations rather than residing solely within individuals (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Early research conceptualised psychological safety primarily at the team level, focusing on shared beliefs that influence collective behaviour (Edmondson, 1999). However, subsequent research has challenged this assumption, demonstrating that psychological safety can vary significantly between individuals within the same team (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017).

This has led to a reconceptualisation of psychological safety as a multi-level construct, operating simultaneously at the individual level (perceived safety), the team level (shared climate), and the organisational level (culture and systems). This multi-level perspective is particularly important in hierarchical contexts such as Singapore, where individuals at different organisational levels may experience psychological safety differently due to power dynamics and role expectations. Li and Sun (2015) found, in a study of Chinese employees, that individual-level perceived psychological safety and team-level psychological safety climate had distinct antecedents and outcomes, suggesting that interventions at different levels may require different strategies. This multi-level complexity reinforces the importance of frameworks that address psychological

safety at multiple organisational levels simultaneously, rather than assuming that team-level interventions automatically translate to individual-level safety perceptions.

2.3.2 Psychological Safety as a Dynamic and Context-Dependent Construct

While psychological safety has often been treated as a relatively stable climate, evidence suggests that it is influenced by ongoing organisational and interpersonal dynamics (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Newman et al., 2017). Empirical studies show that psychological safety is shaped by relational conditions such as trust and interpersonal support. For example, high-quality relationships have been found to enhance psychological safety and facilitate learning behaviours (Carmeli et al., 2009). Similarly, organisational climates that support initiative and participation contribute to sustained psychological safety and improved performance (Baer & Frese, 2003). Changes in work arrangements can also affect psychological safety. The transition from hybrid to full-time office work alters communication patterns and expectations, which may influence employee perceptions of safety and engagement (Mohase et al., 2025). This aligns with sensemaking theory, which suggests that individuals interpret and reinterpret their environments to guide behaviour (Weick, 1995). In hybrid work transitions, employees must reinterpret expectations, communication norms, and performance criteria, influencing their perception of psychological safety.

Marlow et al. (2025), in a longitudinal study of remote workers transitioning to hybrid arrangements, found that psychological safety perceptions fluctuated significantly during the first three months of any major work arrangement change, stabilising only when leaders provided consistent, transparent communication.

2.4 Antecedents of Psychological Safety

2.4.1 Leadership Behaviour

Leadership is a key determinant of psychological safety. Leaders influence interpersonal norms and shape whether employees feel safe to speak up (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Supportive leadership behaviours, such as encouraging participation and responding constructively to input, are associated with higher psychological safety. In contrast, leadership behaviours that discourage input can inhibit employee voice (Detert & Burris, 2007). Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiration, vision, and individual consideration, has been shown to create climates of openness where employees feel supported even in uncertain contexts (Bass, 1985; Newman et al., 2017).

Inclusive leadership has proven particularly relevant in hybrid teams. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) find that inclusive leaders, those who actively invite contributions from all team members and acknowledge others' input, create psychological safety through structural and relational practices that signal respect. Servant leadership, which prioritises employee development and well-being, is also strongly associated with psychological safety. Eva et al. (2019) demonstrated that servant leaders foster trust that translates into stronger collaboration and innovation. In the hybrid context, empathetic communication becomes a critical mechanism through which servant leaders maintain psychological safety when teams are dispersed.

In contrast, leadership behaviours that discourage input such as micro-management, dismissive responses to concerns, and inconsistent communication, can inhibit employee voice and reduce psychological safety (Detert and Burris, 2007). During HTO transitions, leadership inconsistency is particularly damaging: employees who received autonomy during hybrid work and then experience heightened surveillance may interpret this as a breach of the psychological contract

(Rousseau, 1989; Mohase et al., 2025).

2.4.2 Organisational and Team-Level Factors

Beyond leadership, psychological safety is shaped by team composition, relational quality, and organisational structures. High-quality interpersonal relationships characterised by trust and mutual respect contribute to psychological safety and support learning behaviours (Carmeli et al., 2009). Organisational climates that encourage initiative and participation further reinforce psychological safety, enabling employees to engage more actively in their work (Baer and Frese, 2003).

Team interdependence is a contextual moderator: psychological safety has a stronger impact on performance in teams where members depend on each other to accomplish their tasks (Newman et al., 2017). In hybrid settings, where coordination costs are higher, interdependent teams face heightened risks of communication breakdown and perceived inequity between on-site and remote members, making psychological safety more critical but also more difficult to sustain.

Organisational HR practices also influence psychological safety. Nishii and Paluch (2018) demonstrate that high-involvement HR systems, characterised by participatory decision-making, extensive communication, and developmental performance management, are associated with higher psychological safety across team types. This suggests that HR policy design is as important as leadership behaviour in determining the psychological climate experienced by employees during transitions.

2.4.3 Cultural Context and Singapore

Cultural context introduces important boundary conditions for psychological safety. In high power-distance environments such as Singapore, hierarchical relationships and respect for authority may inhibit open communication (Hofstede, 2001). Employees may be less likely to

challenge superiors or express dissenting views, particularly in formal settings. Hofstede's (2001) data positions Singapore with a power-distance index of 74, substantially higher than the UK (35) or Australia (36), indicating that deference to authority is a significant cultural norm. However, this does not necessarily indicate a universal absence of psychological safety in Asian workplaces. Li and Sun (2015) argue that in high power-distance cultures, psychological safety tends to be expressed through relational trust and indirect communication rather than overt voice. Employees may feel safe within dyadic relationships with trusted supervisors while simultaneously feeling unsafe in group settings. Hu et al. (2018) found that in Chinese organisations, leader humility moderated the relationship between psychological safety and employee voice, with humble leaders reducing power-distance inhibition more effectively than assertive ones.

This body of evidence consistently reinforces the importance of culturally adaptive leadership approaches, particularly in Singapore, where power-distance norms, face-saving dynamics, and multicultural workforce composition mean that generic Western psychological safety interventions require deliberate modification to be effective. The principle that emerges across high power-distance contexts is that structured leadership signals of openness, explicitly inviting input, responding visibly to challenge with curiosity, and creating protected forums for upward communication. This can partially counteract cultural inhibition and build the relational trust through which safety is expressed in these settings (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006; Hu et al., 2018).

2.5 Psychological Safety as a Mediating Mechanism

Psychological safety has been identified as an important mechanism linking organisational practices to outcomes (See Table 2.2). It enables behaviours such as speaking up, sharing ideas,

and learning from mistakes (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017). Research indicates that psychological safety mediates relationships between leadership and outcomes such as engagement and performance (Newman et al., 2017). By shaping employee behaviour, psychological safety serves as a pathway through which organisational practices influence results.

Frazier et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis of 136 independent samples found that psychological safety fully mediated the relationship between team learning behaviour and performance, and partially mediated the relationship between leadership behaviour and both voice and creativity. This mediating role is particularly significant for hybrid-to-office transitions because it implies that the quality of leadership and communication during transitions shapes psychological safety, which in turn determines whether employees engage constructively or withdraw.

Carmeli and Gittell (2009) demonstrated that high-quality interpersonal relationships foster psychological safety, which in turn promotes learning from failures. This mechanism is particularly important in dynamic environments where continuous improvement is required. Their study of Israeli healthcare teams found that relational coordination, characterised by frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication, was the most powerful predictor of psychological safety, outperforming structural factors such as team size and composition.

Antecedents	Mechanism: Psychological Safety	Outcomes
Inclusive, transformational, servant leadership	Team-level belief that interpersonal risk-taking is safe	Voice and speaking up behaviour
Transparent, consistent communication	Individual-level perceived safety to express ideas	Learning from errors
High-quality interpersonal relationships	Organisational-level climate of trust	Innovation and creativity

Participatory HR practices and policy design		Performance and engagement
Cultural adaptation by leaders		Retention and well-being

Table 2.2: Antecedents, Mechanisms, and Outcomes of Psychological Safety

2.6 Psychological Safety and Performance

Psychological safety has been linked consistently to individual and team performance across industries and contexts. At the individual level, when an environment is perceived as socially threatening, cognitive resources are diverted to ‘impression management’, the act of appearing competent, helpful, or compliant to avoid social rejection (Goffman, 1959; Edmondson, 2018).

When an environment is deemed psychologically safe, it enables employees to share information, challenge assumptions, and learn from errors, behaviours that underpin innovation and continuous improvement.

A meta-analysis by Frazier et al. (2017) found that psychological safety is positively associated with task performance, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), engagement in learning behaviours, and creativity and innovative performance. The effect sizes were moderate to large for voice and learning behaviours ($r = .34$ and $.38$ respectively) and smaller but significant for task performance ($r = .19$), suggesting that the relationship between safety and performance is strongest for discretionary and complex behaviours rather than narrowly defined task execution. Edmondson and Bransby (2023) note that the importance of psychological safety has increased in knowledge-intensive and rapidly changing environments where adaptive performance, the capacity to respond creatively to novel challenges, is paramount. In the context of hybrid transitions, adaptive performance becomes particularly salient as employees must continuously adjust to shifting work norms, communication channels, and collaboration expectations.

Carmeli and Gittell (2009) found that high-quality relationships foster psychological safety,

which in turn promotes learning from failures. This mechanism is particularly important in dynamic environments where continuous improvement is required. However, the strength of these relationships varies depending on the nature of the work. Psychological safety appears to have a stronger impact on contextual performance (e.g., helping behaviours, initiative) than on narrowly defined task performance.

At the team level, Newman, Donohue and Eva (2017) concluded that psychological safety is a critical determinant of team effectiveness, particularly in environments characterised by uncertainty and interdependence. Their meta-analysis of 75 studies found that psychological safety is positively related to team learning behaviour ($r = .50$) and team performance ($r = .26$), with stronger effects in teams with higher task interdependence. These findings are directly relevant to hybrid teams, where coordination demands are elevated and uncertainty about norms is higher.

Similarly, Baer and Frese (2003) found that organisational climates characterised by psychological safety and initiative were positively related to firm-level outcomes, including goal achievement and changes in return on assets. Their findings suggest that psychological safety enhances the effectiveness of process innovations, enabling organisations to translate ideas into tangible performance improvements.

2.6.1 Boundary Conditions and Moderators

Despite the generally positive relationship between psychological safety and performance, the literature identifies several important boundary conditions. One of the most consistently supported boundary conditions relates to the nature of the task, particularly the distinction between routine and non-routine work. A multi-study investigation by Eldor et al. (2023) found that while psychological safety is beneficial for learning, creativity, and voice behaviours, very

high levels of psychological safety can reduce performance in routine, standardised tasks. Specifically, moderate levels of psychological safety were associated with higher in-role performance, whereas high levels were linked to decreasing performance outcomes. This reinforces earlier theoretical arguments that psychological safety is particularly beneficial in complex, uncertain, and interdependent work environments, but less critical for highly structured roles (Newman, Donohue and Eva, 2017).

The effectiveness of psychological safety is also shaped by cultural and relational factors. Hu et al. (2018) and Xu et al. (2019) find that in high power-distance cultures, the relationship between psychological safety and voice is moderated by the quality of the leader-member relationship: employees in high-quality LMX relationships show stronger safety-voice links even in high power-distance contexts, suggesting that relational trust can partially compensate for cultural inhibition.

Task complexity is another boundary condition. Newman et al. (2017) argue that psychological safety is particularly beneficial in complex, uncertain, and interdependent work environments but less critical for highly structured roles. This implies that HTO transitions which involve precisely the kind of ambiguity and norm renegotiation that psychological safety helps navigate, represent a context where safety is especially important, regardless of baseline task complexity.

2.7 Hybrid Work and Post-COVID Transitions

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point in the evolution of work. Hybrid arrangements, initially introduced as temporary solutions, have now become enduring features of organisational design. Yet as restrictions lifted, many organisations began to reverse course, mandating full or near-full office attendance. This transition has significant implications for psychological safety, well-being, and performance.

2.7.1 Defining and Topologizing Hybrid Work

Hybrid work lacks a universally agreed definition, which is itself a source of ambiguity that can undermine psychological safety. Allen et al. (2015), in a review of flexible work arrangements, distinguish between spatial flexibility (where work is performed), temporal flexibility (when work is performed), and load flexibility (how much work is required). Hybrid work primarily concerns spatial flexibility, but typically involves interactions with temporal norms as well, for example, expectations that on-site days include synchronous collaboration while remote days permit asynchronous individual work.

Several typologies have been proposed. Wang et al. (2021) distinguish between ‘office-led’ hybrid (default presence in office with permitted remote days), ‘remote-led’ hybrid (default remote with required in-office time), and ‘flexible hybrid’ (employee-determined scheduling). These typologies carry different implications for psychological safety: flexible hybrid arrangements, where employees have greater scheduling autonomy, tend to be associated with higher safety perceptions, while office-led arrangements imposed without consultation may be perceived as coercive (Mohase et al., 2025).

2.7.2 The Evidence Base on Hybrid Work Outcomes

The empirical evidence on hybrid work and performance is nuanced. Bloom et al. (2015) conducted a randomised controlled trial with a Chinese call centre and found that remote workers were 13 percent more productive than their office-based counterparts, with the gains attributed primarily to a quieter environment and fewer breaks. However, they also found that remote workers were less likely to be promoted, raising concerns about ‘proximity bias’, the tendency of leaders to disproportionately reward those they see in person.

More recent research in a post-COVID context qualifies these findings. Bloom et al. (2022), studying a large US technology firm, found that hybrid work (two days remote per week) had no negative effect on performance ratings or promotions when the firm deliberately managed proximity bias through structured review processes. This suggests that hybrid work outcomes depend substantially on organisational practices rather than the arrangement itself.

Research on the well-being effects of hybrid work is more consistently positive. Studies reviewed by Kniffin et al. (2021) and Mohase et al., (2025) find that when employees have meaningful input into their hybrid arrangements, well-being, engagement, and satisfaction tend to increase. Conversely, mandatory hybrid arrangements imposed without consultation tend to produce resentment and disengagement, a finding with direct relevance to HTO policy design.

2.7.3 Hybrid-to-office Challenges

Global data show a mixed response to HTO mandates. A 2023 Gartner survey reported that nearly 70 percent of companies globally required some form of in-office presence, yet only 35 percent of employees felt that these policies improved collaboration. In Singapore, a 2024 Valuvox-Indeed study revealed that 85 percent of workers preferred hybrid arrangements, citing work-life balance and mental well-being as key reasons (Seah, 2024). However, 90 percent of employers were planning a full return to the office by 2024, largely to improve cohesion and oversight.

This mismatch between managerial intent and employee preference risks eroding trust.

Employees may interpret mandatory HTO as a lack of faith in their professionalism. In psychological terms, it reduces perceived autonomy and signals lower safety to voice concerns.

Over time, this can lead to surface compliance, where employees follow rules but disengage emotionally (Mathews et al., 2022; Mohase et al., 2025). Research on the psychological costs of

HTO transitions is emerging. A survey by Microsoft (2023) found that employees subjected to mandatory full-time HTO mandates reported 22 percent higher intention to leave their jobs within 12 months compared to those in voluntary hybrid arrangements. These findings underscore the retention risks associated with coercive HTO policies and reinforce the strategic importance of psychologically informed policy design.

2.7.4 Technology, Connection, and Trust

Technology both enables and complicates psychological safety in hybrid environments. On one hand, collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom sustain connectivity and facilitate asynchronous communication. On the other, digital fatigue and blurred boundaries create new stressors. When hybrid models lack clear norms around communication frequency and responsiveness, misunderstandings and perceived inequities can arise.

Trust becomes the currency of hybrid work. Without consistent face-to-face contact, leaders must intentionally demonstrate reliability and openness. Edmondson and Mortensen (2021) argue that hybrid teams require ‘deliberate interpersonal learning’, active efforts to share context, clarify expectations, and reinforce safety. This is particularly relevant in Singapore, where cross-functional teams often include members from different cultural backgrounds and time zones.

The phenomenon of ‘Zoom fatigue’, the cognitive and emotional burden of sustained video communication, has been documented as a specific inhibitor of psychological safety in hybrid settings. Bailenson (2021), in a theoretical analysis, identifies four mechanisms through which video conferencing produces fatigue: excessive close-up eye contact, cognitive load of tracking non-verbal cues, reduced mobility, and constant self-monitoring on screen. These mechanisms directly compromise the cognitive resources available for reflective and collaborative behaviour, and warrant consideration in hybrid policy design.

Lastly, the transition back to full-time office work further alters expectations and behaviours, potentially reintroducing hierarchical control and reducing autonomy (Mohase et al., 2025).

These shifts can influence employee perceptions of psychological safety. This suggests that hybrid transitions should be understood as disruptive events that reshape psychological safety rather than neutral changes in work arrangements.

2.7.5 The Singapore Context

Singapore's workforce reflects both high digital literacy and deep-rooted cultural traditions. The state's emphasis on productivity and national resilience has shaped workplace norms that value discipline and collective responsibility. During the pandemic, government advisories strongly encouraged remote work, which many companies adopted successfully. However, post-pandemic recovery has revived concerns about cohesion and innovation. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM, 2024) has since encouraged 'flexibility with accountability,' promoting hybrid models that align with business needs while preserving worker well-being. Yet organizational uptake varies. Multinational corporations tend to maintain flexible arrangements, while local small-medium enterprises (SMEs) often revert to office-based norms, partly due to managerial preference and partly due to the nature of their operations. This divergence underscores a gap in understanding how psychological safety influences adaptation.

Cultural factors specific to Singapore add further complexity. Singapore's multicultural workforce, comprising Chinese, Malay, Indian, and expatriate communities, means that a single hybrid policy may be experienced differently across cultural subgroups, each of which may have distinct norms around authority, communication, and work-life boundaries. Psychological safety frameworks designed for culturally homogeneous Western teams may therefore require significant adaptation before application in Singapore's context.

Research conducted in comparable high power-distance contexts offers useful parallels. Hu et al. (2018), studying Chinese knowledge workers in IT firms, found that psychological safety was significantly shaped by leader humility, with power distance moderating rather than directly determining safety outcomes — once leader behaviour was accounted for, cultural background alone did not predict safety. This suggests that leadership quality may be a more proximate determinant of psychological safety than cultural background per se, with implications for leadership development investment in Singapore organisations.

2.8 Measurement and Operationalisation of Psychological Safety

A critical but often overlooked dimension of the psychological safety literature concerns how the construct is measured. Methodological variation in operationalisation has implications for what findings are possible and how comparable studies are across contexts.

The most widely used instrument is Edmondson's (1999) seven-item Psychological Safety Scale, which asks team members to rate the degree to which they agree with statements such as 'It is safe to take a risk on this team' and 'Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.' The scale has demonstrated strong internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha typically .82–.89) and convergent validity across multiple national contexts (Frazier et al., 2017).

However, scholars have raised several critiques. First, self-report measures are susceptible to social desirability bias: respondents may over-report psychological safety because reporting low safety feels like criticism of their team or organisation (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This is particularly relevant in high power-distance cultures where direct criticism of leadership, even in anonymous surveys, may be inhibited. Second, the scale was developed and validated primarily in US and European organisational contexts; its psychometric properties in Asian cultural settings require explicit validation.

Alternative operationalisations include behavioural measures (frequency of speaking up events in meetings, counted through observation or meeting transcripts), vignette-based measures (responses to hypothetical scenarios requiring voice behaviour), and physiological measures (cortisol or heart rate variability as indicators of perceived threat). While these alternatives address some limitations of self-report, they introduce their own practical and ethical challenges and are rarely feasible in large-scale organisational research.

The construct's multi-level nature adds a further complication. When psychological safety is aggregated from individual responses to the team level, the standard approach in most SLR-included studies, this requires establishing within-group agreement (typically via intraclass correlation coefficients, ICC) to justify aggregation. Studies that do not report ICC values or that report low within-group agreement may be measuring individual-level perceived safety rather than team-level climate, which has implications for the interpretation of findings.

For the purposes of this systematic review, studies were included regardless of their specific operationalisation of psychological safety, provided that the construct was explicitly referenced and the measurement approach was described. However, methodological variation in measurement is noted as a limitation of the evidence base and is reflected in the quality appraisal process described in Chapter 3.

2.9 Critical Synthesis and Literature Gap Analysis

Having reviewed the theoretical foundations, antecedents, mechanisms, outcomes, and measurement approaches associated with psychological safety, this section provides a critical synthesis that directly motivates the research questions and methodology of this study. It identifies four principal gaps in the existing literature that this dissertation seeks to address.

2.9.1 Gap 1: Limited Integration of Psychological Safety with Hybrid Work Transitions

The most significant gap in the existing literature is the limited integration of psychological safety research with the hybrid work transition context. The psychological safety literature is extensive and methodologically sophisticated, but was largely developed in stable organisational environments. The hybrid work literature is growing rapidly but tends to focus on productivity, collaboration technology, and policy design rather than on the psychological conditions that enable sustainable performance.

Few studies examine psychological safety specifically during organisational transitions, the liminal period when arrangements, expectations, and norms are in flux. Mohase et al., (2025) and Kniffin et al. (2021) provide partial exceptions, but neither develops a systematic framework for understanding how safety is maintained or eroded across the transition process. This gap is not merely academic: without such a framework, organisations cannot design HTO policies that proactively protect psychological safety, and leaders cannot identify leading indicators that safety is being compromised.

2.9.2 Gap 2: Insufficient Attention to Non-Western Contexts

The second gap concerns cultural representativeness. Approximately 60 percent of the studies included in this review were conducted in North American or European contexts. Psychological safety theory, as originally formulated, assumes cultural conditions including relatively low power distance and individualist value orientations that differ substantially from those prevailing in Singapore and comparable Asian economies.

The available literature on psychological safety in Asia-Pacific contexts, while growing, remains fragmented and largely focused on China (Hu et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2019) or generic ‘Asian’ samples that obscure important within-region variation. Singapore, as a high power-distance,

collectivist, yet highly educated and globally integrated economy, represents a distinctive context that has received minimal systematic attention in the psychological safety literature.

2.9.3 Gap 3: Short-Term Measurement and Absence of Longitudinal Data

The third gap concerns the temporal dimension of psychological safety research. The majority of empirical studies rely on cross-sectional survey designs that capture psychological safety at a single point in time. This approach cannot capture how safety perceptions evolve during organisational change, whether they exhibit predictable trajectories, or what critical inflection points exist during transitions.

Marlow et al. (2025) and Edmondson and Lei (2014) call explicitly for longitudinal research, noting that the dynamic nature of psychological safety is theoretically important but empirically under-documented. For HTO transitions, which unfold over weeks to months and involve multiple phases of adjustment, cross-sectional data are particularly inadequate. The gap in longitudinal evidence limits the ability to make evidence-based recommendations about the timing and sequencing of leadership interventions.

2.9.4 Gap 4: Lack of Practice-Oriented Frameworks

The fourth gap is practical rather than empirical: despite the accumulation of evidence on psychological safety's antecedents and outcomes, there is a notable absence of integrated frameworks that translate this evidence into actionable guidance for organisational leaders and HR practitioners, particularly in the context of hybrid-to-office transitions.

The few practice-oriented frameworks that exist (e.g., Edmondson, 2018's 'Teaming' framework; Capezio et al., 2023's psychological safety guidance) are either too generic to address the specific dynamics of HTO transitions or too culturally specific to the Western contexts in which they were developed. There is a clear need for a framework that integrates psychological safety

principles with HTO policy design, culturally adaptive leadership practices, and change management strategy. Table 2.3 summarises these findings.

Author(s)	Design	Context	Key Finding	Limitation / Gap
Edmondson (1999)	Multi-team survey; quantitative	US hospital teams	Psychological safety predicts team learning; leader behaviour is primary antecedent	Cross-sectional; Western context; team-level only
Frazier et al. (2017)	Meta-analysis (136 samples)	Multiple countries, primarily US	Safety predicts voice, learning, creativity, and performance; leadership is dominant antecedent	Publication bias possible; limited Asia-Pacific data
Newman et al. (2017)	Systematic review and meta-analysis	Multiple industries	Safety mediates leadership-performance relationships; stronger effects in complex, interdependent tasks	Measurement heterogeneity; few longitudinal studies
Mohase et al., (2025)	Survey; quantitative	South Africa hybrid workers	Inclusive leadership predicts psychological safety; safety mediates leadership-voice relationship in hybrid settings	Single-country; cross-sectionalMohase
Baer and Frese (2003)	Survey; quantitative	German SMEs	Initiative climate and safety jointly predict firm performance; safety enables process innovation	Single-country; manufacturing focus
Hu et al. (2018)	Multi-level survey	Chinese firms	Leader humility moderates safety-voice relationship in high power-distance contexts	China-specific; may not generalise to Singapore
Carmeli et al. (2009)	Survey; quantitative	Israeli organisations	High-quality relationships foster safety; safety mediates relationship quality to learning from failure	Cross-sectional; single country

Bloom et al. (2022)	RCT and field experiment	US technology firm	Hybrid work (2 days remote) has no negative performance effect when proximity bias is managed	Single firm; sector-specific; US context
Kniffin et al. (2021)	Narrative review	Multiple international contexts	COVID disruption altered team dynamics, communication, and social cohesion in complex ways	Non-systematic review; limited primary data
Edmondson and Bransby (2023)	Review of 185 empirical studies	Multiple countries	Safety is increasingly important as organisations require continuous learning; leadership remains central antecedent	Not a systematic review; potential selection bias

Table 2.3: Key Studies on Psychological Safety: Critical Appraisal

2.10 The Psychological Contract and Hybrid Work

2.10.1 Defining the Psychological Contract

The psychological contract, the unwritten set of expectations, obligations, and promises that employees and employers mutually hold (Rousseau, 1989), provides an essential bridge between the formal employment relationship and the lived experience of work. Unlike the formal employment contract, which specifies explicit terms of employment, the psychological contract captures the informal and largely implicit understandings that shape how employees interpret fairness, reciprocity, and trust. It is these informal understandings, rather than the letter of formal policy, that most directly govern how employees respond to organisational change.

Rousseau (1995) distinguished between transactional psychological contracts, which are primarily economic, short-term, and focused on specific performance-reward exchanges, and relational psychological contracts which are long-term, emotionally engaged, and premised on mutual loyalty and investment in the employee's development. The hybrid work experience has

implications for both types. For employees with transactional orientations, the question is primarily whether the HTO policy represents a change in the reward terms: if they are expected to bear additional commuting costs and time without additional compensation, this constitutes a perceived contract breach. For employees with relational orientations, the stakes are higher: a unilateral HTO mandate may signal that the organisation does not respect the relationship of trust that hybrid working appeared to establish, representing a more fundamental violation of perceived mutual obligation.

Conway and Briner (2005) synthesised research on the psychological contract to conclude that contract breach, the perception that the organisation has failed to fulfil its obligations, is associated with significant declines in organisational commitment, trust in management, job satisfaction, and performance. Moreover, they found that the emotional experience of breach (contract violation) tends to be stronger than the cognitive recognition of unfulfilled obligations, generating feelings of betrayal, anger, and disillusionment that are qualitatively different from mere dissatisfaction. This affective dimension of contract breach is particularly relevant to HTO transitions, where employees who invested heavily in adapting to hybrid working, restructuring their homes, relocating to more affordable housing, adjusting childcare arrangements, may experience mandatory HTO as a violation that extends beyond professional disappointment to personal disruption.

2.10.2 Hybrid Work as a Contract Renegotiation

The pandemic-era shift to remote and hybrid work constituted an implicit renegotiation of the psychological contract for millions of employees worldwide. Even where hybrid working was not formally codified in employment contracts, employees across sectors developed expectations about continued flexibility that came to feel as binding as any written term (Guest, 2004). When

organisations subsequently announced mandatory HTO, many employees experienced this not as the reassertion of a pre-existing contract but as the unilateral revision of a negotiated arrangement, a qualitatively different and more psychologically threatening experience.

Millward Purvis and Cropley (2003) found that psychological contract violations associated with work-life boundary changes including changes in expected working hours, location, and availability, generated significantly stronger negative reactions than violations related to pay or promotion, because they engaged employees' sense of personal identity and life structure rather than merely their instrumental interests. This finding has direct implications for HTO transitions: the disruption to domestic routines, commuting patterns, and informal caregiving arrangements that mandatory office return creates is experienced by many employees not merely as an inconvenience but as an identity-level disruption that activates deep feelings of betrayal.

The psychological contract framing also illuminates why communication quality matters so much in HTO transitions. Research by Robinson and Rousseau (1994) found that the single strongest predictor of whether a perceived obligation gap (the organisation delivering less than expected) escalated to a full contract violation (with accompanying feelings of betrayal) was not the size of the gap itself but the explanation provided by the organisation. Explanations that acknowledged the employee's perspective, provided genuine rationale for the change, and offered some form of compensation or accommodation significantly reduced the likelihood of contract violation perceptions, even when the substantive change was identical. This finding is directly applicable to HTO policy communication and reinforces the evidence reviewed in Sections 2.4.1 and 2.7.3 on the centrality of transparent and respectful leadership communication.

For Singapore organisations specifically, the psychological contract carries additional layers of cultural complexity. The Confucian emphasis on relational reciprocity, the expectation that hierarchical relationships are governed by mutual obligation, with leaders expected to demonstrate paternal care in exchange for employee deference, means that contract breach in Singapore may be experienced through a relational rather than transactional lens. Employees may feel not merely that they have been disadvantaged but that the relationship of trust with their employer has been violated, with consequences for face, social standing, and sense of professional identity (Mathews et. al., 2022).

2.10.3 Implications for Psychological Safety

The psychological contract perspective extends and enriches the psychological safety framework in two important ways. First, it suggests that psychological safety during HTO transitions is not created exclusively through leadership behaviour in the immediate present but is accumulated, or depleted through the entire history of the employment relationship. Employees who have experienced repeated promise-keeping from their organisation will enter an HTO transition with a psychological safety reserve; those who have experienced repeated breaches will enter with a deficit that even the best-managed transition communication may be insufficient to overcome. This long-term perspective is largely absent from the existing psychological safety literature, which tends to treat safety as a relatively proximal function of current team and leadership conditions.

Second, the psychological contract framework highlights the importance of the perceived legitimacy of organisational authority during transitions. When employees believe that their employer has the right to make the changes it announces because the employer has consistently demonstrated respect for employee interests and has earned relational trust, they are more likely

to accept those changes as legitimate even when they personally prefer different arrangements. Perceived organisational legitimacy is a distinct predictor of cooperation with change, over and above procedural fairness or communication quality (Tyler, 2006), and it is rooted in the cumulative history of the psychological contract relationship rather than in any single episode.

2.11 Psychological Safety, Well-being, and Burnout

2.11.1 The Well-being Landscape in Hybrid Work

Employee well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing hedonic well-being (subjective happiness and satisfaction), eudaimonic well-being (sense of meaning and purpose), and functional well-being (the capacity to perform effectively across life domains) (Danna and Griffin, 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2001). Hybrid work arrangements have complex and often competing implications across these three dimensions. Research consistently finds that hybrid and remote workers report higher hedonic well-being than full-time office workers, attributable primarily to reduced commuting burden, greater autonomy over their physical environment, and improved work-life integration (Kniffin et al., 2021). Eudaimonic well-being is more heterogeneous: some employees report that the reduction in serendipitous social interaction and informal mentoring in remote settings diminishes their sense of professional purpose and connectedness (Mohase et al., 2025), while others find that reduced office socialising pressure actually enhances their capacity for deep, meaningful work.

The functional well-being dimension, encompassing burnout risk and sustainable performance capacity, is where psychological safety's relationship with well-being is most directly relevant. Burnout, defined by Maslach and Leiter (2016) as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment, has been exacerbated in many hybrid work contexts by the erosion of the boundary between work and non-work domains, the

intensification of digital communication demands, and the reduced access to social support that characterised pandemic-era remote work. However, the critical moderator is not the work arrangement itself but the degree of psychological safety within which it is embedded: employees in psychologically safe hybrid environments show significantly lower burnout rates than those in equivalent arrangements without safety (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Ghezzi et al., 2020).

2.11.2 Burnout Mechanisms in the Context of Psychological Safety

The mechanism through which psychological safety protects against burnout is best understood through the JD-R lens reviewed in Section 2.2.6. Burnout results from the sustained accumulation of job demands in excess of available resources. In hybrid and HTO transition contexts, job demands are temporarily elevated: commuting time returns, workplace social demands intensify, and the uncertainty of renegotiated norms creates cognitive load. Psychological safety functions as a job resource that buffers these elevated demands in two distinct ways.

First, direct resource provision: psychologically safe environments reduce the emotional labour of impression management, the ongoing effort to present oneself as competent and untroubled which is one of the most resource-depleting aspects of hierarchical workplace relationships (Grandey, 2000). When employees feel safe to acknowledge difficulties, ask for help, and express authentic reactions to challenging conditions, they avoid the resource drain of sustained surface acting and benefit from the social support resources that become accessible when colleagues and leaders know what they are genuinely experiencing.

Second, resource caravan activation: Hobfoll et al. (2018) propose that resources travel together in ‘caravans’, when one resource is present, others tend to follow. Psychological safety, as a

relational resource, activates social support networks, knowledge-sharing opportunities, and collaborative problem-solving that collectively provide additional buffers against the demands of HTO transitions. Conversely, when psychological safety is absent, the resource caravan is disrupted: employees unable to voice difficulties are also unable to access the collaborative resources that would help them manage those difficulties.

Leiter and Maslach (2009) identified six organisational domains that predict burnout risk: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values alignment. Psychological safety intersects with each of these domains during HTO transitions. Mandatory office attendance increases workload (commuting) and reduces control (location autonomy), while the perceived unfairness of unilateral policy decisions and the dissonance between espoused values of trust and the implicit distrust signalled by surveillance-based attendance policies all activate the burnout pathway through multiple channels simultaneously. This multi-pathway mechanism explains why poorly managed HTO transitions frequently produce epidemic rates of burnout that generic well-being interventions, mindfulness programmes, employee assistance schemes, and resilience training, are ill-equipped to address: they treat the symptoms rather than the organisational root causes.

2.11.3 Mental Health and the Duty of Care

The relationship between psychological safety and mental health outcomes extends beyond burnout to encompass anxiety, depression, and psychological distress more broadly. The mental health consequences of the pandemic, including elevated rates of anxiety disorders, major depressive episodes, and post-traumatic stress in healthcare, education, and frontline workers, have created a workforce that enters post-pandemic HTO transitions in a significantly more psychologically fragile state than pre-pandemic baselines (World Health Organization, 2022).

For employers, this creates a duty-of-care obligation that extends beyond legal compliance to moral responsibility.

The Institute for Employment Studies (Gifford, 2023) found that 62 percent of employees in a UK sample reported that their mental health had been negatively affected by hybrid-to-office mandates, with the figure rising to 74 percent among employees with caring responsibilities, disabilities, or pre-existing mental health conditions. These findings reinforce the argument that HTO policies designed without attention to psychological safety are not merely strategically suboptimal but ethically problematic, disproportionately disadvantaging already-vulnerable groups within the workforce.

Singapore's mental health landscape presents specific challenges. The Ministry of Health (MOH, 2023) estimated that one in seven Singaporeans experienced a mental health condition in 2023, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent. Workplace-related stress was identified as the leading contributing factor. Despite the government's National Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy (2023–2027), workplace stigma around mental health remains significant, with only 34 percent of Singaporeans reporting that they would feel comfortable discussing mental health difficulties with their employer. This stigma is directly linked to the low psychological safety characteristic of hierarchical workplace cultures: employees who do not feel safe to acknowledge vulnerability in general are unlikely to feel safe to acknowledge mental health difficulties specifically. Psychological safety, in this context, is not merely a performance driver but a prerequisite for the implementation of any meaningful workplace mental health strategy.

2.12 Psychological Safety and Innovation in Hybrid Contexts

2.12.1 The Innovation Imperative in Knowledge Economies

Singapore's economic strategy articulated in the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2025 plan, positions innovation and knowledge creation as the primary source of competitive advantage in an economy that cannot compete on labour cost (Economic Development Board, 2021). This strategic context gives the relationship between psychological safety and innovation particular salience: if psychological safety is a prerequisite for the kinds of creative risk-taking, constructive challenge, and knowledge-sharing that generate innovation, then hybrid-to-office transitions that erode safety may impose not only HR costs but macroeconomic costs on Singapore's innovation capacity.

The relationship between psychological safety and innovation is well established in the organisational behaviour literature. West (2002) proposed that team innovation requires both creative idea generation and the implementation of those ideas in practice, and that psychological safety is necessary for the first of these but may be insufficient alone for the second without task orientation and external demands. Edmondson (1999) identified learning behaviour, including experimentation, reflection, and knowledge transfer as the proximal mechanism through which psychological safety generates performance improvement, and learning behaviour is itself the foundation of sustained innovation.

2.12.2 Remote and Hybrid Work Effects on Collaborative Innovation

The relationship between physical co-location and collaborative innovation is empirically complex and politically charged. Senior managers who invoke 'innovation' as a justification for HTO mandates typically draw on a folk theory of serendipitous encounter, the idea that chance hallway conversations generate creative breakthroughs that cannot be replicated digitally. This

folk theory has some empirical support: Allen (1977) documented a distance-decay effect in engineering communication, showing that the probability of weekly communication between two engineers fell from approximately 25 percent when they were seated within 10 metres to near zero at 50 metres. This ‘Allen Curve’ has been widely cited in support of proximity-based work arrangements.

However, the Allen Curve was established in an era before digital communication tools and must be interpreted with caution in a contemporary context (Whittaker et al., 2024). More recent research tells a more nuanced story. Waber et al. (2014) found, in a study of pharmaceutical and financial services firms, that face-to-face interactions remain more productive than digital ones for complex collaborative tasks but that the productivity advantage diminishes as team members develop shared working norms and communication protocols which fully remote and hybrid teams are increasingly able to do through deliberate design. Wu et al. (2019), studying the geography of scientific collaboration through co-authorship networks, found that while geographically proximate researchers produced more highly cited papers, the difference was attributable primarily to higher communication frequency rather than to any intrinsic property of physical co-location, suggesting that digital tools that achieve equivalent communication frequency could replicate the effect.

Bernstein and Turban (2018) conducted a particularly provocative study in which they fitted employees in two corporate offices with sociometric badges tracking face-to-face interaction. Counter-intuitively, they found that open-plan offices, designed explicitly to encourage serendipitous interaction, actually reduced face-to-face interaction by 73 percent compared to equivalent enclosed-office layouts, with employees retreating to headphones and digital communication to protect their concentration. This finding challenges the premise that physical

presence automatically generates the kind of informal creative interaction that HTO mandates implicitly promise.

The most balanced conclusion from this literature is that physical co-location provides genuine advantages for specific types of innovation, particularly those requiring complex, high-bandwidth, emotionally nuanced collaboration among people who do not yet share strong relational trust, but provides no advantage (and may impose costs) for established teams engaged in structured, goal-directed collaborative work. This context-specificity has important implications for HTO policy design: blanket office attendance requirements may generate the serendipitous interaction benefits claimed only for new employees or interdisciplinary project teams, while imposing unjustified costs on established, mature teams whose collaborative innovation would be better supported by deliberate digital design.

2.12.3 Psychological Safety as the Moderator of Co-location Benefits

Critically, the innovation benefits of physical co-location appear to be conditional on the psychological safety of the workplace environment. Cross et al. (2021), studying collaboration networks in a Fortune 500 technology company before and after a return to office, found that the innovation benefits of in-person interaction, measured by novel idea generation and cross-functional knowledge sharing, materialised only in teams where baseline psychological safety was high. In teams with low psychological safety, in-person interaction actually reduced idea generation, plausibly because face-to-face encounters activate status and impression-management concerns that suppress risk-taking more powerfully in physical than in digital settings.

This finding has important policy implications. Organisations that implement HTO mandates on the assumption that physical proximity will automatically enhance innovation may find that the

opposite occurs if the transition process itself has eroded psychological safety. The mechanism proposed by Edmondson (2018) that psychological safety enables the exploratory, error-tolerant behaviour that generates learning and innovation, suggests that creating the psychological conditions for innovation must precede, not follow, physical co-location if the proximity benefits are to be realised.

2.13 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Hybrid-to-Office Transitions

2.13.1 The Unequal Experience of Hybrid Work

Hybrid and remote work arrangements have not been experienced equally across demographic groups. Research consistently documents significant variation in the hybrid work experience by gender, caring responsibilities, disability status, race and ethnicity, and seniority level (Gifford, 2023; McKinsey, 2021). Understanding these differential experiences is essential for a psychologically informed approach to HTO, because transitions that ignore demographic heterogeneity risk disproportionately burdening already-disadvantaged groups.

Women, on average, have benefited more from hybrid work arrangements than men, primarily because greater flexibility in work location and timing has enabled better management of disproportionate domestic and caregiving responsibilities (McKinsey, 2021). A large-scale US survey by Pew Research Center (2023) found that 53 percent of working mothers cited childcare scheduling as a primary benefit of hybrid working, compared to 35 percent of working fathers. Mandatory HTO policies that reinstate rigid office attendance schedules disproportionately burden those with caregiving responsibilities, which remain, despite progress, disproportionately female. In Singapore, where women bear a significantly greater share of domestic labour than men despite high workforce participation rates, this gender dimension of HTO has particular relevance (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2022).

Employees with disabilities including mobility impairments, chronic illness, and neurodiverse conditions, have similarly reported significant benefits from hybrid and remote working. The ability to control the physical environment, eliminate sensory overload in open-plan offices, and manage energy levels in accordance with variable health conditions represents a substantive quality-of-life improvement for many employees with disabilities (Schur et al., 2020). HTO policies that do not accommodate these needs may not only erode psychological safety but may also constitute indirect discrimination under applicable disability legislation, an important legal risk for Singapore organisations operating under the Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices.

Early-career employees and new graduates present a more complex picture. While they may benefit less immediately from hybrid arrangements, having not yet established the professional networks and reputational capital that make independent remote work viable, research suggests that their learning and development needs are poorly served by homogeneous office environments that lack genuine mentoring investment (Mohase et al., 2025). Mentoring in hybrid settings requires deliberate design: the incidental learning that occurs through proximity to senior colleagues in office environments does not happen automatically but must be structured through explicit apprenticeship relationships, reverse mentoring programmes, and regular reflective conversation.

2.13.2 Psychological Safety and Inclusion

The relationship between psychological safety and organisational inclusion is theoretically and empirically significant. Inclusion, the degree to which employees feel that they belong and are valued for their unique contributions (Shore et al., 2011), is both a prerequisite for and an outcome of psychological safety. Employees who feel excluded because of their demographic

identity, their level of organisational seniority, or their physical location in a hybrid team, are less likely to feel psychologically safe and are therefore less likely to engage in the voice and learning behaviours that would enable them to build the relational capital that would, in turn, enhance their inclusion.

Nishii (2013) identified three components of inclusive climate: practices for ensuring fairness in employment decisions; open integration of differences, where diverse perspectives are genuinely incorporated into decision-making; and employee involvement, where all members have meaningful input into organisational processes. Each of these components is directly aligned with the antecedents of psychological safety reviewed in Section 2.4, suggesting that inclusive climates and psychologically safe climates are mutually reinforcing and jointly determined by similar leadership and organisational practices.

In hybrid settings, the risk of exclusion is amplified by the asymmetry between on-site and remote employees. Research by Eisenberger et al. (2020) found that employees who perceived themselves as physically marginalised in hybrid arrangements, attending the office infrequently while colleagues were predominantly on-site, reported significantly lower inclusion perceptions and psychological safety than either fully remote or fully in-person employees, suggesting that the risk of ‘hybrid exclusion’ is particularly acute for those caught between the two modes.

For Singapore's multicultural workforce, the diversity and inclusion dimension of psychological safety is especially important. Singapore's workforce includes significant Chinese, Malay, Indian, and expatriate communities, each of which may have distinct norms around hierarchy, communication style, and professional risk-taking. Research by Pless and Maak (2004) found that intercultural teams in which members felt psychologically safe to acknowledge and discuss cultural differences in working style reported significantly higher creative performance than

those in which cultural differences were treated as taboo or were homogenised into a dominant norm. This finding suggests that psychological safety in Singapore's multicultural hybrid teams requires not merely the removal of interpersonal threat but the active cultivation of an environment where cultural heterogeneity is treated as an intellectual and creative resource.

2.13.3 Proximity Bias as a Systemic Inclusion Threat

Proximity bias, the tendency to disproportionately evaluate, reward, and promote employees who are physically present in the office, is one of the most systematically documented threats to equity in hybrid work arrangements (Bloom et al., 2015; 2022). The consequences of proximity bias are not merely individual but structural: over time, proximity-biased performance management systems create organisational hierarchies in which advancement is correlated with physical presence rather than with output quality, generating a systematic disadvantage for those who are less able or less willing to attend the office regularly, disproportionately including women, employees with disabilities, those with long commutes, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who have relocated to more affordable housing during the pandemic.

Golden and Eddleston (2020) conducted a longitudinal study of proximity bias in a US multinational and found that remote employees received performance ratings 0.4 standard deviations lower than equivalent in-person employees over a three-year period, despite no objectively measurable difference in work output as measured by project completion rates, client satisfaction scores, or innovation metrics. This bias persisted after controlling for manager personality, team composition, and work type, suggesting that it reflects a systematic cognitive bias rather than a rational assessment of contribution. The psychological safety implications are direct: employees who perceive that their physical presence, rather than their work, determines

their evaluation cannot feel genuinely safe to manage their work arrangements in the way that best serves their performance, creating a structural contradiction between the stated values of hybrid work and its actual incentive structure.

2.14 Remote and Hybrid Leadership: Capabilities and Challenges

2.14.1 The Leadership Capability Gap

One of the most consistently reported challenges in hybrid work research is the capability gap among managers in leading distributed teams (CIPD, 2023; Deloitte, 2022). Many managers were promoted and developed during an era of co-located work and have limited experience with, or training in, the relational and communication skills required to maintain team cohesion, psychological safety, and performance accountability in hybrid settings. The pandemic accelerated the demand for these capabilities but did not ensure their systematic development, creating a cohort of managers who may be genuinely trying to lead effectively but lack the specific skills that hybrid leadership requires.

Avolio et al. (2014) identified five capability gaps most commonly observed in managers leading hybrid or distributed teams: (i) the inability to build relational trust without the benefit of informal in-person social interaction; (ii) limited skill in adapting communication style across digital channels; (iii) difficulty in providing meaningful performance feedback based on outputs rather than observable effort; (iv) unconscious proximity bias in attention allocation and recognition; and (v) limited capacity for empathetic enquiry, the ability to understand what team members are genuinely experiencing, in the absence of the non-verbal cues available in face-to-face interaction. Each of these gaps is directly implicated in the maintenance of psychological safety during hybrid-to-office transitions.

2.14.2 Visible and Invisible Leadership in Hybrid Contexts

A recurring theme in the hybrid leadership literature is the concept of leadership visibility, the degree to which team members are aware of and feel connected to their leader's presence, values, and support. In co-located environments, leadership visibility is partly automatic: casual encounters in corridors, shared meals, and observable behaviour in open offices collectively create a background sense of leader presence even when formal meetings are infrequent. In hybrid environments, this background presence disappears, and leadership visibility must be deliberately constructed through digital means.

Research by Larson and DeChurch (2020) found that hybrid team members who reported low leader visibility, characterised by infrequent communication, limited digital presence, and perceived unavailability, also reported significantly lower psychological safety and higher rates of disengagement than those with high leader visibility. Importantly, the relationship between visibility and safety was mediated by perceived leader responsiveness, the degree to which employees believed that their communications would be acknowledged and acted upon. Leaders who were frequently present digitally but primarily in broadcast mode (disseminating information rather than engaging in dialogue) generated no more safety than leaders who were rarely visible, suggesting that it is the quality of digital presence rather than its quantity that matters.

Edmondson and Mortensen (2021) describe the concept of 'deliberate interpersonal learning', the intentional effort by hybrid leaders to understand team members' individual contexts, constraints, and perspectives, as the critical competency that distinguishes psychologically safe hybrid leaders from those who inadvertently erode safety through inattention. Deliberate interpersonal learning requires leaders to schedule regular one-to-one conversations focused explicitly on how

team members are experiencing the working arrangement, rather than solely on task progress, and to respond to what they learn with genuine curiosity and problem-solving orientation rather than reassurance or dismissal.

2.14.3 Trust-Based vs Control-Based Leadership Approaches

The binary between trust-based and control-based leadership approaches, while an oversimplification, captures an important dimension of the hybrid leadership challenge. Control-based approaches emphasise observable effort, attendance, and rule compliance as proxies for performance; trust-based approaches emphasise outcomes, autonomy, and relational accountability as the basis for the performance relationship. The pandemic forced most organisations, however reluctantly, to shift toward trust-based approaches during the period of enforced remote work. HTO transitions create an opportunity for this shift to be consolidated or reversed.

Organisations that use HTO as an opportunity to reassert control-based management, monitoring badge-in rates, requiring cameras during video calls, tracking computer activity, and tying attendance to performance ratings, send a powerful signal about the quality of trust in the employment relationship. This signal is not lost on employees: research by Stanton (2002) found that perceived electronic monitoring significantly reduced feelings of autonomy and procedural justice, with downstream effects on organisational commitment and psychological safety. The irony is that control-based approaches, by eroding the psychological safety that enables effective performance, may achieve the opposite of their stated goal.

Trust-based approaches, by contrast, treat the HTO transition as an opportunity to consolidate the relational capital built during hybrid working. By explicitly stating that the rationale for office attendance is about collaborative value creation rather than monitoring and control, and by

demonstrating through management behaviour that this stated rationale is genuine, trust-based leaders can use the transition to deepen rather than erode the psychological safety accumulated during the hybrid period. The research evidence reviewed throughout this chapter strongly suggests that trust-based approaches generate superior outcomes on every relevant organisational metric, performance, retention, engagement, innovation, and well-being, and that the appeal of control-based management rests on intuitions about employee motivation that the evidence does not support (Grant, 2013).

2.15 Technology, Digital Tools, and Psychological Safety

2.15.1 The Digital Communication Ecosystem in Hybrid Work

The digital communication ecosystem that has developed during the pandemic, encompassing video conferencing platforms, asynchronous messaging tools, collaborative document environments, project management systems, and digital whiteboards, has fundamentally altered the infrastructure of organisational communication in ways that have complex and ambivalent implications for psychological safety. On one hand, these tools extend the reach of communication, enabling team members to connect across geographic and time-zone boundaries and creating searchable records of organisational decisions and discussions. On the other hand, they introduce new forms of social inequality, cognitive burden, and surveillance that can suppress the authentic expression associated with psychological safety.

Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) conducted a micro-process analysis of meeting communication across in-person, telephone, and video modalities and found significant differences in the frequency and quality of ‘functional communication’, constructive problem-solving, humour, and elaboration, across modalities. In-person meetings generated the highest frequency of functional communication, but video meetings generated more functional

communication than telephone meetings, suggesting that non-verbal cues, even when mediated through a screen, contribute meaningfully to the social dynamics that underpin psychological safety. The practical implication is that organisations should default to video-enabled communication for meetings requiring substantive collaboration and reserve asynchronous text-based tools for information exchange and documentation.

2.15.2 Asynchronous Communication and Inclusion

Asynchronous communication tools including email, Slack, Microsoft Teams, and project management platforms such as Asana and Notion, have become central to hybrid team coordination. These tools offer significant advantages for psychological safety: they allow employees to compose and review their contributions before sending, reducing the time-pressure that can suppress voice in synchronous settings; they create a written record that equalises access to information; and they enable employees in different time zones or with different communication styles to participate on terms more suited to their needs (Jonassen and Kwon, 2001).

However, asynchronous tools also introduce risks. Kruger et al. (2005) documented the phenomenon of ‘email tone deafness’, the systematic tendency for text-based communication to be interpreted as more negative, hostile, or dismissive than the sender intended, attributing this to the absence of paralinguistic cues (tone of voice, facial expression, gesture) that in face-to-face communication moderate the interpretation of ambiguous messages. In psychologically unsafe environments, this tone-interpretation bias can create or amplify conflicts that would not survive a face-to-face conversation, accelerating the deterioration of team climate.

The proliferation of communication channels in hybrid environments, with many organisations operating simultaneously across email, Slack, Teams, video conferencing, and face-to-face, also

creates a meta-communication burden: employees must track not only the content of communications but the appropriate channel for each type of interaction, the expected response times on each channel, and the social norms governing formality, brevity, and tone on each platform. This meta-communication overhead is a source of cognitive load that reduces the resources available for productive and psychologically present engagement, and may inadvertently suppress voice by making the logistics of communication more effortful.

2.15.3 Surveillance Technology and Psychological Safety

The rise of employee monitoring technology, including keystroke logging, screenshot capture, GPS tracking of company devices, email content analysis, and ‘productivity scoring’ algorithms, represents a distinctive and troubling feature of the post-pandemic work environment. A 2022 survey by the Electronic Frontier Foundation found that 80 percent of large employers in the US had implemented at least one form of digital employee monitoring since 2020, a figure that is expected to continue rising. In Singapore, similar trends are documented, with the Personal Data Protection Commission (PDPC, 2023) issuing guidance on the appropriate use of monitoring technologies in workplace settings.

The psychological safety implications of employee monitoring are severe and well-documented. Stanton and Stam (2003) found that employees subject to visible monitoring reported significantly lower psychological safety, higher anxiety, and lower organisational commitment than unmonitored equivalents, even when they were told that the monitoring data would not be used in performance evaluations. The explanation is rooted in the signalling function of monitoring: surveillance communicates a presumption of untrustworthiness that directly contradicts the relational foundation of psychological safety. Employees interpret monitoring not as a neutral data-collection exercise but as evidence that their employer does not trust them to

work diligently without oversight, a message that is incompatible with the felt safety to take interpersonal risks.

The interaction between monitoring and cultural context is particularly relevant for Singapore. In high power-distance cultures, employees may be less likely to publicly resist monitoring, the cultural norms of deference to authority and avoidance of conflict suppress overt objection, but the psychological effects are no less real. Covert compliance coupled with emotional disengagement, the pattern that Morrison and Milliken (2000) identifies as ‘surface compliance’, may actually be more prevalent in high power-distance contexts precisely because employees lack the cultural safety to express their objection through legitimate voice channels.

Organisations that interpret the absence of overt complaint as evidence of employee acceptance of monitoring practices are likely to be systematically misreading the psychological reality of their workforces.

2.16 Sector-Specific Considerations

2.16.1 Financial Services and Professional Services

Singapore's financial services sector comprising banking, insurance, asset management, and FinTech, is one of the largest contributors to GDP and one of the most significant employers of professional knowledge workers. The sector has been characterised by early and aggressive adoption of HTO mandates, with several major investment banks requiring full-time office attendance for front-office staff from as early as 2022. The justification typically offered is the need for real-time collaboration, regulatory compliance visibility, and client relationship management, arguments that have some empirical basis for certain roles but are often applied uniformly to roles for which they are less compelling (KPMG, 2023).

The psychological safety implications of financial services HTO mandates are complicated by the sector's pre-existing cultural characteristics. Financial services organisations, particularly investment banking, trading, and private equity, have historically been associated with high-pressure, performance-intensive cultures in which vulnerability is stigmatised and hierarchy is enforced through subtle but powerful status signals (Keltner et al., 2003). These cultural characteristics create baseline conditions of relatively low psychological safety that HTO transitions may exacerbate by reinforcing visibility-as-performance norms and reducing the autonomy that hybrid arrangements had temporarily introduced.

Professional services firms including law firms, consulting practices, and accounting firms, present a more heterogeneous picture. The partnership model that governs many professional services firms creates structural incentives for presenteeism, the practice of being visibly present in the office as a signal of commitment and ambition that operate independently of any formal attendance policy. Junior professionals in these environments may feel coercively present even when no explicit HTO mandate has been issued, because the unwritten norms of the promotion tournament make hybrid working feel professionally risky regardless of what formal policy permits. Addressing psychological safety in professional services contexts therefore requires attention to informal norms and the incentive structures that sustain them, not merely to formal policy design.

2.16.2 Healthcare and Education

Healthcare and education sectors occupy a distinctive position in the hybrid work literature: for most roles in these sectors, remote work is not feasible, patient care and classroom teaching inherently require physical presence, and the hybrid work research therefore has limited direct applicability. However, the psychological safety literature is particularly rich in healthcare

settings, where Edmondson's (1999) original research was conducted and where the stakes of interpersonal risk-taking are literally life-and-death.

O'Donovan and McAuliffe (2020) conducted a systematic review of psychological safety interventions in healthcare and found that team-based training programmes focused on inclusive communication, structured handoff protocols, and leader modelling of error acknowledgement consistently increased safety perceptions and reduced adverse event rates. Importantly, these interventions were effective despite the hierarchical and high-stakes nature of healthcare environments, suggesting that psychological safety is malleable even in conditions that might be expected to suppress it. The mechanisms identified, structured communication tools, explicit cultural norms, and deliberate leadership modelling, are directly transferable to other sectors navigating high-stakes transitions.

Education presents a parallel case. The pandemic forced educators into online and hybrid teaching at extraordinary speed, creating widespread anxiety about pedagogical effectiveness and professional identity. Research by Trust and Whalen (2020) found that teachers who felt psychologically safe within their school communities, able to acknowledge uncertainty, share both successes and failures, and experiment with new approaches without fear of negative judgment, adapted more effectively to digital teaching and sustained higher student engagement than those in psychologically unsafe school cultures. The parallel to knowledge workers navigating HTO transitions is instructive: both groups face rapid normative change that requires the kind of adaptive experimentation that psychological safety enables.

A 2025 systematic and narrative review by Montgomery et al. confirmed these dynamics across multiple healthcare settings, finding that psychological safety was significantly associated with objective patient safety outcomes — including rates of reported medical errors — in five of the

studies reviewed, reinforcing the evidence that psychological safety is a structural prerequisite for safe healthcare delivery rather than merely a relational nicety (Montgomery et al., 2025).

2.16.3 Technology and Knowledge-Intensive Industries

The technology sector has been the site of the most publicly visible and politically charged HTO debates, partly because of its high public profile and partly because technology companies typically employ highly skilled workers with strong external labour market options, making the credibility of HTO threats relatively low. The sector is also notable for the diversity of approaches to hybrid work: some companies have maintained generous flexibility policies throughout the post-pandemic period, while others including several of the largest US technology firms, have implemented increasingly mandatory attendance requirements.

Research on psychological safety in technology organisations is particularly relevant to this study because technology work is inherently knowledge-intensive, interdependent, and reliant on the kind of creative risk-taking and constructive challenge that psychological safety enables. A longitudinal study of software engineering teams by Rozovsky (2015), published as a summary of Google's Project Aristotle research, found that psychological safety was the most important predictor of team performance across 180 Google teams, outperforming team composition, individual ability, and manager quality. This finding, which generated significant public attention, has been instrumental in placing psychological safety on the agenda of technology sector HR and leadership development.

The specific dynamics of software development teams, including code review processes, sprint retrospectives, and cross-functional dependencies, create distinctive antecedents of psychological safety that are worth noting. Psychologically safe code review cultures, in which developers feel comfortable submitting imperfect work for collaborative improvement rather than only

submitting work they are confident is correct, have been shown to produce higher-quality code, faster identification of bugs, and more effective knowledge transfer than review cultures dominated by status and competitiveness (Bird et al., 2009). The transition to hybrid and HTO environments does not eliminate these dynamics but does alter the communication infrastructure through which they are enacted, creating new challenges for maintaining the relational conditions that enable effective technical collaboration.

2.17 Organisational Justice and Psychological Safety

2.17.1 Distributive, Procedural, and Interactional Justice

Organisational justice theory (Colquitt et al., 2001) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how employees evaluate the fairness of organisational decisions and processes, and how those evaluations influence their attitudes and behaviour. The theory identifies four dimensions of justice: distributive justice (the fairness of outcomes; whether employees receive what they deserve); procedural justice (the fairness of the processes by which decisions are made; whether employees have voice and whether criteria are consistently applied); interpersonal justice (the degree to which employees are treated with dignity and respect); and informational justice (the adequacy of explanations provided for decisions). Each of these dimensions is directly implicated in the psychological safety dynamics of HTO transitions. Distributive justice in the HTO context concerns whether the costs and benefits of office attendance are fairly distributed across the workforce. If the burden of commuting falls disproportionately on lower-paid employees (who may live further from offices), caregivers (who bear asymmetric domestic responsibilities), or employees with disabilities (who face accessibility challenges), while the benefits of office attendance, networking, visibility, career

advancement, accrue primarily to those already advantaged, the distributional outcomes are unjust and will be perceived as such by affected employees.

Procedural justice is particularly important in the HTO context because the process by which transition decisions are made is often experienced as more central to the sense of fairness than the specific outcomes of those decisions. Employees who feel that they had meaningful input into the transition policy, even if the final outcome was not what they preferred, report significantly higher procedural justice perceptions and lower psychological contract breach than those who experienced the policy as imposed without consultation (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). This finding reinforces the practical importance of the participatory policy design recommendation offered in Chapter 6.

Informational justice, the adequacy of explanations, is the dimension most directly within management's control during HTO transitions. Greenberg (1994) demonstrated that providing 'adequate accounts' for negative outcomes, explanations that are thorough, honest, and acknowledge the employee's perspective, significantly reduced the negative attitudinal and behavioural consequences of those outcomes. Applied to HTO transitions, this suggests that the quality of the explanation offered for the hybrid-to-office requirement is as important as any substantive accommodation offered, and that explanations that are formulaic, management-speak, or that invoke business benefits without acknowledging employee costs will generate significantly worse justice perceptions than honest accounts that acknowledge the trade-offs involved.

2.17.2 Justice Climate and Collective Safety

Colquitt et al. (2002) extended organisational justice theory to the team level, introducing the concept of 'justice climate', the shared perception within a team of the fairness of organisational

treatment. Justice climate operates similarly to psychological safety climate in that it represents a collective, socially constructed perception that shapes team-level behaviour over and above any individual justice perceptions. Research has consistently found that justice climate predicts team performance, cooperation, and organisational citizenship behaviour over and above individual-level justice perceptions (Naumann and Bennett, 2000).

The relationship between justice climate and psychological safety is theoretically important: a team in which members collectively perceive fair treatment from the organisation is likely to develop a shared sense of organisational trustworthiness that reinforces the interpersonal trust underlying psychological safety. Conversely, a team in which members collectively experience injustice, whether through distributional inequity, exclusion from decision-making, or inadequate explanation, may develop a shared narrative of organisational bad faith that undermines psychological safety even where individual leader-member relationships are strong. HTO transitions create conditions for justice climate disruption that can cascade into safety climate deterioration if not proactively managed.

2.18 Generational Differences and Psychological Safety

2.18.1 Generational Cohort Theory and Its Limitations

Generational cohort theory proposes that individuals who come of age during the same historical period share distinctive values, attitudes, and behavioural dispositions shaped by their formative experiences (Mannheim, 1952; Strauss and Howe, 1991). Applied to the workplace, this theory has generated a substantial industry of managerial advice about how to lead, motivate, and retain employees from different generational cohorts, Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012).

However, generational cohort theory as popularly applied is subject to significant methodological critique. Twenge et al. (2010) and others have documented that most apparent generational differences in workplace attitudes can be better explained by life stage (age effects) and period (historical events affecting all age groups simultaneously) than by cohort membership. Young workers in any era tend to prioritise flexibility and development opportunities; older workers tend to prioritise stability and recognition, differences that reflect career stage rather than generational identity. This does not mean that generational differences are entirely illusory, but it does mean that managing by generational stereotypes rather than by individual circumstances is both empirically unjustified and ethically problematic from an anti-discrimination standpoint.

With this caveat clearly noted, there is genuine evidence that the post-pandemic workforce contains meaningfully different distributions of hybrid work preferences across age groups, not because of generational identity per se but because of life-stage and career-stage factors that correlate with age. Younger employees, who are more likely to be in the early stages of career development, to live in smaller shared accommodation less suited to productive home working, and to have less established professional networks, may genuinely benefit more from in-person working for career development reasons, even if they rhetorically prefer hybrid arrangements for lifestyle reasons. Older employees, who are more likely to have established professional networks, managerial responsibilities, and domestic environments suited to remote work, may experience the costs of HTO differently.

2.18.2 Generation Z, Psychological Safety, and Authenticity

Generation Z employees, those entering the workforce from approximately 2019 onwards, have received particular attention in the hybrid work literature, partly because they completed their

education and entered professional life during the pandemic and therefore have limited professional socialisation in traditional co-located environments. Research by Deloitte (2024) found that 77 percent of Gen Z respondents prioritised work-life balance and mental health support above salary as factors in employer choice, and that 64 percent reported that they would be more productive in environments that allowed them to choose their work location.

From a psychological safety perspective, Gen Z employees present a distinctive profile. Research by Twenge (2023) found that Gen Z employees tend to score higher on neuroticism and anxiety than older cohorts, a finding attributed to the combination of social media exposure, climate anxiety, and economic uncertainty that characterises their formative experiences, but also higher on values related to authenticity, diversity, and social justice. This combination creates a particular psychological safety dynamic: Gen Z employees may be simultaneously more emotionally sensitive to interpersonal threats (requiring more deliberate safety cultivation) and more likely to disengage publicly if they perceive organisational hypocrisy around values of inclusion, diversity, and well-being.

For Singapore organisations seeking to recruit and retain Gen Z talent ,a critical challenge given demographic pressures and skills competition from multinational employers ,the psychological safety implications are strategic. Organisations that demonstrate genuine commitment to psychological safety through transparent communication, participatory policy design, and culturally adaptive leadership are likely to be significantly more attractive to Gen Z candidates than those that maintain traditional control-based management cultures. The reputational dimension of psychological safety, its visibility through employee review platforms such as Glassdoor and LinkedIn, means that safety-related failures are increasingly public and reputationally costly in ways that were not possible in previous eras.

2.19 Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management

2.19.1 Psychological Safety as a Foundation for Learning Organisations

The concept of the learning organisation, articulated by Senge (1990) and developed by a generation of organisational theorists, proposes that sustainable competitive advantage derives not from static assets or current capabilities but from the capacity to learn and adapt faster than competitors. Psychological safety is widely regarded as a necessary condition for the learning organisation: without it, the honest diagnosis of performance failures, the constructive challenge of flawed assumptions, and the experimental risk-taking that learning requires are suppressed by the social costs of being wrong in public.

Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguished between single-loop learning, the correction of errors within an existing framework of assumptions, and double-loop learning, the questioning and revision of the underlying assumptions themselves. Double-loop learning is the rarer, more challenging, and more organisationally valuable form, and it requires a degree of psychological safety that is substantially higher than single-loop learning. Pointing out that a procedure is not being followed correctly (single-loop) is much less interpersonally risky than suggesting that the procedure itself is based on a flawed assumption (double-loop). Research by Edmondson (1999) demonstrated that teams with higher psychological safety engaged in significantly more double-loop learning behaviour, with direct consequences for adaptive performance.

In the context of hybrid-to-office transitions, the learning organisation framework suggests that organisations need double-loop learning to navigate the transition effectively: not merely learning how to implement a predetermined HTO policy more smoothly (single-loop) but questioning the assumptions that underlie the policy, including assumptions about the relationship between physical presence and productivity, the appropriate role of monitoring and

control in managing knowledge workers, and the value of informal social interaction relative to its costs. Psychological safety is the prerequisite for this more fundamental organisational inquiry.

2.19.2 Knowledge Transfer in Hybrid Environments

Hybrid and remote work arrangements create specific challenges for organisational knowledge management, the processes through which tacit knowledge (know-how embedded in practice and experience) is transferred between organisational members. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) identified knowledge socialisation, the direct transfer of tacit knowledge through shared experience, as the foundational knowledge creation process on which all other forms of organisational learning depend. Socialisation requires physical proximity and shared practice: it is difficult to transfer tacit knowledge through video conferencing or written documentation because the knowledge itself is embedded in the doing rather than in its description.

This knowledge transfer challenge creates a genuine rationale for some degree of physical co-location, particularly for organisations in which expert knowledge is tacit and its transfer to new employees is critical for sustained performance. The relevant question for hybrid policy design is not whether in-person work enables knowledge transfer, it clearly does, but whether mandatory full-time attendance is necessary for sufficient knowledge transfer, or whether structured and deliberate in-person collaboration on specific days and for specific purposes could achieve equivalent transfer more efficiently. The available evidence (Bloom et al., 2022; Waber et al., 2014) suggests that the latter is possible, provided that the in-person time is deliberately designed for knowledge transfer activities rather than merely for generic co-presence.

Psychological safety is directly implicated in knowledge transfer effectiveness. Employees who feel psychologically safe are significantly more willing to share tacit knowledge, including

knowledge about their own limitations and gaps, than those in unsafe environments. Szulanski (1996) identified ‘relationship quality’ as the most important predictor of successful tacit knowledge transfer within organisations, with low-quality, high-mistrust relationships creating the primary barrier to transfer. Psychological safety, as a dimension of relationship quality, is therefore not merely a facilitator of knowledge creation (through voice and experimentation) but of knowledge transfer (through openness and reciprocal sharing).

2.20 The Theory-Practice Gap in Psychological Safety

2.20.1 Why Psychological Safety Knowledge Does Not Automatically Translate into Practice

One of the most practically important, and frequently overlooked, dimensions of the psychological safety challenge is the theory-practice gap: the consistent finding that organisational leaders and managers who understand the importance of psychological safety in principle regularly fail to enact the behaviours that would create it in practice. This gap is not primarily an education problem, awareness of psychological safety concepts has increased dramatically since Google's Project Aristotle report (Duhigg, 2016), but a behaviour change and systemic design problem.

Edmondson (2018) identifies three principal mechanisms through which the theory-practice gap is sustained. First, the ‘performance pressure paradox’: managers who are under pressure to deliver results, especially in high-stakes HTO transition periods, tend to revert to control-based behaviours precisely when psychological safety is most needed. The intuition that tighter control produces better performance is deeply embedded in traditional management culture and is activated automatically under stress, even among managers who intellectually endorse safety-oriented approaches. Managing this paradox requires not only training but the redesign of

organisational incentives, ensuring that managers are evaluated and rewarded for psychological safety outcomes as well as for task delivery.

Second, the ‘status quo bias’: organisations tend to continue management practices that have been institutionalised over time, even when evidence suggests that alternative practices would produce better outcomes. The physical-presence-as-performance norm that underlies many HTO mandates is a specific instance of this bias: it has been institutionalised across generations of management practice and is resistant to revision even in the face of contrary evidence.

Overcoming status quo bias requires not merely evidence-based advocacy but the deliberate creation of new reference points, pilot programmes, case studies, and visible examples of organisations achieving excellent results through psychologically informed management.

Third, the ‘fear of looking weak’ effect: leaders who have been socialised in cultures that equate authority with certainty and invulnerability often resist the authenticity practices, acknowledging uncertainty, admitting mistakes, expressing genuine emotions, that are most strongly associated with psychological safety creation. In Singapore's hierarchical context, this effect is amplified by cultural norms of face-preservation that make public acknowledgement of limitation feel professionally dangerous. Developing the institutional safety for leaders to practise vulnerability, through modelling by very senior leadership, explicit cultural endorsement, and peer learning communities — is therefore a prerequisite for developing psychological safety in teams.

2.20.2 Organisational Systems That Undermine Stated Safety Values

Even when leaders are individually committed to psychological safety, organisational systems can systematically undermine their efforts. Argyris and Schön's (1978) concept of ‘defensive routines’, organisational practices that protect the organisation from the discomfort of honest self-examination, describes a pattern that is particularly relevant to hybrid-to-office transitions:

organisations may espouse psychological safety as a value while maintaining systems (performance management, communication hierarchies, physical space design, monitoring technologies) that operate on opposite assumptions.

The most commonly documented systemic underminer of psychological safety is the annual performance review process. Traditional performance reviews, which aggregate a year's worth of behavioural evidence into a rating that determines salary and career progression, create powerful incentives for impression management, error concealment, and information withholding throughout the year. Employees who know that their annual rating will be influenced by how they appeared to their manager throughout the year have strong incentives to present themselves as competent, decisive, and unfailingly positive, precisely the opposite of the authentic, risk-taking behaviour that psychological safety enables (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023). The growing movement toward continuous performance management, replacing annual reviews with regular, developmental conversations focused on learning and growth is directly aligned with psychological safety principles and has been shown to increase voice behaviour and error reporting in organisations that have implemented it (CIPD, 2023).

Communication structures that concentrate information at the top of organisational hierarchies and allow it to 'trickle down' slowly and selectively are a second systemic underminer. In hybrid environments, where information asymmetry between on-site and remote employees is structurally embedded in the pattern of informal communication, this trickle-down problem is amplified. Organisations that do not proactively restructure their information flows to achieve greater equity and transparency in hybrid contexts will find that their stated commitments to transparency are systematically undermined by their communication architecture.

2.20.3 Ethical Dimensions of Psychological Safety in the Workplace

The discussion of psychological safety in this dissertation has been primarily framed in instrumental terms, as a driver of performance, innovation, engagement, and retention. This framing is appropriate for a management research context and reflects the primary orientation of the evidence base. However, it is important to acknowledge that psychological safety also has moral dimensions that transcend its instrumental consequences: the creation of psychologically safe workplaces is not merely strategically wise but is an expression of respect for the fundamental dignity and autonomy of employees as persons.

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2011) proposes that human flourishing requires the development and exercise of a set of core capabilities, including the capability to use senses, imagination, and thought; to experience emotions and attachments; and to exercise practical reason and affiliation with others. These capabilities are directly implicated in the psychological safety construct: employees in psychologically unsafe workplaces are systematically prevented from exercising their capability for authentic expression, genuine relationship, and practical reasoning about their work. From this perspective, creating psychologically unsafe workplaces is not merely a strategic error but a moral failure, the treatment of persons as means to organisational ends rather than as ends in themselves.

This moral framing has practical implications for how organisations justify investment in psychological safety. While instrumental arguments, the productivity and retention benefits, are more persuasive in short-term management decision-making, moral arguments engage a different level of organisational commitment. Leaders who understand psychological safety as a moral obligation as well as a strategic investment are more likely to sustain their commitment when

short-term pressures argue for reverting to control-based management, because their commitment is grounded in values as well as in evidence.

The concept of organisational silence, the collective absence of employee voice in organisations where significant problems exist (Morrison and Milliken, 2000), raises important ethical questions about the distribution of power and the ethics of management practices that suppress voice. When employees are silent, through fear of consequences, resignation about the effectiveness of speaking up, or active discouragement by leaders, the organisation loses access to information that could prevent errors, improve decisions, and identify emerging risks. This information loss is not merely inconvenient but can be catastrophic: major organisational failures from the Challenger space shuttle disaster (Vaughan, 1997) to financial crises and healthcare scandals, have repeatedly been traced to the systematic suppression of inconvenient information by employees who feared the consequences of voice.

The ethics of organisational silence extend to the HTO transition context: employees who observe that a hybrid-to-office policy is generating distress, inequity, or performance problems but feel unable to raise these concerns have been deprived not only of psychological safety but of a fundamental capacity for organisational citizenship. Organisations that create conditions of silence, through surveillance, dismissiveness, or implicit punishment of challenge, are not simply reducing their access to useful information but are actively violating the moral relationship of mutual accountability that professional employment should embody.

For Singapore specifically, the ethics of silence are complicated by cultural norms that may make silence appear to be respectful deference rather than safety-suppressed voice. The challenge for leaders in high power-distance organisations is to distinguish between voluntary, culturally expressed deference (which does not necessarily indicate a safety problem) and

involuntary, fear-based silence (which does). Research by Morrison (2014) suggests that the most reliable indicator of this distinction is not the frequency of speaking up but the nature of what is not said: employees who choose not to raise concerns but feel genuinely comfortable doing so (culturally expressive silence) are distinguishable from those who would like to raise concerns but feel unable to (safety-suppressed silence) through qualitative interview methods that give employees the opportunity to reflect on their own experience of voice and silence.

2.21 Justification for this Study

The review of literature presented in this chapter establishes psychological safety as a theoretically robust, empirically supported, and practically significant construct for understanding how organisations can sustain employee performance and engagement during hybrid-to-office transitions. The literature also reveals four clear gaps: in hybrid work integration, cultural representativeness, longitudinal evidence, and practice-oriented frameworks, that this dissertation directly addresses.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws on psychological safety theory (Edmondson, 1999), self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), organisational climate theory (Schneider et al., 2013), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995). Together, these frameworks provide a multi-level, multi-mechanism account of how psychological safety is created, sustained, and disrupted during organisational transitions. The extended review also provides insights into the complex nature of the business environment especially when trying to implement psychologically safe practices..

The following chapter presents the methodology through which this literature base is systematically synthesised to develop an integrative conceptual framework for psychologically safe hybrid-to-office transitions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodological foundations of the study, describing the philosophical positioning, research design, and procedural steps through which the systematic literature review was conducted. The aim is to provide a transparent and replicable account of the research process, consistent with the standards of rigorous doctoral inquiry (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 3.2 presents the philosophical orientation, including epistemological and ontological assumptions. Section 3.3 justifies the systematic literature review as the chosen research design. Section 3.4 describes the data sources used. Section 3.5 presents the search strategy. Section 3.6 specifies the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Section 3.7 describes the data extraction and coding procedure. Section 3.8 outlines the quality appraisal process. Section 3.9 addresses ethical considerations. Section 3.10 acknowledges the limitations of the approach.

3.2 Philosophical Orientation

3.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

Research philosophy provides the foundation for understanding how knowledge is generated and interpreted. This study adopts a constructivist ontology, which holds that reality ,particularly social and organisational reality ,is not fixed or objective but is constructed through human interaction, interpretation, and meaning-making (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2016). Psychological safety, as a construct rooted in shared beliefs about interpersonal risk-taking, is inherently

intersubjective and socially constituted, making constructivism an appropriate ontological starting point.

The epistemological stance is interpretivist, which assumes that understanding organisational phenomena requires engagement with the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of those involved rather than the discovery of universal laws through observation (Bryman, 2016). This is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) original conceptualisation of psychological safety as an emergent, perceptually grounded phenomenon that cannot be meaningfully separated from the social contexts in which it arises.

At the same time, the study is informed by a pragmatic orientation. Pragmatism prioritises the practical application of knowledge and supports the integration of multiple forms of evidence to address real-world problems (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Morgan, 2014). In organisational research, pragmatism justifies the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence within a single synthesis, as each form of evidence illuminates different dimensions of the research problem. This is particularly appropriate for a systematic literature review, which synthesises evidence across diverse methodological traditions.

The combination of interpretivism and pragmatism enables the study to balance theoretical depth with practical relevance. Interpretivism guides the synthesis of meanings and experiences associated with psychological safety, while pragmatism justifies the integration of diverse empirical findings to inform an applied framework for organisational use.

3.2.2 Comparison of Design Options

Several research designs were considered before selecting the systematic literature review. Primary empirical approaches, including interviews, surveys, or case studies, would have enabled direct data collection from Singaporean organisations. However, such approaches

involve significant time and resource commitments and would have yielded findings specific to a limited sample. Given the aim of developing a broadly applicable conceptual framework, a synthesis of the existing evidence base was judged to be more appropriate and more likely to yield generalisable insights.

A narrative literature review was considered but rejected on the grounds that narrative reviews are susceptible to selection bias and lack the transparent, reproducible procedures required for doctoral-level rigour (Tranfield et al., 2003). A meta-analysis was also considered, but the heterogeneity of outcomes, designs, and operationalisations across the psychological safety literature made statistical aggregation inappropriate without a prior qualitative synthesis to establish conceptual equivalence.

The systematic literature review (SLR) was selected as the most appropriate design. The SLR provides an objective, transparent, and reproducible process for synthesising existing studies (Tranfield et al., 2003; Booth et al., 2016). Unlike narrative reviews, SLRs follow defined protocols for identifying, evaluating, and analysing literature, reducing the risk of confirmation bias and enabling replication. The approach aligns with evidence-based management (Rousseau and Barends, 2011), which advocates systematic synthesis of research to inform organisational decision-making. Table 3.1 highlights this comparisons.

Dimension	Position Adopted	Alternative Considered	Justification
Ontology	Constructivism	Critical realism	Psychological safety is socially constructed, not externally observable
Epistemology	Interpretivism	Positivism	Meaning and context are central to understanding safety perceptions

Methodology	Pragmatism (integrative)	Purely qualitative or quantitative	SLR requires integration of diverse evidence forms
Research Design	Systematic Literature Review	Primary empirical study	Generalisable framework requires synthesis of existing evidence

Table 3.1: Philosophical Positioning of the Study

3.3 Systematic Literature Review Design

3.3.1 Methodological Framework: PRISMA 2020

This study is guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework, which provides a structured and transparent process for identifying, screening, and synthesising relevant literature (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA 2020 is the current standard for systematic review reporting in health, social science, and management research and is recommended by leading journals in organisational behaviour and human resource management. The use of PRISMA enhances the rigour, replicability, and credibility of the review process.

The PRISMA 2020 framework was selected over earlier iterations (Moher et al., 2009) because it incorporates updated guidance on reporting searches of grey literature, databases added to the review, and methods for assessing risk of bias across studies. It also provides explicit guidance for systematic reviews that do not conduct meta-analyses, ‘qualitative syntheses’, which is consistent with the thematic synthesis approach adopted in this study.

3.3.2 Stages of the Systematic Review

Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), the review comprised three main stages: planning, conducting, and reporting.

In the planning stage, the scope, research questions, and inclusion criteria were defined prospectively. A review protocol was established before searching commenced, to prevent post-

hoc adjustments that could introduce bias. This protocol specified the primary research question, key search terms, databases to be used, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the approach to data extraction and synthesis.

In the conducting stage, systematic searches were executed across multiple databases. Records were screened first at the title and abstract level, then at the full-text level, with exclusion reasons documented at each stage. Quality appraisal was conducted on all full-text eligible studies.

In the reporting and synthesising stage, data were extracted from included studies using a standardised template, coded thematically, and synthesised into the five themes and conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram documenting the number of records identified, screened, and included at each step is presented in Appendix A.

3.4 Data Sources and Rationale

The literature search was conducted using a multi-database strategy. Primary databases included Google Scholar (leveraging linked full-text access through National Library Board Singapore, the Singapore University of Social Sciences library portal, and Murdoch University Library databases), Emerald Insight, and ResearchGate for supplementary open-access materials. This approach was adopted in response to limited access to subscription-based databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, while ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.

Google Scholar was selected as the primary search platform because it provides the broadest coverage of peer-reviewed journals across disciplines, including management, organisational psychology, human resource development, and sociology. Martín-Martín et al. (2018) demonstrated that Google Scholar covers 95 percent of the unique records available in Scopus and Web of Science combined, making it a defensible primary source for systematic reviews conducted without institutional access to subscription databases.

Emerald Insight was included for its extensive coverage of management and organisational behaviour journals (including the International Journal of Human Resource Management, the Journal of Organisational Behaviour, and the Journal of Management Development), which are directly relevant to this study's focus.

The use of multiple databases mitigates the limitations associated with relying on a single source and reduces the risk of database bias, which is a recognised concern in systematic reviews (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020). However, the absence of Scopus and Web of Science access is acknowledged as a limitation (see Section 3.10).

3.5 Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

The search strategy was developed iteratively to capture literature at the intersection of psychological safety, hybrid work arrangements, and organisational outcomes. Keywords were derived from established literature on psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017) and emerging research on remote and hybrid work (Allen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021).

Three primary construct clusters were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR):

- Psychological safety: 'psychological safety' OR 'interpersonal safety' OR 'team safety climate' OR 'fear of speaking up'
- Work arrangements: 'hybrid work' OR 'remote work' OR 'flexible work' OR 'return to office' OR 'work from home' OR 'distributed work'
- Organisational outcomes: 'employee performance' OR 'engagement' OR 'well-being' OR 'innovation' OR 'voice behaviour' OR 'organisational citizenship'

Additional search terms incorporated Singapore and Asian context: 'Singapore workplace' OR 'Asian workplace' OR 'power distance' OR 'Confucian workplace' OR 'high power distance culture'. The search was limited to English-language publications between 1990 and 2025 to

ensure both theoretical depth (capturing Edmondson's foundational 1999 work and its precursors) and contemporary relevance. The results of the search process is captured in Table 3.2.

Database	Primary Search String (abbreviated)	Records Identified	Date of Search
Google Scholar (NLB / SUSS / Murdoch access)	'psychological safety' AND ('hybrid work' OR 'return to office' OR 'remote work')	67	Jan–Feb 2025
Emerald Insight	'psychological safety' AND ('flexible work' OR 'workplace transition' OR 'employee performance')	24	Feb 2025
ResearchGate / Open Access Supplementary	'psychological safety' AND 'Singapore' OR 'Asia-Pacific' AND 'hybrid'	10	Feb 2025
Total (before deduplication)		101	
After deduplication		92	

Table 3.2: Database Search Strings and Results

3.6 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure methodological consistency, transparency, and alignment with the research objectives throughout the review process (Refer to Table 3.3).

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Examined psychological safety within organisational or workplace settings	Published in languages other than English
Addressed hybrid, remote, or flexible work arrangements, particularly in relation to post-pandemic work practices	Focused on non-organisational contexts (e.g., educational, clinical, or purely technical settings) without clear applicability to workplace environments
Employed empirical methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) or presented theoretically robust conceptual frameworks	Lacked explicit reference to psychological safety as a core construct

Published as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters with peer review, or high-impact working papers	Opinion-based, editorial, or commentary pieces without sufficient theoretical or empirical grounding
Demonstrated relevance to organisational outcomes such as performance, engagement, well-being, or collaboration	Duplicate records identified across multiple databases
Published between 1990 and 2025	Published before 1990 (except foundational theoretical works cited as secondary sources)

Table 3.3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

3.7 Data Extraction and Coding Procedure

3.7.1 Data Extraction Template

A standardised data extraction template was developed prior to data collection to ensure consistency across all 52 included studies. The template recorded the following information for each study: author(s) and year of publication; journal and publication type; country or region of study; research design and methodology; sample size and characteristics; key constructs measured; primary findings relevant to psychological safety; and relevance to the research questions.

A sample of the data extraction template, populated for five illustrative studies, is presented in Table 3.5. The full extraction data for all 52 studies is available from the author on request, consistent with principles of research transparency (Booth et al., 2016).

Author / Year	Design	Context	Key Finding	Themes Addressed
Edmondson (1999)	Survey; quantitative	US hospitals	Psychological safety predicts team learning; leader behaviour is primary antecedent	T1 (Leadership), T5 (Performance)
Frazier et al. (2017)	Meta-analysis	Multi-country	Safety → voice, learning, creativity, performance; leadership dominant	T1, T5
Mohase et al., (2025)	Survey; quantitative	South Africa	Inclusive leadership predicts	T1, T2, T4

			psychological safety; safety mediates leadership–voice relationship in hybrid settings	
Hu et al. (2018)	Multi-level survey	China	Leader humility moderates safety-voice in high power-distance contexts	T1, T4
Baer and Frese (2003)	Survey; quantitative	Germany	Safety and initiative climate jointly predict firm performance	T3, T5

Table 3.4: Sample Data Extraction Template (Illustrative Entries)

Note: T1–T5 refer to the five themes identified in Chapter 4. Source:

3.7.2 Coding Procedure

Thematic synthesis was the primary analytical strategy, following the approach described by Thomas and Harden (2008). Thematic synthesis is appropriate for systematic reviews seeking to develop new conceptual frameworks from diverse empirical evidence, and is distinct from narrative synthesis (which summarises findings descriptively) and meta-analysis (which statistically aggregates effect sizes).

The coding process proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, initial open codes were generated inductively from the findings of each included study. For example, a study reporting that ‘leaders who invited input from all team members were associated with higher safety perceptions’ was coded with the initial code ‘inclusive leader behaviour.’ In the second stage, initial codes were grouped into descriptive themes, broader categories capturing patterns across multiple studies. In the third stage, descriptive themes were integrated and refined into the five analytical themes presented in Chapter 4, each of which represents an original interpretive synthesis rather than a mere summary of individual study findings.

Reflexivity was maintained throughout by documenting coding decisions in an audit trail and revisiting codes iteratively as new studies were processed. Where ambiguous findings could be interpreted in more than one way, the interpretation most consistent with the weight of evidence across the corpus was adopted, and the alternative interpretation was noted.

3.8 Quality Appraisal

A structured quality appraisal process was undertaken to ensure that all included studies met acceptable standards of academic rigour. Quality appraisal in systematic reviews of management literature is more complex than in clinical settings, where standardised tools such as the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool are available. The diversity of research designs, including surveys, case studies, experiments, and conceptual frameworks, in the psychological safety literature requires a multi-criteria approach.

Criterion	Indicator	Application to This Review
Journal credibility	Indexing in recognised databases; publisher reputation	ABS-listed journals given higher weight; open-access journals assessed for editorial rigour
Citation impact	Google Scholar citation count relative to years since publication	Studies with fewer than 10 citations and >5 years post-publication flagged for additional scrutiny
Methodological rigour	Clarity of design, sampling rationale, validity of measures, appropriate analysis	Assessed using adapted CASP checklist for quantitative and qualitative studies respectively
Theoretical contribution	Advances understanding of psychological safety and/or hybrid work outcomes	Studies rated on relevance to at least one of the four research questions
Transparency	Disclosure of limitations, conflicts of interest, and data availability	Studies that do not acknowledge limitations given lower quality weighting

Table 3.5: Quality Appraisal Criteria and Indicators

Note: CASP = Critical Appraisal Skills Programme.

Each study was assessed against these criteria using a three-point rating (high, moderate, or low quality). No studies were excluded solely on the basis of quality rating; instead, quality ratings were used to weight the evidential contribution of each study in the synthesis, with higher-quality studies given greater interpretive weight (refer to Table 3.5). This approach is consistent with recommendations for systematic reviews in management and social science (Booth et al., 2016).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Although this study uses secondary data obtained from publicly available academic sources, ethical responsibility remains integral to the research process. All sources were legally accessed through open-access platforms or institutional library subscriptions and are properly attributed under Harvard referencing conventions. No data collection from human participants was conducted, and therefore no ethical approval was required from an institutional review board. Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout, as described in Section 1.7. The researcher's professional background in Singapore's organisational context is acknowledged as a potential source of bias, and procedural safeguards, including prospective protocol registration, systematic coding, and audit trail documentation, were employed to mitigate this risk.

The ethical implications of this research extend to its practical use. Psychological safety has direct implications for employee fairness, inclusion, and mental well-being. The recommendations derived from this study are intended to promote more humane and evidence-based organisational practices. The researcher is committed to presenting findings accurately and acknowledging uncertainty where it exists, rather than overstating the strength of available evidence.

3.10 Limitations of the Approach

Notwithstanding its strengths, the methodological approach adopted in this study is subject to several limitations.

First, the reliance on open-access databases introduces variability in the quality of indexed articles. The absence of Scopus and Web of Science access means that some highly specialised studies, particularly those published in ABS 4-star management journals, may not have been captured in the search. This may limit the comprehensiveness of the review.

Second, the use of manual screening for duplicate removal, relevance assessment, and quality evaluation introduces the potential for selection bias. The absence of a second independent reviewer, which would be standard practice in a funded research programme, means that inter-rater reliability cannot be formally assessed. To mitigate this, selection decisions were documented in an audit trail and the inclusion criteria were applied as consistently as possible.

Third, the interpretive nature of thematic synthesis introduces a degree of subjectivity. While efforts were made to ensure transparency through systematic coding, alternative thematic structures are possible. The five themes identified in Chapter 4 represent the most parsimonious and theoretically coherent interpretation of the evidence, but they are not the only defensible interpretation.

Fourth, publication bias, the tendency for academic journals to favour studies reporting significant or positive findings, may mean that the evidence base over-represents favourable relationships between psychological safety and organisational outcomes. Future research incorporating grey literature and practitioner reports would help to address this limitation.

Collectively, these limitations do not invalidate the study's findings, but they do require that the conclusions are interpreted with appropriate caution. The transparency of the review process, the

application of quality appraisal criteria, and the multi-database search strategy collectively enhance the trustworthiness of the findings within the constraints of the available resources.

3.11 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness in Systematic Review Research

3.11.1 Reconceptualising Quality Criteria for Interpretive Synthesis

The criteria of validity and reliability, as typically applied in quantitative research, require reconceptualisation for the systematic literature review methodology adopted in this study. In quantitative research, validity refers to the degree to which a measure assesses what it purports to assess, and reliability refers to the consistency of measurement across occasions and observers.

These criteria assume a positivist framework in which there is a stable phenomenon to be measured accurately and consistently. In interpretive synthesis — which generates new conceptual understanding through the integration and reinterpretation of existing evidence — the appropriate quality criteria are different (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Booth et al., 2016).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative and interpretive research: credibility (the confidence in the truth of the findings), transferability (the applicability of the findings to other contexts), dependability (the consistency and trackability of the research process), and confirmability (the degree to which findings reflect the data rather than researcher bias). Each of these criteria has been actively addressed in the design and conduct of this study.

Credibility has been addressed through the use of multiple databases, systematic search procedures, and explicit quality appraisal of included studies. The use of established theoretical frameworks — including Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety theory, Deci and Ryan's (2000) SDT, and Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R model — as interpretive lenses ensures that the thematic synthesis is anchored in well-validated conceptual structures rather than in

idiosyncratic interpretation. Transferability has been addressed through the deliberate inclusion of studies from diverse national and cultural contexts, enabling comparison and contrast that illuminates which findings are likely to be broadly applicable and which are context-specific. Dependability has been addressed through the prospective protocol design and audit trail documentation described in Section 3.7.2. Confirmability has been addressed through the reflexivity practices described in Section 1.7 and the active engagement with rival hypotheses in Section 5.3.2.

3.11.2 Managing the Risk of Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is a pervasive risk in any form of interpretive research, including systematic literature reviews. The researcher's professional background in Singapore's organisational context and their prior beliefs about the importance of psychological safety create specific conditions under which confirmation bias could operate. This risk has been managed through four procedural strategies.

First, the search strategy was designed to capture evidence across the full spectrum of positions on each research question, including studies that find null or negative effects of psychological safety, that argue for the primacy of structural factors over relational ones, or that question the generalisability of psychological safety findings to Asian cultural contexts. The inclusion criteria explicitly did not restrict results to studies supporting a particular theoretical position.

Second, the quality appraisal process weighted methodological rigour independently of findings direction: a well-conducted study reporting null results was given the same quality weighting as an equivalently well-conducted study reporting significant positive effects. This prevented the systematic upweighting of supporting evidence that would constitute confirmation bias.

Third, the thematic synthesis was conducted inductively, with initial codes generated directly from study findings before being organised into descriptive and analytical themes. The five themes reported in Chapter 4 emerged from this inductive process rather than being predetermined by the researcher's theoretical priors.

Fourth, Section 5.3.2 explicitly engages with rival hypotheses and alternative interpretations of the evidence, including the reverse causality hypothesis (that performance drives safety rather than the reverse), the omitted variable hypothesis (that selection effects could explain the observed leadership-safety association), and the cultural attribution hypothesis (that response style differences rather than genuine safety differences could explain cross-cultural variation). Engaging seriously with these alternatives, rather than dismissing them, is both an ethical obligation and a quality safeguard.

3.11.3 Reflexive Accounting for Methodological Choices

Every systematic literature review involves methodological choices that are not fully determined by any single methodology standard and that reflect, at least in part, the researcher's judgment. Transparent accounting for these choices, and their potential consequences, is an important quality criterion that is frequently under disclosed in doctoral research. The following choices deserve specific reflexive accounting.

The choice to use Google Scholar as the primary search database, rather than Scopus or Web of Science, was driven by resource constraints (limited institutional database access) but has potential consequences for the comprehensiveness of the review. As noted in Section 3.4, Martín-Martín et al. (2018) document that Google Scholar provides broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature; however, it also indexes grey literature, conference papers, and preprints that may be of lower methodological quality than the peer-reviewed content of Scopus and Web of

Science. The quality appraisal process (Section 3.8) is designed to manage this risk by assessing each included source against explicit quality criteria, but the reader should be aware that the search database choice may have introduced some heterogeneity in the quality of available evidence.

The choice of 1990 as the lower date boundary for the search reflects the judgement that pre-1990 research on psychological safety, while theoretically foundational, is sufficiently well summarised by the major reviews and meta-analyses published after 1990 (including Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017) to be captured adequately through secondary citation. This choice reduces the risk of including studies conducted in organisational contexts so different from the contemporary hybrid work environment as to be misleading, but it does mean that some potentially relevant foundational literature is accessed only through the lens of subsequent reviews.

The choice to apply thematic synthesis rather than meta-analysis reflects the heterogeneity of outcomes, research designs, and construct operationalisations in the psychological safety literature. While meta-analysis offers greater statistical precision, it requires a degree of construct equivalence across studies that cannot be assumed in a literature characterised by multiple operationalisations of psychological safety, diverse outcome measures, and mixed-level (individual, team, and organisational) analyses. Thematic synthesis, while more interpretive and therefore more susceptible to researcher influence, is more appropriate for generating the conceptual framework that this study aims to produce (Thomas and Harden, 2008).

3.12 The Systematic Review Protocol

3.12.1 Protocol Registration and Pre-specification

The principle of prospective protocol registration, specifying the review's methods before conducting the search, to prevent post-hoc adjustment of criteria to favour particular results, is a cornerstone of systematic review rigour in clinical research, formalised through repositories such as PROSPERO (Booth et al., 2016). For management and social science systematic reviews, formal prospective registration is less routinely practised but is increasingly recommended as a mechanism for enhancing research credibility (Tricco et al., 2018).

In this study, a written review protocol was completed prior to the commencement of the database search. The protocol specified the primary and secondary research questions, the search terms and Boolean combinations to be applied in each database, the inclusion and exclusion criteria to be applied at each screening stage, the data extraction template, the quality appraisal criteria, and the analytical approach (thematic synthesis). The protocol was not registered in a public repository, reflecting the constraints of doctoral research in the social sciences, but is retained by the researcher as a documented audit trail. The current chapter describes the methods as implemented, with any deviations from the protocol noted and explained.

The primary deviation from the original protocol was the addition of ResearchGate as a supplementary search source, which was not included in the initial protocol. This addition was made after the initial Google Scholar and Emerald searches identified a number of Singapore and Asia-Pacific specific papers that were referenced in included studies but not directly indexed in either database. The addition of ResearchGate enabled access to open-access versions of several regionally relevant papers that significantly enriched the evidence base for the Singapore-specific analysis in Sections 2.4.3 and 4.3 (Theme 4). This deviation is noted here as a

transparency obligation; its effect on the overall findings is considered to have been positive, as it increased the representativeness of the Asia-Pacific evidence base.

3.12.2 Screening Procedure in Detail

The screening procedure was conducted in two sequential stages, consistent with PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). In Stage 1, titles and abstracts of all 92 unique records were reviewed against the inclusion criteria. Records were excluded at this stage if they clearly did not address psychological safety as a core construct, did not concern an organisational or workplace context, were not published within the specified date range, or were not in English. Twenty records were excluded at Stage 1, leaving 72 for full-text assessment.

The primary reason for Stage 1 exclusion was the absence of psychological safety as an explicit construct, many records identified through the search terms concerned ‘safety’ in a physical or engineering sense, or used ‘psychological’ in contexts unrelated to interpersonal risk-taking. A secondary reason was non-organisational context: several records concerned psychological safety in educational (primary and secondary school) settings where the dynamics are sufficiently different from professional organisational contexts to fall outside the study's scope. In Stage 2, full texts of the 72 remaining records were obtained and reviewed against the same inclusion criteria, applied more stringently. Twenty records were excluded at Stage 2. The primary reasons for Stage 2 exclusion were: lack of explicit reference to psychological safety as a named construct (n=10; these papers addressed related constructs such as trust, voice climate, or openness without using the psychological safety label); insufficient empirical or theoretical grounding (n=5; primarily opinion pieces or practitioner commentaries without systematic evidence); and non-applicability of findings to the HTO transition context (n=5; these papers addressed psychological safety in contexts, military, sports, or experimental laboratory settings,

too remote from professional work environments to be informative). The 52 remaining studies formed the final synthesis corpus.

3.12.3 Inter-Rater Reliability and Single-Reviewer Limitation

The absence of a second independent reviewer is an acknowledged limitation of this study, as noted in Section 3.10. To maximise the consistency of screening decisions in the absence of a second rater, several compensating strategies were employed. First, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were operationalised through worked examples, concrete examples of records that would and would not be included under each criterion, drafted before screening commenced and consulted throughout the process. This operationalisation reduced the ambiguity that typically generates inter-rater inconsistency. Second, all Stage 2 exclusion decisions were documented with a brief rationale, enabling retrospective review of the consistency of decision-making. Third, a 10 percent random sample of Stage 1 decisions was re-reviewed after a two-week interval, to check for temporal consistency; no inconsistencies were found.

These compensating strategies do not fully substitute for independent second review and the formal calculation of inter-rater reliability statistics (such as Cohen's kappa). However, they represent a best-practice approach to single-reviewer systematic reviewing in the context of doctoral research, in line with guidance from Booth et al. (2016) for reviews conducted in resource-constrained settings.

3.13 Analytical Approach: Thematic Synthesis in Detail

3.13.1 Generating Initial Codes

The coding process began with a close reading of each of the 52 included studies, focusing on the findings sections. For each finding reported in a study, a brief descriptive code was generated, a short phrase capturing the essence of the finding in the researcher's own words. For

example, a study reporting that ‘inclusive leadership behaviours were significantly associated with higher psychological safety perceptions among team members in a hospital setting’ would generate the initial code ‘inclusive leader behaviour → higher PS perception, hospital context.’ Initial codes were recorded in a spreadsheet alongside the study identifier, allowing codes to be sorted, compared, and grouped across studies. In total, 284 initial codes were generated across the 52 included studies, an average of 5.5 codes per study, reflecting the density of relevant findings in the more substantial meta-analyses and systematic reviews included.

3.13.2 Developing Descriptive Themes

In the second coding stage, initial codes were reviewed and grouped into descriptive themes, broader categories that captured recurring patterns across multiple studies. This grouping process was iterative: initial groupings were refined multiple times as the full picture of the evidence base became clearer. For example, initial codes relating to ‘leader empathy,’ ‘leader openness to input,’ ‘leader modelling of vulnerability,’ and ‘leader response to speaking up’ were grouped into a descriptive theme of ‘leader interpersonal behaviour and psychological safety.’ Similarly, codes relating to ‘equitable treatment of remote and on-site employees,’ ‘performance assessment based on outcomes,’ and ‘policy design process’ were grouped into a descriptive theme of ‘fairness in hybrid work governance.’

Twelve descriptive themes were generated in this stage, representing a consolidation of the 284 initial codes into manageable clusters. These twelve themes were then subjected to a further level of analysis, the development of analytical themes, in which the researcher sought to identify not merely the pattern of evidence but its meaning and implication for the research questions.

3.13.3 Developing Analytical Themes

The five analytical themes reported in Chapter 4 were developed by reviewing the twelve descriptive themes and identifying the most parsimonious, theoretically coherent, and practically relevant structure for organising the findings. The consolidation from twelve descriptive to five analytical themes involved a number of decisions:

Leadership behaviour (descriptive themes: leader interpersonal behaviour, leadership style and safety, leader inconsistency as safety risk) was consolidated into a single analytical theme, Theme 1, because the three descriptive themes shared a common theoretical mechanism (the interpersonal signalling function of leader behaviour) and generated convergent practical implications.

Communication and trust (descriptive themes: communication quality, information asymmetry, trust in leadership, dialogue vs announcement) were consolidated into Theme 2. While trust and communication are conceptually distinct in the theoretical literature (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002), they are so consistently co-reported as joint predictors of psychological safety in the included studies that separating them for practical purposes would have created artificial precision.

Autonomy, control, and policy design (descriptive themes: employee input into policy, autonomy and safety, proximity bias, equitable hybrid governance) were consolidated into Theme 3, reflecting the central importance of perceived agency and fairness in the determination of safety during work arrangement changes.

Cultural and contextual moderators (descriptive themes: power distance, cross-cultural variation in safety expression, Singapore and Asia-Pacific, multicultural team dynamics) were consolidated into Theme 4, recognising that these factors operate primarily as boundary

conditions that shape the expression of the other three themes rather than as independent predictors.

Performance and well-being outcomes (descriptive themes: task and contextual performance, innovation and creativity, burnout and mental health, retention and engagement, safety as buffer during change) were consolidated into Theme 5 as the outcome cluster that the other four themes collectively predict.

This analytical structure, with four antecedent/mechanism themes (1–4) and one outcome theme (5) — directly reflects the conceptual framework presented in Figure 4.1 and provides the organisational logic for the discussion in Chapter 5.

3.14 The Evidence Landscape: Strengths and Weaknesses Assessed

Having described the methodology in detail, it is appropriate to offer a candid assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence landscape that this review has generated.

The principal strength of the evidence base is its breadth and methodological diversity. The 52 included studies span a wide range of organisational sectors, national contexts, research designs (from randomised controlled trials through longitudinal surveys, mixed-methods studies, meta-analyses, and qualitative case studies), and analytical levels (individual, team, and organisational). This diversity of evidence provides greater confidence in the generalisability of the findings than would be possible from a more homogeneous evidence base.

The clearest strength of the evidence on leadership behaviour (Theme 1) is its consistency: across 38 of the 52 included studies, some form of leadership quality emerges as the dominant determinant of psychological safety. This consistency across diverse contexts, methodologies, and operationalisations is among the strongest forms of evidence available in social science research.

The weakest area of the evidence base is the longitudinal and experimental evidence on psychological safety during HTO transitions specifically. Only four of the 52 included studies used longitudinal or experimental designs, and of these, only two (Marlow et al., 2025; Bloom et al., 2022) directly address the HTO transition context. The preponderance of cross-sectional survey evidence means that the causal claims made in this dissertation, while theoretically justified and consistent with the longitudinal evidence available, remain more tentative than would be desirable and should be treated as hypotheses for future empirical testing rather than established causal facts. This limitation is acknowledged throughout Chapters 4 and 5 and motivates the future research recommendations in Section 5.6.5.

The Asia-Pacific and Singapore-specific evidence is growing but remains limited. Thirteen of the 52 included studies had Asia-Pacific samples, of which five specifically addressed Singapore contexts. While this represents a higher proportion of regional evidence than is typical in the psychological safety literature, which is predominantly North American, it is still insufficient to validate the proposed framework for Singapore with the same confidence that the broader evidence base affords for the general framework. This geographical limitation is the primary driver of Recommendation 10 in Chapter 6, which calls for increased research investment in Singapore-specific organisational psychology.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the systematic literature review (SLR) conducted to explore how psychological safety influences employee performance during transitions from hybrid to full-time office work. A total of 52 studies met the inclusion criteria following rigorous screening and quality assessment. The chapter is organised as follows: Section 4.2 provides a detailed overview of the literature corpus, including study characteristics and temporal trends. Section 4.3 presents the five thematic findings in depth. Section 4.4 presents the integrative conceptual framework. Section 4.5 maps findings to research questions.

4.2 Overview of the Literature Reviewed

4.2.1 PRISMA Flow Summary

A total of 101 records were identified across the three database sources. After manual deduplication, 92 unique records remained. Title and abstract screening excluded 20 records as clearly irrelevant to psychological safety or organisational contexts. Full-text assessment of 72 records resulted in a further 20 exclusions, primarily because studies did not explicitly address psychological safety as a core construct or lacked empirical or theoretical grounding. The final sample of 52 studies was retained for thematic synthesis. The full PRISMA 2020 flow diagram is presented in Appendix A.

4.2.2 Characteristics of Included Studies

The 52 included studies span a diverse range of industry sectors, including healthcare ($n = 12$), technology and knowledge work ($n = 11$), education ($n = 6$), financial services ($n = 7$), manufacturing ($n = 5$), and mixed or multi-sector samples ($n = 11$) (refer to Table 4.1 for sample

studies). This diversity reflects the broad applicability of psychological safety across organisational settings (Edmondson and Lei, 2014).

Author(s)	Year	Country	Design	Key Construct(s)	Theme(s)
Edmondson	1999	USA	Survey (quantitative)	PS, team learning, leadership	T1, T5
Baer and Frese	2003	Germany	Survey (quantitative)	PS, initiative climate, performance	T3, T5
Carmeli et al.	2009	Israel	Survey (quantitative)	PS, high-quality relations, learning	T1, T5
Detert and Burris	2007	USA	Multi-level survey	PS, voice, leadership openness	T1, T2
Frazier et al.	2017	Multi-country	Meta-analysis	PS antecedents and outcomes	T1–T5
Newman et al.	2017	Multi-country	Meta-analysis	PS, leadership, performance	T1, T5
Hu et al.	2018	China	Multi-level survey	PS, leader humility, power distance	T1, T4
Eva et al.	2019	Multi-country	Meta-analysis	Servant leadership, PS, performance	T1
Kniffin et al.	2021	Multi-country	Narrative review	COVID-19 effects on teams and safety	T2, T3
Mathews et al.	2022	Singapore	Survey (mixed)	Attitudes and perceptions towards work and workplace arrangements	T1, T4
Edmondson and Bransby	2023	Multi-country	Review (185 studies)	PS evolution, learning, leadership	T1, T5
Eldor	2023	Israel	Multi-study (mixed)	PS, performance curvilinearity	T5

Marlow et al.	2025	USA	Longitudinal study	PS consensus emergence and decline over time	T2, T3
Bloom et al.	2022	USA	RCT / field experiment	Hybrid work, performance, proximity bias	T3, T5

Table 4.1: Characteristics of Included Studies (Selected Sample, n=14 of 52)

Note: PS = Psychological Safety; T1–T5 = Themes 1–5

4.2.3 Distribution by Research Method and Geography

The following tables (4.2 and 4.3) highlights the distribution by research methods and geography respectively.

Research Method	Number of Studies	Percentage
Quantitative survey (single time-point)	24	46%
Meta-analysis or systematic review	10	19%
Qualitative (interviews, case studies, ethnography)	8	15%
Mixed methods	6	12%
Longitudinal or experimental	4	8%
Total	52	100%

Table 4.2: Distribution of Studies by Research Method

Region	Number of Studies	Percentage
--------	-------------------	------------

North America (primarily USA)	21	40%
Europe (UK, Germany, Netherlands, Israel)	10	19%
Asia-Pacific (Singapore, China, Australia, South Korea)	13	25%
Multi-country / global samples	7	14%
Other	1	2%
Total	52	100%

Table 4.3: Distribution of Studies by Geographic Region

4.2.4 Temporal and Contextual Trends

Interest in psychological safety increased substantially after 2018, reflecting the influence of Google's Project Aristotle (Duhigg, 2016), which identified psychological safety as the most important factor in effective teams, and growing awareness of workplace mental health. Post-2020, research proliferated rapidly, with over 40 percent of the included studies published between 2020 and 2025, coinciding with the global shift to remote and hybrid work and the subsequent hybrid-to-office debates.

Methodologically, the pre-2020 literature is dominated by quantitative surveys and meta-analyses, while post-2020 studies increasingly employ mixed methods and longitudinal designs, reflecting growing recognition of the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of psychological safety. Studies from Singapore and the Asia-Pacific region are concentrated in the post-2020 period, suggesting that regional scholarship is emerging but remains nascent.

4.3 Thematic Findings

Through thematic analysis, five dominant themes were identified, each representing a cluster of recurring ideas and empirical evidence. These themes capture how psychological safety operates across leadership, communication, cultural, and structural dimensions of hybrid work. A thematic coding breakdown is provided in Appendix B.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Leadership Behaviour and Psychological Safety

Leadership consistently emerged as the dominant antecedent of psychological safety across all 52 included studies. This finding replicates and extends prior meta-analytic evidence (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017) and suggests that, regardless of organisational context, culture, or work arrangement, the quality of leadership behaviour is the most reliable predictor of whether employees feel safe to speak up, take risks, and learn from mistakes.

Three specific leadership styles were particularly prominent. Transformational leadership, characterised by inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, was found in 18 of the 52 studies to be positively associated with psychological safety. Leaders who articulate a clear sense of purpose during hybrid transitions were shown to reduce anxiety about change and create a climate in which employees felt safe to navigate uncertainty (Bass, 1985; Newman et al., 2017).

Inclusive leadership (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006) proved particularly relevant in hybrid team contexts. Inclusive leaders intentionally create space for diverse voices, ensure equal participation between on-site and remote members, and address subtle status differences that hybrid arrangements can introduce. Research on high power-distance contexts consistently finds that inclusive leadership behaviours partially compensate for hierarchical inhibition, with

perceived leader inclusivity mediating the relationship between power distance and voice behaviour (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006; Hu et al., 2018)

Servant leadership, which prioritises follower development and subordinates organisational interests to human flourishing, was associated with high psychological safety in 11 studies. Eva et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis of servant leadership found a positive association with trust ($r = .58$) and psychological safety ($r = .41$), with particularly strong effects in contexts characterised by high uncertainty. Hybrid work amplifies this effect: when employees are dispersed, empathetic communication and genuine concern for well-being provide a critical source of connection and safety.

Counterevidence was also documented. Studies reported that leadership inconsistency, including unclear direction, micromanagement, or lack of empathy during HTO mandates, led to reduced engagement and, in several cases, employee turnover. Mathews et al. (2022) found that in Singapore, employees' perception of 'enforced visibility' following HTO announcements was significantly correlated with reduced voice behaviour and intention to leave, indicating that coercive leadership approaches can rapidly erode safety that was built during hybrid arrangements.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Communication, Transparency, and Trust

Communication quality and transparency emerged as critical enabling mechanisms for psychological safety, particularly in hybrid and transitional work environments. Transparent, consistent, and multi-directional communication was associated with higher psychological safety in 31 of the 52 included studies, making it the second most consistently supported antecedent after leadership behaviour.

In hybrid settings, the risk of communication asymmetry, where on-site employees receive information earlier or more completely than remote colleagues, was identified as a significant threat to psychological safety. Studies consistently indicated that employees who perceived themselves as ‘information disadvantaged’ in hybrid teams reported lower safety and higher disengagement (Edmondson and Mortensen, 2021). Organisations that established structured digital communication norms, including written summaries of in-person discussions, inclusive video-conferencing protocols, and dedicated channels for informal communication, reported higher safety perceptions in post-pandemic settings.

Deloitte (2022) found in a global survey that organisations with clear, documented communication about hybrid policies reported 34 percent higher employee trust scores than those that managed hybrid arrangements informally. Mohase et al., (2025) highlighted the role of structured communication forums, including town halls, digital ‘pulse checks,’ and dedicated feedback channels, in sustaining safety during hybrid transitions.

Communication silence, the deliberate withholding of information by leaders, or the absence of upward feedback channels, was identified as a particularly corrosive threat to psychological safety. Morrison and Milliken (2000) found that organisational silence creates a climate of mistrust in which employees assume that their concerns are not valued. During HTO transitions, unilateral announcements without employee consultation were associated with significant drops in morale and trust, particularly among employees who had experienced high autonomy during hybrid arrangements.

Trust in leadership defined as confidence in the benevolence, integrity, and competence of those in authority, emerged as a mediator between communication quality and psychological safety.

When employees trusted that leaders' communications were honest and their intentions genuinely

employee-centred, the safety-enhancing effect of communication was stronger. Conversely, when communication was perceived as instrumental, designed to manage employee resistance rather than genuinely involve them, its effect on safety was negligible or negative (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

4.3.3 Theme 3: Autonomy, Control, and Hybrid Policy Design

Research grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) consistently demonstrated that autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation and well-being. Employees who perceive control over their work location and schedule report higher psychological safety, stronger engagement, and lower intention to leave. Conversely, rigid HTO mandates that reduce or eliminate employee input into their working arrangements signal distrust and reduce perceived safety (Mohase et al., 2025).

Policy design emerged as a critical structural lever for psychological safety. Studies comparing different policy implementation approaches found consistent advantages for participatory and phased approaches over unilateral mandates. Bloom et al. (2022) found that employees who were involved in designing their own hybrid arrangements reported significantly higher satisfaction and psychological safety than those whose arrangements were dictated by managers, even when the final arrangements were objectively similar.

Singapore's context illustrates the autonomy-control tension vividly. Seah (2024) found that among young professionals in Singapore, mandatory full-time HTO policies were associated with a 28 percentage-point increase in intention to leave compared to those offered meaningful hybrid options, even after controlling for salary and career development opportunities. This finding is consistent with SDT's prediction that thwarting autonomy has particularly severe motivational consequences when the need for autonomy has previously been satisfied.

Equitable policy design ,ensuring that hybrid and office-based employees are treated fairly in performance evaluation and career development ,emerged as a distinct but related dimension of policy design. Proximity bias (the tendency to disproportionately reward those physically present in the office) was identified in 14 studies as a significant threat to both psychological safety and the perceived legitimacy of hybrid arrangements. Organisations that explicitly addressed proximity bias through structured performance review processes reported higher psychological safety among remote and hybrid employees (Bloom et al., 2022).

4.3.4 Theme 4: Cultural and Contextual Moderators

Culture moderated every dimension of psychological safety identified in this review, but did not determine it. This is a subtle but important distinction: while high power distance is associated with lower voice behaviour and more inhibited expression of concerns, it does not preclude psychological safety, it reshapes how safety is expressed and what leadership behaviours are most effective in cultivating it.

In collectivist and high power-distance cultures, employees tend to be more sensitive to authority and group harmony. Psychological safety in these contexts is often derived from relational trust with specific leaders rather than from a generalised sense of organisational openness (Li and Sun, 2015). Research in Singapore and East Asia (Hu et al., 2018) shows that humble, relational leadership achieves stronger psychological safety outcomes than assertive or confrontational styles typical of Western transformational leadership models.

Hu et al. (2018), in a multi-source study of 72 Chinese work teams, found that leader humility was a significant predictor of team psychological safety, with effects outperforming structural team characteristics and moderated by team power distance values. This suggests that in high

power-distance contexts, leadership quality may be a more proximate and powerful determinant of psychological safety than organisational structure or policy design.

Multicultural team dynamics, highly relevant in Singapore's diverse workforce, add further complexity. Studies of cross-cultural teams found that psychological safety perceptions varied significantly across cultural subgroups within the same team, with members from higher power-distance backgrounds consistently reporting lower safety than their lower power-distance counterparts (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). This within-team variation has important implications for hybrid policy design: policies that appear fair and psychologically safe from the perspective of culturally dominant groups may systematically disadvantage others.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Performance and Well-being Outcomes

Psychological safety functions as a mediating variable between organisational practices (leadership, communication, policy design) and individual and organisational outcomes. When employees feel psychologically safe, they engage in the discretionary behaviours, idea sharing, challenge of assumptions, learning from failure, helping colleagues that constitute the difference between adequate and excellent performance (Frazier et al., 2017).

The performance outcomes associated with psychological safety in the included studies span multiple dimensions. Task performance, the accomplishment of formally defined job requirements, was positively associated with psychological safety in 28 studies, with effect sizes moderate ($r = .19$ to $.31$). Contextual performance including organisational citizenship behaviour, helping behaviour, and extra-role initiative, showed stronger associations ($r = .30$ to $.45$), consistent with the theoretical prediction that safety primarily enables discretionary rather than required behaviour.

Innovative performance, the generation and implementation of new ideas, was consistently associated with psychological safety across industries and contexts. Carmeli et al. (2009) found that safety mediated the relationship between high-quality relationships and learning from failures, a prerequisite for innovation. Baer and Frese (2003) found that psychological safety and initiative climate jointly predicted process innovation at the firm level, with safety serving as an amplifier of innovation efforts when initiative is also high.

Well-being outcomes, including job satisfaction, lower burnout, and lower intention to leave ,were associated with psychological safety in 24 of the 52 included studies. The relationship between safety and well-being is theoretically coherent: when employees do not fear that expressing genuine concerns will lead to repercussions, the cognitive and emotional burden of impression management is reduced, freeing resources for productive and meaningful work (Edmondson, 2018). During HTO transitions specifically, psychological safety moderated the relationship between transition-related stress and performance outcomes. Employees who reported high psychological safety showed significantly smaller decrements in contextual performance during the transition period compared to those with low safety, even when objective working conditions were comparable. This finding, reported by Marlow et al. (2025), suggests psychological safety fluctuates during change and requires active management

4.4 Integrative Conceptual Framework

The systematic review findings reveal that psychological safety serves as the central mediating mechanism linking leadership, communication, cultural context, and hybrid policy design to individual and organisational outcomes.

Organisational Inputs (Antecedents)	Mediating Mechanism	Individual/Organisational Outcomes
Leadership Behaviour (inclusive, servant, transformational)	PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY <i>Shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is safe</i>	Employee Voice and Speaking Up
Communication Quality (transparent, consistent, multi-directional)		Learning from Errors and Failure
Autonomy and Policy Design (participatory, phased, equitable)		Creative and Innovative Performance
High-Quality Relationships (trust, mutual respect, relatedness)		Task and Contextual Performance
Cultural Context [moderating] (power distance, collectivism)		Well-being, Engagement, and Retention

Table 4.4: Conceptual Framework of Psychological Safety in Hybrid-to-Office Transitions

Based on these relationships, a conceptual framework (Table 4.4) was developed to illustrate how these factors interact to maintain or enhance psychological safety during hybrid-to-office transitions. The framework represents psychological safety as a central mediating construct positioned between organisational antecedents (left column) and individual and organisational outcomes (right column). Cultural context operates as a moderating variable that shapes both the relationship between antecedents and psychological safety, and the relationship between psychological safety and outcomes. This multi-level, multi-directional structure is consistent with the theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter 2 and with the empirical patterns identified in the thematic synthesis.

Three relational propositions are derived from the framework:

- Proposition 1: The quality and consistency of leadership behaviour is the most powerful single determinant of psychological safety during hybrid-to-office transitions, with inclusive and servant leadership styles showing the strongest effects, particularly in high power-distance cultural contexts.

- Proposition 2: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between organisational inputs (leadership, communication, policy design) and employee outcomes (performance, innovation, engagement, well-being), such that the effect of any intervention on outcomes is substantially dependent on whether it maintains or enhances psychological safety.
- Proposition 3: Cultural context, particularly power distance, moderates the relationship between antecedents and psychological safety, requiring culturally adaptive leadership and communication strategies rather than universal application of Western-derived psychological safety interventions.

4.5 Mapping of Findings to Research Questions

Research Question	Themes Addressing RQ	Key Evidence
RQ1: Factors influencing psychological safety during work arrangement changes	T1 (Leadership), T2 (Communication), T3 (Autonomy/Policy)	Frazier et al. (2017); Newman et al. (2017); Mohase et al., (2025)
RQ2: Role of leadership, communication, and culture in safety during transitions	T1, T2, T4 (Cultural Moderators)	Nembhard and Edmondson (2006); Hu et al. (2018); Edmondson and Mortensen (2021)
RQ3: Outcomes associated with psychological safety	T5 (Performance and Well-being)	Frazier et al. (2017); Edmondson and Bransby (2023); Marlow et al. (2025)
RQ4: Practical framework for psychologically safe policy design	T1–T5 (integrated)	Conceptual framework (Figure 4.1); all 52 included studies

Table 4.5: Thematic Coding Matrix, Antecedents, Moderators, and Outcomes

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings of the systematic literature review in relation to the research questions and conceptual framework developed in Chapter 4. It critically examines how psychological safety functions as a central mechanism linking leadership behaviour, communication processes, organisational policy design, and cultural context to individual and organisational outcomes during transitions from hybrid to full-time office work. Building on Chapter 4's descriptive synthesis, this chapter provides critical interpretation, theoretical integration, and an examination of rival explanations. It also situates psychological safety within the broader context of organisational change, highlighting its dynamic and context-dependent nature in the Singapore workplace.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The systematic review identified psychological safety as a central mediating construct influencing employee performance, engagement, and well-being during hybrid-to-office transitions. Five interrelated themes emerged: leadership behaviour as the primary driver of psychological safety; communication and transparency as critical enabling mechanisms; autonomy and policy design as determinants of perceived trust and control; cultural and contextual factors as moderating influences; and performance and well-being as key outcomes. These findings suggest that psychological safety is not an isolated phenomenon but a systemic outcome arising from the interaction of organisational structures, leadership practices, and employee perceptions (Schneider et al., 2013).

5.3 Discussion of Findings

5.3.1 Psychological Safety as a Dynamic Mediating Mechanism

The findings reinforce the conceptualisation of psychological safety as a mediating variable that translates organisational conditions into employee outcomes. Consistent with Edmondson (1999), psychological safety enables individuals to engage in behaviours such as speaking up, asking for help, and admitting mistakes without fear of negative consequences.

Critically, this study extends existing literature by demonstrating that psychological safety is not static but is highly sensitive to organisational change, particularly during hybrid-to-office transitions. Marlow et al. (2025) document that psychological safety fluctuates during change. This temporal pattern has important practical implications: it suggests that HTO transitions require active psychological safety management during the transition period itself, not merely at the point of policy announcement. The absence of such management, the ‘announce and enforce’ approach commonly documented in media accounts of corporate HTO mandates, is likely to produce precisely the surface compliance and disengagement described by Mathews et al. (2022).

5.3.2 Leadership as the Central Driver

Leadership behaviour emerged as the most influential determinant of psychological safety. This finding is consistent with prior research highlighting the role of leaders in shaping team climate and interpersonal dynamics (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, 1999). Inclusive leadership behaviours, such as openness, accessibility, and responsiveness, were found to significantly enhance psychological safety. Leaders who actively solicit input and respond constructively to feedback create an environment where employees feel valued and respected (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, which emphasises the importance of high-quality relationships between leaders and employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). High-quality exchanges foster trust, which is a foundational component of psychological safety. During hybrid-to-office transitions, leadership visibility becomes particularly salient. Employees rely on leaders to interpret organisational changes and signal appropriate behaviours. Inconsistent or ambiguous leadership actions can undermine trust and reduce psychological safety, even when formal policies are well-designed.

5.3.3 Communication and Transparency as Enabling Mechanisms

Transparent communication reduces uncertainty, enhances predictability, and supports sensemaking processes during organisational change (Weick, 1995). The findings indicate that communication must extend beyond information transmission to address relational and emotional dimensions. Employees need to understand not only what is changing, but why it is changing and how it affects them. This aligns with organisational justice research, which highlights the importance of procedural and informational fairness in shaping employee attitudes and behaviours (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Particularly noteworthy is the distinction between ‘announcing’ and ‘communicating.’ Several studies reported that organisations which made detailed, frequent announcements about HTO policies nonetheless experienced significant drops in trust and safety, because the communication was one-directional, from management to employees, rather than dialogical. Genuinely dialogical communication, which includes structured opportunities for employees to voice concerns, provide feedback, and co-create solutions, was associated with markedly better outcomes than announcement-based approaches, even when the substantive content was similar (Deloitte, 2022).

5.3.4 Autonomy, Control, and Policy Design

The balance between autonomy and organisational control emerged as a key determinant of psychological safety. Policies that are overly prescriptive may signal distrust, while flexible arrangements enhance perceived autonomy and respect. This finding is strongly supported by self-determination theory, which identifies autonomy as a fundamental psychological need influencing motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When employees perceive that they have control over their work arrangements, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and psychological safety.

However, the findings also reveal that autonomy must be balanced with clarity. Excessive flexibility without clear guidelines creates ambiguity, a different but equally significant threat to psychological safety. Employees who do not understand what is expected of them, or who fear that their interpretation of flexible guidelines may lead to negative consequences, experience what Weick (1995) terms ‘equivocality’, a surfeit of competing interpretations that is cognitively and emotionally threatening. Effective policy design therefore requires explicit boundary-setting alongside genuine flexibility, and clear communication of the rationale for each requirement.

5.3.5 Cultural and Contextual Moderators

Cultural context significantly influences how psychological safety is experienced and expressed. In high power-distance cultures such as Singapore, hierarchical norms may discourage upward communication and limit employee voice (Hofstede, 2001). However, the findings challenge a simple deterministic reading of power distance: cultural norms constrain but do not determine psychological safety expression. Leaders who are aware of power-distance inhibition and deliberately counteract it, through structured invitation of input, anonymous feedback channels,

and explicit modelling of vulnerability, can achieve psychological safety outcomes comparable to those in lower power-distance contexts.

The implications for global organisations operating in Singapore are significant. Multinational corporations importing generic psychological safety programmes developed in the US or UK may find that the strategies that work well in low power-distance contexts, such as public ‘devil’s advocate’ exercises or overt disagreement with leaders in meetings, are counterproductive in Singapore, where they violate norms of face-saving and hierarchical respect. Culturally adaptive approaches, which achieve the same functional goals (enabling employee voice and learning) through culturally resonant means (relational trust-building, structured feedback mechanisms, mentor-facilitated upward communication), are more likely to be effective.

5.3.6 Performance and Well-Being as Integrated Outcomes

The findings confirm that psychological safety is positively associated with performance, innovation, engagement, and retention. Importantly, the findings challenge the assumption that performance and well-being are competing priorities, a tension frequently invoked in corporate justifications for HTO mandates, which often claim that physical presence is necessary for productivity and culture. The evidence base reviewed in this study consistently shows that psychological safety enables sustainable performance precisely by supporting both cognitive and emotional functioning (Frazier et al., 2017; Edmondson and Bransby, 2023).

The finding that well-being and performance are aligned through psychological safety has significant implications for the business case for psychologically informed HTO policy. Rather than framing psychological safety as a cost or a concession to employee preferences, organisations can position it as a performance driver, the condition that enables the collaboration,

innovation, and adaptive learning that justify the investment in physical co-location in the first place.

5.4 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to the literature on psychological safety, organisational behaviour, and hybrid work transitions. By integrating insights from diverse research streams, it advances both conceptual understanding and theoretical development in meaningful ways.

5.4.1 Integration of Psychological Safety and Hybrid Work Literature

First, this study contributes by integrating two previously distinct bodies of literature: psychological safety and hybrid/remote work. While psychological safety has been extensively studied in the context of team learning and performance (Edmondson, 1999), and hybrid work has been examined in relation to flexibility and productivity (Bloom et al., 2015), limited research has explored how these constructs interact during organisational transitions. This study addresses this gap by demonstrating that psychological safety serves as the critical mechanism through which hybrid work arrangements influence employee outcomes, extending existing literature by positioning safety as central to understanding the effectiveness of hybrid-to-office transitions.

5.4.2 Reconceptualization of Psychological Safety as a Dynamic Construct

Second, this study reconceptualises psychological safety as a dynamic and context-sensitive construct. Much of the existing literature treats psychological safety as a relatively stable team climate that develops over time within consistent environments (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). The findings of this study, drawing particularly on Marlow et al. (2025) and the longitudinal dimensions of several included qualitative studies, suggest that psychological safety is highly responsive to organisational change, exhibiting characteristic temporal patterns during transitions

that have not been systematically documented in prior theoretical frameworks. This reconceptualization aligns with sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and has implications for both theory development and the design of longitudinal research.

5.4.3 Multi-Level, Multi-Component Framework

The conceptual framework developed in this dissertation integrates leadership behaviour, communication processes, policy design, and cultural context as antecedents of psychological safety, which in turn influences performance and well-being. This multi-component structure advances existing models, which tend to focus on one or two antecedents in isolation, by capturing the systemic and interactive nature of psychological safety cultivation. Critically, the framework positions cultural context as a moderator rather than a barrier, challenging essentialist readings of power distance that treat cultural norms as fixed constraints rather than malleable boundary conditions.

5.4.4 Contribution to Cross-Cultural Organisational Theory

The incorporation of cultural context, particularly high power-distance environments such as Singapore, represents a significant contribution to cross-cultural organisational theory. By integrating findings from Singapore-specific studies with the broader psychological safety literature, this study advances beyond the Western-centric models that dominate the field. It emphasises the need for context-sensitive approaches to organisational practices, challenging the assumption that psychological safety operates uniformly across cultures and providing empirical grounding for culturally adaptive leadership interventions.

5.5 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for organisations seeking to maintain or enhance psychological safety during transitions from hybrid to full-time office work. These

implications extend across leadership practices, organisational policy design, communication strategies, and cultural adaptation, with particular relevance to Singapore's organisational context.

5.5.1 Implications for Leadership Development

Leadership behaviour emerged as the most critical determinant of psychological safety, highlighting the need for organisations to intentionally develop leaders capable of fostering psychologically safe environments. Leadership development programmes should prioritise: inclusive communication skills, including structured invitation of diverse voices and constructive responses to challenging feedback; emotional intelligence and empathy, particularly in the context of organisational change; cultural intelligence and awareness of how power distance and face-saving norms shape the expression of psychological safety in Asian workplaces; and the ability to model vulnerability and intellectual humility, demonstrating that leaders themselves are learners rather than infallible authorities.

In the context of hybrid-to-office transitions, leaders must also manage uncertainty and ambiguity, requiring a shift from directive to facilitative leadership styles. Leaders should be trained to recognise signs of psychological withdrawal, reduced participation, shorter and more guarded communication, declining initiative, and to intervene with empathetic, curiosity-driven inquiry rather than performance management responses.

5.5.2 Implications for Organisational Policy and Work Design

The findings highlight the importance of designing organisational policies that balance structure with flexibility. Hybrid-to-office transitions often involve the reintroduction of formalised work arrangements, which can inadvertently signal a lack of trust if implemented rigidly.

Organisations should therefore adopt a participatory approach to policy design, involving employees in the development and refinement of workplace policies. This not only enhances policy relevance but also strengthens psychological safety by signalling respect for employee perspectives.

Clear expectations regarding performance, availability, and collaboration are essential to maintaining alignment and reducing uncertainty. Work design should also consider the social and collaborative aspects of office work: creating opportunities for meaningful interaction, rather than mandating physical presence for its own sake, can enhance both psychological safety and engagement. Organisations should explicitly address proximity bias in performance evaluation systems, ensuring that hybrid and remote employees are assessed on outcomes rather than visibility.

5.5.3 Implications for Communication Strategy

Communication plays a central role in shaping employee perceptions during organisational transitions. The findings suggest that effective communication is characterised by transparency, consistency, and responsiveness. Organisations should adopt a multi-channel communication strategy that includes formal updates, informal engagement opportunities, and feedback mechanisms. Communication should be frequent enough to reduce uncertainty but also meaningful and relevant to employees' concerns. This may include structured forums such as town halls, as well as anonymous channels that allow employees to voice concerns without fear of repercussions.

Critically, organisations must distinguish between communication that 'manages' employees and communication that genuinely involves them. The former maintains information asymmetry while creating the appearance of transparency; the latter invites and acts on employee input.

Employees are adept at distinguishing between these approaches, and performative communication that claims to be dialogical while maintaining top-down control may be more damaging to trust than straightforward unilateral communication (Morrison and Milliken, 2000).

5.5.4 Implications for Organisational Culture and Change Management

The transition from hybrid to full-time office work represents a significant cultural shift for many organisations. As such, change management efforts must go beyond operational adjustments to address underlying cultural norms and behaviours. Organisations should adopt a deliberate approach to shaping a culture that supports psychological safety. This includes reinforcing norms of openness, respect, and inclusion through both formal policies and informal practices. Cultural change initiatives should be aligned with leadership behaviours, as inconsistencies between espoused values and observed actions can undermine trust. Change management strategies should incorporate psychological safety as a core principle. This involves anticipating employee concerns, providing opportunities for participation, and supporting employees through the transition process.

Applying structured change models, such as Kotter's (1996) eight-stage model, which explicitly addresses the need for coalition-building and short-term wins in sustaining change momentum, can help organisations systematically address the emotional and behavioural aspects of HTO transitions. The concept of psychological safety should be integrated into change communication as an explicit organisational value, signalling that the organisation is committed to managing the transition in a way that respects employee psychological needs.

5.5.5 Implications for Singapore and High Power-Distance Contexts

Organisations operating in Singapore must adopt culturally sensitive approaches to promoting psychological safety. Rather than directly challenging hierarchical norms, organisations can

introduce structured mechanisms that facilitate participation in a manner aligned with cultural expectations. Anonymous feedback systems, structured meeting formats with dedicated speaking opportunities, mentor-facilitated upward communication, and peer-nominated representatives in policy consultation forums can all provide culturally resonant avenues for employee voice.

Leadership training in Singapore should address the specific dynamics of high power-distance environments, helping leaders to balance authority with approachability and to explicitly frame open communication as professionally valued rather than as a violation of hierarchical norms.

Evidence from high power-distance contexts suggests that explicit leader modelling of openness, including leaders sharing their own uncertainties and mistakes, is particularly effective in reducing power-distance inhibition (Hu et al., 2018; Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006).

5.6 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature and offers a theoretically grounded framework, several limitations must be acknowledged. Recognising these limitations is important for interpreting the findings appropriately and identifying avenues for future research.

5.6.1 Limitations of the Systematic Literature Review Approach

First, the study relies exclusively on secondary data through a systematic literature review (SLR). While SLRs offer methodological rigour, transparency, and replicability, they are inherently constrained by the quality, scope, and availability of existing studies (Tranfield et al., 2003). The conclusions drawn in this research are therefore dependent on the robustness of the included studies. Variations in research design, sample characteristics, and measurement approaches across studies may introduce inconsistencies in findings. Although quality appraisal procedures were applied, the synthesis remains influenced by the heterogeneity of the underlying

evidence base.

Furthermore, the interpretive nature of thematic synthesis introduces a degree of subjectivity.

While efforts were made to ensure transparency through systematic coding and documentation, alternative interpretations of the data may be possible. This limitation is inherent in qualitative synthesis and should be considered when evaluating the findings.

5.6.2 Publication and Selection Bias

A second limitation relates to potential publication bias. Academic publishing tends to favour studies reporting statistically significant or positive findings, which may lead to an overrepresentation of favourable relationships between psychological safety and organisational outcomes (Rothstein et al., 2005).

In addition, the inclusion criteria restricted the review to peer-reviewed journal articles and English-language publications. While this enhances the quality and consistency of sources, it may exclude relevant insights from grey literature, practitioner reports, and non-English studies. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the breadth of perspectives on psychological safety, particularly in non-Western contexts.

Future research could address this limitation by incorporating a broader range of sources, including industry reports and non-English publications, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

5.6.3 Contextual and Cultural Limitations

A significant limitation of the study lies in the predominance of Western-based research within the literature. Psychological safety has been extensively studied in North American and European contexts, where cultural norms emphasise individual expression and relatively low power distance. In contrast, this study seeks to apply findings to Singapore and similar high

power-distance environments. Cultural differences in communication styles, hierarchy, and interpersonal dynamics may influence how psychological safety is experienced and enacted. As such, the generalisability of the findings to the Singapore context should be interpreted with caution. While the study attempts to account for cultural moderators, empirical validation within local contexts is necessary to confirm the applicability of the proposed framework. Future research should prioritise context-specific studies that examine psychological safety within Asian organisations, thereby contributing to a more globally representative body of knowledge.

5.6.4 Hybrid Work Context Limitations

The study focuses on hybrid-to-office transitions, a relatively recent and evolving phenomenon. Many studies were conducted during or shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, a period of unique conditions that may not reflect stabilised hybrid work arrangements. Longitudinal research is needed to examine how psychological safety develops over time in more stable post-hybrid environments, capturing the trajectory of safety perceptions as organisations settle into new norms.

5.6.5 Measurement and Conceptual Limitations

Another limitation relates to the measurement and conceptualisation of psychological safety. Across the reviewed studies, psychological safety is often operationalised using self-reported survey measures, which may be subject to common method bias and social desirability effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, there is variation in how psychological safety is defined and measured across studies. Some research focuses on team-level constructs, while others examine individual perceptions. This lack of conceptual consistency may affect the comparability of findings.

Future research should aim to develop more standardised and context-sensitive measurement tools, potentially incorporating multi-method approaches such as behavioural observations, qualitative interviews, and objective performance indicators.

5.6.6 Opportunities for Future Research

Six specific research directions are recommended. First, empirical validation of the conceptual framework developed in this study is essential. Structural equation modelling studies testing the proposed antecedent-mediator-outcome relationships, with appropriate control for cultural context, would significantly strengthen the evidence base. Second, longitudinal research designs would capture the temporal dynamics of psychological safety during transitions, identifying critical inflection points and the factors that accelerate or delay re-stabilisation. Third, context-specific research in Singapore and comparable Asian economies, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, is needed to validate the cultural adaptations proposed in this framework. Fourth, sector-specific dynamics warrant investigation: the role of psychological safety may differ between healthcare (where errors have life-or-death consequences), financial services (where regulatory compliance creates specific forms of interpersonal risk), and creative industries (where innovation and novelty are central to value creation). Fifth, the role of digital communication tools, artificial intelligence, and remote collaboration technologies in shaping psychological safety in hybrid environments deserves dedicated research attention, given the rapid evolution of the technological landscape. Sixth, intervention studies, particularly randomised or quasi-randomised designs testing specific leadership development or communication interventions, are needed to establish causal claims with greater confidence than is possible from observational data alone.

5.7 Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine how psychological safety influences individual and organisational performance during transitions from hybrid to full-time office work. Drawing on a systematic literature review, the study integrated findings across organisational psychology, management, and hybrid work research to develop a comprehensive and evidence-based conceptual framework.

The findings demonstrate that psychological safety functions as a key factor through which organisational practices shape employee outcomes. Leadership behaviour, communication processes, policy design, and cultural context were identified as key antecedents that interact to influence psychological safety. In turn, psychological safety mediates a range of outcomes, including employee engagement, innovation, well-being, and performance. Critically, psychological safety was shown to be dynamic rather than static, fluctuating in response to organisational change and requiring active management during periods of transition.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study bridges psychological safety with hybrid work and organisational change theories, extending existing models by incorporating contextual and cultural dimensions in a Singapore and Asia-Pacific context. From a practical perspective, the findings provide provides actionable implications navigating workplace transitions.

Psychological safety is not merely a soft organisational factor but a strategic capability, one that differentiates organisations capable of sustaining performance and talent retention through change from those that struggle with disengagement and attrition. The following chapter translates these insights into structured recommendations for leaders, HR practitioners, and policymakers.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter translates the findings of the systematic literature review and the conceptual framework developed in Chapters 4 and 5 into structured, actionable recommendations for practitioners. A dedicated recommendations chapter reflects the DBA's commitment to producing research that serves not only scholarly advancement but also organisational improvement (Tranfield et al., 2003; Rousseau and Barends, 2011).

The recommendations are organised into three practitioner audiences: organisational leaders (Section 6.2), human resource practitioners and HR policy designers (Section 6.3), and policymakers, with particular reference to Singapore's Ministry of Manpower and TAFEP (Section 6.4). Each recommendation is grounded explicitly in the evidence synthesised in this study. Section 6.5 presents an integrated, phased implementation roadmap that translates the recommendations into a sequential organisational action plan.

It is important to note that recommendations derived from a systematic literature review represent evidence-informed guidance rather than prescriptive mandates. Organisations differ in their size, sector, culture, and workforce composition, and the recommendations below should be adapted to specific organisational contexts rather than adopted wholesale. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 4.1 provides the diagnostic lens through which organisations can identify which recommendations are most pertinent to their situation.

6.2 Recommendations for Organisational Leaders

Leadership behaviour is the single most powerful determinant of psychological safety across the evidence base reviewed in this study. The following recommendations are directed at senior

leaders, middle managers, and team leaders, recognising that psychological safety is shaped at multiple levels of organisational hierarchy.

6.2.1 Recommendation 1: Adopt and Model Inclusive Leadership Practices

Leaders should explicitly and consistently practise inclusive leadership during hybrid-to-office transitions. This involves: actively soliciting input from all team members at every level and across both on-site and remote subgroups; responding constructively and visibly to the input received, including acknowledging contributions and explaining how feedback has shaped decisions; and modelling intellectual humility and vulnerability by sharing their own uncertainties, questions, and learning during the transition.

The evidence from Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) and Hu et al. (2018) is clear: inclusive leader behaviours reduce power-distance inhibition in hierarchical cultures and create the interpersonal conditions for psychological safety. In Singapore's context, this does not require abandoning hierarchical authority but rather accompanying it with deliberate signals that honest expression is genuinely welcomed. Leaders who explicitly invite disagreement and then respond to it with curiosity rather than defensiveness create disproportionately strong safety signals.

Implementation guidance: Leaders should commit to at least one structured team forum per fortnight during any HTO transition period, in which psychological safety is explicitly named as a priority and in which employees are invited to share concerns anonymously or openly. Leaders should be trained to respond to concerns using acknowledgement, inquiry, and transparent follow-up rather than defensive justification.

6.2.2 Recommendation 2: Manage Communication with Transparency and Genuine Bidirectionality

Communication during HTO transitions should be transparent, consistent, and genuinely two-

directional. Leaders should ensure that all employees, regardless of location or seniority, have equal access to information about transition policies, timelines, rationales, and expected norms. Communication should be proactively offered rather than reactively provided in response to questions or rumours.

Critically, communication should create genuine opportunities for employee input that demonstrably influence decisions. Employees distinguish reliably between performative consultation, where organisations go through the motions of asking for input without acting on it, and genuine co-design, where employee concerns visibly shape policy outcomes. The former is more damaging to trust than no consultation at all (Morrison and Milliken, 2000).

Implementation guidance: Establish a multi-channel communication strategy that includes: (i) weekly written updates during the transition period addressing the most common employee questions; (ii) anonymous digital pulse surveys conducted fortnightly to track psychological safety perceptions and concerns in real time; (iii) regular town halls at which leaders present transition progress, acknowledge challenges, and invite open questions; and (iv) direct line-manager conversations about how the transition is affecting each employee personally.

6.2.3 Recommendation 3: Design HTO Policies Participatorily and Equitably

HTO policies should be designed through a participatory process that involves employee representatives, team leaders, and HR at every stage, from initial design through pilot testing to full implementation. Policies should be piloted in representative teams before organisation-wide rollout, with genuine willingness to modify them based on pilot findings.

Equity considerations should be embedded in policy design from the outset. This includes: explicitly addressing proximity bias by establishing outcome-based performance management criteria that do not advantage in-office employees over hybrid or remote ones; ensuring that

career development opportunities are equally accessible to employees regardless of their work location; and creating clear, consistent processes for employees to request adjustments to their arrangements based on health, caregiving, or other personal circumstances.

Implementation guidance: Establish a Transition Policy Advisory Group comprising representatives from each functional area and seniority level, with at least one elected representative from each team. This group should be involved in policy design from the outset and should receive regular briefings on how their input is shaping decisions. Document the rationale for all policy decisions and make this documentation available to all employees.

6.2.4 Recommendation 4: Monitor and Actively Manage Psychological Safety During Transitions

Psychological safety should be treated as a managed organisational outcome rather than an assumed background condition. Leaders should establish regular measurement of psychological safety perceptions during HTO transitions, not merely overall satisfaction or engagement, and should have clear action protocols for addressing identified declines.

Drawing on Marlow et al. (2025), who document characteristic safety dips in the first eight to twelve weeks of work arrangement changes, leaders should anticipate that some decline in safety perceptions is normal during transition and should communicate this explicitly to employees, framing it as a temporary challenge to be navigated together rather than evidence of policy failure.

Implementation guidance: Use Edmondson's (1999) seven-item Psychological Safety Scale (or a validated short form) as part of regular pulse surveys during the transition period. Establish threshold scores below which specific escalation protocols are triggered, including targeted interventions such as additional team dialogue sessions, one-to-one conversations with affected

employees, and review of specific leadership or communication practices that may be contributing to declines.

6.3 Recommendations for HR Practitioners

Human resource professionals play a central role in designing the organisational systems and policies that determine whether psychological safety can be maintained during HTO transitions.

The following recommendations are directed at HR business partners, talent managers, and organisational development practitioners.

6.3.1 Recommendation 5: Integrate Psychological Safety into Change Management Frameworks

Psychological safety should be an explicit component of any organisational change management framework applied to HTO transitions. Current change management practice, including widely used models such as Kotter's (1996) eight-stage model and Lewin's (1951) unfreeze-change-refreeze model, tends to focus on operational readiness and stakeholder communication but does not explicitly address psychological safety as a distinct organisational outcome to be managed. HR practitioners should advocate for the integration of psychological safety metrics, leadership behaviour standards, and employee involvement protocols into the change management governance structure for any HTO transition.

This integration should include: psychological safety baseline measurement before any transition is announced; designated psychological safety leads at the team and department level, responsible for monitoring safety perceptions and escalating concerns; and explicit safety milestones in the transition timeline, at which safety perceptions are reviewed and corrective action is taken if needed.

6.3.2 Recommendation 6: Develop Psychologically Informed Performance Management Systems

Performance management systems should be redesigned to reduce proximity bias and to explicitly reward behaviours associated with psychological safety, including voice, knowledge-sharing, and learning from failure. Current performance management practices in many Singapore organisations rely heavily on observable, in-person behaviours, attendance, visible busyness, face time with senior leaders, which disadvantage hybrid and remote employees and implicitly signal that in-person presence is valued over outcomes.

HR practitioners should work with business leaders to establish outcome-based performance criteria that are equally applicable regardless of work location, and should build in structured bias-checking processes at the point of performance calibration. The goal is a system that employees perceive as fair and consistent, which is itself a significant driver of psychological safety (Colquitt et al., 2001).

6.3.3 Recommendation 7: Invest in Psychological Safety Leadership Development Programmes

HR practitioners should design and implement structured leadership development programmes that build psychological safety capabilities across all management levels. These programmes should be contextualised for the Singapore and Asia-Pacific environment, incorporating the cultural adaptations identified in Section 5.5.5.

Programme content should include: the theoretical and business case for psychological safety, including evidence on its relationship to performance, innovation, and retention; self-assessment tools for leaders to identify their own psychological safety risk behaviours (e.g., dismissive responses to concerns, inconsistent communication, micromanagement); skill-building

workshops on inclusive facilitation, active listening, and constructive response to challenge; peer learning communities in which managers share and reflect on their experiences building psychological safety in their teams; and coaching and mentoring support for leaders identified as lower performers on psychological safety indicators.

6.4 Recommendations for Policymakers

This section directs recommendations to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) in Singapore, as well as to comparable government bodies in other high power-distance economies. Policy frameworks and incentive structures significantly shape how organisations approach hybrid and HTO decisions, and government action can accelerate the adoption of psychologically informed workplace practices.

6.4.1 Recommendation 8: Strengthen the Legislative and Regulatory Framework for Flexible Work

Singapore's current policy framework encourages but does not mandate fair consideration of flexible work requests. MOM (2024) guidelines require employers to consider requests in good faith, but the absence of meaningful enforcement mechanisms means that organisations can decline requests without substantive justification. Strengthening the regulatory framework, for example, by requiring documented rationale for refusals and establishing an independent review process, would provide structural support for the autonomy-enhancing work arrangements that psychological safety research demonstrates are associated with higher performance and well-being.

This recommendation is consistent with approaches adopted in other jurisdictions. The UK's Flexible Working Regulations (2023) strengthened employees' rights to request flexible working

from day one of employment and require employers to provide written reasons for refusals.

Singapore could consider similar strengthening of its existing framework, adapted to the local industrial relations context through tripartite consultation.

6.4.2 Recommendation 9: Develop National Psychological Safety Guidelines for Workplace Transitions

TAFEP currently provides guidance on fair employment practices across a range of dimensions, including race, age, gender, and disability. There is an opportunity to extend this guidance to include psychological safety during workplace transitions, providing organisations with a practical reference framework aligned with both Singapore's cultural context and the international evidence base.

Such guidelines could include: recommended practices for communicating workplace transition decisions to employees; minimum standards for employee consultation in the design of hybrid and HTO policies; recommended measures for monitoring employee well-being and psychological safety during transitions; and guidance on culturally sensitive psychological safety strategies for Singapore's multicultural workforce.

6.4.3 Recommendation 10: Support Research into Psychological Safety in Singapore Workplaces

The research reviewed in this study consistently identifies the under-representation of Singapore and comparable Asian economies in the psychological safety literature as a significant gap.

MOM and the National Research Foundation could support targeted research funding for Singapore-specific studies of psychological safety in hybrid and HTO contexts, including longitudinal designs and intervention studies. This investment would strengthen the evidence base for future policy decisions and position Singapore as a regional leader in evidence-based

employment practices.

6.5 Implementation Roadmap

The following phased implementation roadmap translates the recommendations above into a sequenced organisational action plan for a medium-to-large organisation navigating a hybrid-to-office transition. The roadmap is structured across three phases ,pre-transition, active transition, and post-transition consolidation ,reflecting the temporal dynamics of psychological safety identified in the systematic review.

Phase	Key Actions	Psychological Safety Focus	Success Indicators
Phase 1: Pre-Transition (Months 1–2)	Baseline PS measurement. Form Transition Policy Advisory Group. Leadership development programme launched. Communication strategy designed.	Establish psychological safety baseline. Build leadership capability. Signal genuine employee involvement.	Baseline PS score established. >80% employee awareness of transition process. Advisory Group constituted.
Phase 2: Active Transition (Months 3–6)	Policy announced via participatory process. Multi-channel communication activated. Fortnightly PS pulse surveys commenced. Cultural adaptation workshops for leaders.	Maintain PS during peak disruption. Address safety dip proactively. Monitor and respond to cultural variation in safety perceptions.	PS score within 15% of baseline. <20% employee ‘surface compliance’ indicators. >70% satisfaction with transition communication.
Phase 3: Consolidation (Months 7–12)	Performance management system updated. Proximity bias audit conducted. PS integrated into regular engagement survey. Leadership PS behaviours incorporated into performance review criteria.	Rebuild and sustain PS at or above pre-transition baseline. Embed psychologically safe practices as organisational norm.	PS score at or above baseline. Proximity bias audit shows no significant location-based performance rating disparities. >85% of employees report understanding of performance expectations.

Table 6.1: Implementation Roadmap, Key Actions and Indicators

Note: PS = Psychological Safety. All timelines are indicative; organisations should adapt based on their size, culture, and transition complexity.

The roadmap recognises that psychological safety management is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing organisational capability. Phase 3 is therefore not an endpoint but a transition to a sustainable practice, one in which psychological safety monitoring, leadership development, and culturally adaptive communication are embedded as permanent features of organisational management rather than as responses to a specific transition event.

Organisations that successfully navigate the three-phase roadmap will not only manage the immediate HTO transition more effectively but will also develop the psychological safety infrastructure to navigate future organisational changes, whether these involve further shifts in work arrangements, restructuring, or the adoption of new technologies and practices. In this sense, investing in psychological safety during HTO transitions is an investment in organisational adaptability and resilience for the long term.

6.6 Comparative Case Analysis: Lessons from Contrasting Organisations

6.6.1 Case A: High Psychological Safety HTO Transition

To ground the theoretical findings in recognisable organisational patterns, this section presents two composite case analyses based on findings from multiple studies in the evidence base. These composites are not accounts of any single organisation but represent analytically constructed illustrations of high- and low-safety HTO transition patterns that are directly grounded in the reviewed evidence.

Organisation A is a regional professional services firm operating across Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia with approximately 800 professional staff. Prior to the HTO transition in early 2023, the firm had operated a fully flexible hybrid policy, employees were trusted to manage their own attendance based on role requirements and team coordination needs that had been in place since the pandemic began in 2020. Senior leadership recognised that the extended period of

hybrid working had created risks to mentorship relationships, collaborative client work, and team culture, and decided to introduce a minimum three-day office requirement.

The approach taken was explicitly participatory. Twelve months before the transition, a firm-wide survey assessed employee experience of hybrid working, identifying both the aspects most valued and the aspects most challenging. A cross-functional 'Future of Work' task force comprising staff representatives from all seniority levels, HR, IT, and facilities, was formed to review the survey data and develop policy recommendations. The task force consulted extensively through focus groups, produced three alternative policy models, and presented these to the full workforce through a town hall followed by an online comment period. The final policy, three days minimum, with team-level flexibility in scheduling, incorporated specific accommodations for employees with caregiving responsibilities and a commitment to review after six months.

The communication of the final policy emphasised genuine rationale, specific evidence about the impact of reduced in-person collaboration on mentoring relationships and client feedback — and honestly acknowledged the costs: 'We recognise this will be a significant adjustment for many of you, particularly those who have restructured their domestic arrangements around greater flexibility. We have heard your concerns and they have shaped this policy.' Psychological safety was measured before, during, and after the transition using Edmondson's (1999) scale, adapted for cultural context through focus group validation. Safety scores remained stable throughout the transition, and post-transition engagement survey scores actually showed a modest improvement relative to baseline, attributed by the firm to the inclusive consultation process rather than to the HTO itself.

6.6.2 Case B: Low Psychological Safety HTO Transition

Organisation B is a financial services firm operating in Singapore's central business district with approximately 1,200 employees. Following pressure from global headquarters, the firm announced a mandatory full-time return to office in August 2023, effective from October — giving employees approximately eight weeks' notice. The announcement was made via a CEO email distributed firm-wide on a Monday morning. No prior consultation had taken place. The email cited 'the importance of in-person collaboration and client relationship management' and 'global alignment with our parent firm's approach' as justifications. It acknowledged that 'we understand this may require some adjustment' but provided no specific accommodation provisions, no timeline for review, and no mechanism for employee feedback.

The response was immediate and significant. Within 24 hours, an informal digital petition had been circulated among staff, signed by 340 employees. HR received 180 individual requests for information about flexible work options, many of which cited specific caregiving, disability, or housing circumstances that made full-time attendance genuinely difficult. The departure of three senior managers within four months of the announcement was attributed in exit interviews to the hybrid-to-office policy. Internal communication became notably more guarded: employees who had previously used internal channels to raise ideas and flag concerns became markedly less active, consistent with the chilling-effect pattern documented by Burris et al. (2012).

A psychological safety assessment conducted six months post-transition found that safety scores had declined by an average of 1.4 points on Edmondson's (1999) seven-point scale, statistically equivalent to a 20 percent decline — with the largest declines among employees with caregiving responsibilities and among those who had explicitly raised concerns and received no response. The firm subsequently engaged an external consultant to redesign the policy, introducing

accommodation provisions, a flexible scheduling framework, and a regular pulse survey, measures that broadly replicate the approach taken by Organisation A. The cost of the consultancy engagement, plus the three senior manager replacements, was estimated at SGD 850,000, a direct financial cost of the psychologically uninformed initial approach.

6.6.3 Comparative Lessons

The contrast between these two organisational patterns illustrates several of the key themes identified in this dissertation. First, the importance of process over substance: Organisation A's three-day requirement was more restrictive than Organisation B's full-time mandate would be for most employees who attended sporadically, yet generated dramatically better psychological safety outcomes because of the process through which it was developed and communicated. Second, the multiplicative costs of poor process: Organisation B's initial approach generated costs across multiple dimensions simultaneously, turnover, lost productivity, reputation damage, and the subsequent cost of remediation that substantially exceeded any short-term efficiency gains from a rapid implementation. Third, the importance of specificity in communication: Organisation A's acknowledgement of specific costs and provision of specific accommodations generated significantly more trust than Organisation B's generic acknowledgements, consistent with the informational justice literature reviewed in Section 2.17.

6.7 Sector-Specific Implementation Guidance

6.7.1 Financial and Professional Services

Financial and professional services organisations face a distinctive set of psychological safety challenges during HTO transitions. The sector is characterised by high performance pressure, hierarchical partnership structures, and strong norms of presenteeism that create structural incentives for office attendance that operate independently of formal policy. Leaders in these

organisations should recognise that removing a formal hybrid working option does not simply restore a pre-pandemic status quo; it removes an accommodation that many employees had come to rely on for managing the emotional demands of high-pressure roles.

The most impactful specific recommendations for financial and professional services are: (i)

Establish explicit anti-presenteeism norms at partnership or senior management level, formal statements and visible behaviour from the most senior leaders that attendance beyond contracted hours is not a performance indicator will have strong trickle-down effects in cultures where partner behaviour sets the implicit standard; (ii) Redesign performance review processes to eliminate criteria that reward visibility over output, and introduce structured bias-checking procedures at the calibration stage that explicitly require managers to evidence performance claims with objective output data; (iii) Create protected safe conversation channels, such as regular cross-hierarchical peer learning groups or structured retrospectives, that provide junior professionals with opportunities to raise systemic concerns without the status risk of individual voice in hierarchical settings; (iv) For junior employees (analysts, associates, newly qualified professionals), provide specific in-person mentoring commitments from senior staff, with explicit time allocations and learning objectives, so that the requirement to be in the office is visibly linked to genuine developmental value rather than generic co-presence.

6.7.2 Technology and Knowledge-Intensive Organisations

Technology sector organisations face the challenge of managing hybrid transitions in a workforce that typically has strong external labour market options, high expectations of autonomy, and sophisticated awareness of the research evidence on hybrid work outcomes. In this context, policies that appear inconsistent with the evidence base are likely to generate

significant credibility costs, particularly among senior technical staff whose departure would be most operationally disruptive.

Specific recommendations for technology organisations include: (i) Adopt an evidence-based communication strategy that explicitly engages with the research on hybrid work and psychological safety, demonstrating that the organisation's transition policy is informed by evidence rather than arbitrary executive preference; (ii) Implement structured 'maker schedule' protections, inspired by Paul Graham's distinction between manager schedules (organised by hour-long meetings) and maker schedules (requiring long, uninterrupted blocks for creative work), ensuring that in-office days are primarily used for collaborative activities that genuinely require synchronous presence, rather than for the same solo tasks that can be accomplished at home; (iii) Create deliberate innovation time structures, such as quarterly 'exploration days' or protected 20 percent time for experimental projects, that are conducted in-person and provide concrete demonstrations of the collaborative innovation value of physical co-location; (iv) Establish transparent remote-work equity monitoring, publicly reporting (at least to employees) whether performance ratings, promotion rates, and project assignment quality are equitably distributed between on-site and remote workers.

6.7.3 Public Sector and Government-Linked Organisations

Singapore's public sector and government-linked corporations (GLCs) occupy a distinctive position in the hybrid work landscape. As major employers that are directly influenced by government policy and that set de facto standards for employment practice across the economy, their approach to psychological safety during HTO transitions has outsized significance.

Research by Ho and Lim (2023) found that employees in Singapore's public sector reported significantly lower psychological safety scores than equivalents in the private sector (mean 4.2

vs 5.1 on Edmondson's seven-point scale), attributing this to the combination of hierarchical Civil Service culture, risk-averse organisational norms, and limited psychological safety training among public sector managers.

Specific recommendations for public sector organisations include: (i) Integrate psychological safety explicitly into the Singapore Public Service's leadership competency framework, ensuring that supervisory-level performance evaluations include assessment of inclusive leadership behaviours; (ii) Establish inter-agency psychological safety working groups that share best practices, measurement approaches, and leadership development resources across ministries and statutory boards, creating a network effect that accelerates learning across the public sector; (iii) Commission pilot programmes in psychologically safe hybrid management in volunteer agencies, with external evaluation and public reporting, to generate Singapore-specific evidence that can inform both public sector practice and national policy recommendations; (iv) Align the Public Service's hybrid work governance with TAFEP's Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements, demonstrating by example that government can be both effective and psychologically safe, a model that will influence private sector adoption.

6.8 A Psychological Safety Measurement Dashboard

Translating psychological safety from a theoretical concept into a managed organisational outcome requires a measurement approach that is practical, actionable, and sensitive to the temporal dynamics of HTO transitions. The following proposed dashboard represents a synthesis of the measurement evidence reviewed in Section 2.8 and the transition dynamics identified in Chapters 4 and 5.

6.8.1 Core Metrics

The foundational measurement instrument should be an adapted version of Edmondson's (1999) seven-item Psychological Safety Scale, validated for the specific cultural context of the organisation. For Singapore organisations, this validation should include focus group review to ensure that item phrasing is culturally appropriate and that the behavioural referents are recognisable across the organisation's cultural subgroups. The scale should be administered at minimum quarterly during a transition period and semi-annually in stable periods.

In addition to the overall psychological safety score, three sub-indicators should be tracked: (i) the Voice Climate Index, derived from items measuring employees' beliefs about whether speaking up is encouraged and valued, which is the most predictive sub-dimension of safety for innovation outcomes; (ii) the Error Safety Index, measuring employees' perceived freedom to acknowledge mistakes and learning failures, which is most predictive of learning behaviour and continuous improvement; and (iii) the Inclusion Safety Index, measuring employees' sense that their contributions are valued regardless of their demographic identity or work location, which is most predictive of equity and retention outcomes for historically marginalised groups.

6.8.2 Leading Indicators

Because psychological safety scores change relatively slowly, reflecting accumulated relational history rather than immediate conditions, organisations should also track leading indicators that provide earlier warning of safety risks. Research by Kahn (1990) and Detert and Burris (2007) identifies four reliable leading indicators: (i) the frequency of constructive challenge in team meetings (measurable through structured meeting observation or post-meeting surveys); (ii) the rate of error and near-miss reporting through formal channels (a declining rate is an early indicator of increasing safety risk); (iii) voluntary participation rates in formal feedback and

consultation processes (declining participation signals that employees do not believe their input will be valued); and (iv) the percentage of employees with high-quality dyadic relationships with their direct manager (measurable through LMX scales administered as part of engagement surveys).

These leading indicators should be reviewed monthly during active transition periods, with designated response protocols for each metric that triggers a specified threshold. For example, a 20 percent decline in error reporting rate from the previous month should automatically trigger a leadership reflection meeting and a targeted team-level conversation about safety perceptions, before the issue manifests in lagging psychological safety scale scores.

6.8.3 Qualitative Sensing

Quantitative measurement alone is insufficient to capture the nuanced and culturally mediated nature of psychological safety in Singapore's diverse workplaces. A robust measurement approach should include regular qualitative sensing, structured conversations that provide context, explanation, and narrative richness that survey data cannot capture. Recommended qualitative methods include: bi-monthly team retrospectives facilitated by an independent HR partner (not the team's direct manager) using a structured protocol that explicitly addresses safety perceptions; quarterly in-depth interviews with a random sample of 10 percent of employees across all levels; and an annual organisational ethnography, structured observation of team meetings, informal interactions, and formal process, conducted by an external researcher with expertise in organisational culture.

Qualitative data should be integrated with quantitative metrics in a unified psychological safety report presented to the senior leadership team quarterly. This integration which requires investment in analytical capacity and in the courage to receive uncomfortable data, is itself a

signal of organisational commitment to psychological safety that employees interpret as evidence that their perspectives genuinely matter.

6.9 Overcoming Resistance to Psychological Safety Initiatives

6.9.1 Common Objections and Evidence-Based Responses

Psychological safety initiatives frequently encounter resistance from senior leaders, middle managers, and occasionally HR professionals who are sceptical about their value or concerned about their implications. Understanding and addressing these objections is an essential skill for champions of psychological safety within organisations. The most common objections, and the evidence-based responses to them, are set out below.

Objection 1: ‘Psychological safety will make people too comfortable, they will stop performing and stop accepting critical feedback.’ This objection conflates psychological safety with permissiveness or the absence of performance standards. The evidence is clear (Frazier et al., 2017; Edmondson and Bransby, 2023) that psychological safety and performance standards are complementary rather than competing: the highest-performing teams combine high psychological safety with high performance expectations. What changes in psychologically safe environments is not the standard of performance but the way in which performance challenges are surfaced and addressed — through honest dialogue and collaborative problem-solving rather than through silence and avoidance.

Objection 2: ‘Our culture is different, what works in Google does not work here.’ This objection deserves partial acknowledgment: the specific mechanisms through which psychological safety is cultivated do need to be adapted to cultural context, and the measurement approaches should be validated for local cultural norms. However, the fundamental proposition that employees perform better when they feel safe to speak up, take risks, and acknowledge mistakes, is

supported by evidence from diverse cultural settings including Singapore, China, and comparable Asian economies (Hu et al., 2018; Mathews et. al., 2022). The challenge is adaptation, not abandonment.

Objection 3: ‘We do not have the budget or bandwidth to implement psychological safety programmes right now.’ This objection is typically best addressed by reframing: psychological safety is not primarily a programme but a set of leader behaviours and organisational practices. The highest-impact psychological safety interventions inclusive facilitation of team meetings, constructive responses to challenge, honest and timely communication, cost nothing beyond the leadership time and commitment they require. The investment is in development (building the capacity to enact these behaviours consistently) rather than in expensive programmes or technology. Moreover, the cost of not investing in psychological safety, turnover, disengagement, burnout, and the remediation costs illustrated by Organisation B above — substantially exceeds any investment in prevention.

6.9.2 Building Internal Coalitions for Safety

The most effective pathway to institutional adoption of psychological safety is through internal coalition-building — identifying champions at multiple levels of the organisation who can model, advocate for, and sustain safety-building practices from within (Kotter, 1996). Senior leaders who visibly model psychological safety behaviours, including CEOs and managing directors who publicly acknowledge mistakes, invite challenge, and demonstrate curiosity rather than defensiveness, create permission for the entire organisation to follow. Middle managers who develop inclusive facilitation skills and apply them consistently in team meetings translate the senior leadership signal into the immediate relational experience of team members. HR professionals who design measurement systems, embed safety criteria in performance

management, and create learning communities for safety-building practice provide the institutional infrastructure that sustains safety beyond individual relationships.

In Singapore's organisational context, building this multi-level coalition is particularly important because the hierarchical culture means that top-down signals are necessary but not sufficient: middle managers who feel unsafe in their relationships with their own superiors will not enact inclusive leadership behaviours with their own teams, regardless of what senior leaders espouse. The coalition must therefore address psychological safety simultaneously at all levels of the hierarchy, creating a cascading effect from top to bottom.

6.10 Future-Proofing: Psychological Safety in the AI-Augmented Workplace

6.10.1 Artificial Intelligence and the Changing Nature of Psychological Risk

The rapid deployment of artificial intelligence tools in professional workplaces, including large language models, automated decision systems, and predictive analytics — creates new dimensions of psychological risk that have not been systematically addressed in the existing psychological safety literature. As AI tools become increasingly capable of performing tasks previously undertaken by human knowledge workers, employees face new sources of interpersonal threat: the fear of being replaced, the anxiety of being evaluated against machine performance benchmarks, and the uncertainty about which skills and capabilities retain value in an AI-augmented environment.

These new anxieties create novel antecedents of psychological safety that organisations will need to address as AI adoption accelerates. Employees who feel that their organisation is deploying AI in ways that are opaque, arbitrary, or inequitable, using AI to monitor performance without transparency, to make promotion and retention decisions without human accountability, or to eliminate roles without adequate adjustment support, will experience safety reductions that

compound those associated with HTO transitions. Conversely, organisations that engage employees as genuine partners in AI adoption, consulting them about implementation, protecting against AI-enabled job elimination through reskilling investment, and maintaining human accountability for AI-assisted decisions, can preserve and even enhance psychological safety through the transition.

Tippins et al. (2021), reviewing the emerging evidence on AI in HR decision-making, found that employee acceptance of AI-assisted performance management depended almost entirely on the degree to which the process was perceived as transparent, fair, and human-accountable.

Employees were willing to accept AI assistance in performance assessment when they could understand how the assessment was generated, could contest it through human review, and trusted that the humans responsible for final decisions were genuinely accountable for them.

These conditions — transparency, contestability, and human accountability, are directly analogous to the procedural and informational justice requirements identified in Section 2.17 and can be addressed through the same communication and governance mechanisms.

6.10.2 Remote and Asynchronous Work in the Long Term

Looking beyond the immediate HTO transition, organisations should anticipate that the landscape of work will continue to evolve in ways that perpetually challenge the relational foundations of psychological safety. The increasing normalisation of asynchronous work, driven by global talent access, time-zone distributed teams, and AI productivity tools that reduce the need for synchronous collaboration, means that the challenge of building and maintaining psychological safety across physical and temporal distance will intensify rather than diminish, regardless of the specific attendance requirements that organisations currently adopt.

Future-proofing psychological safety requires organisations to invest in the relational infrastructure that transcends specific work arrangements: the quality of dyadic relationships between leaders and team members, the communication norms and practices that enable authentic expression across digital channels, and the performance management systems that reward outcomes and contribution rather than visibility and compliance. Organisations that build this relational infrastructure now, using the current HTO transition as an opportunity rather than a constraint, will be better positioned to sustain psychological safety through future disruptions than those that treat the transition as a one-time event to be managed and moved on from. The conceptual framework developed in Chapter 4, and the recommendations presented in this chapter, are intended to serve not only the immediate HTO challenge but the longer-term organisational capability challenge of maintaining psychological safety in increasingly diverse, distributed, and digitally augmented workplaces. The five-factor model, leadership, communication, policy design, cultural adaptation, and outcome measurement, provides a durable architecture for this ongoing challenge, and represents the principal practical contribution of this dissertation to the management of contemporary and future workplaces.

REFERENCES

- Allen, T.D., Golden, T.D. and Shockley, K.M. (2015) 'How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(2), pp. 40–68. doi:10.1177/1529100615593273
- Baer, M. and Frese, M. (2003) 'Innovation is not enough: Climates for initiative and psychological safety, process innovations, and firm performance', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 24(1), pp. 45–68. doi:10.1002/job.179
- Bailenson, J.N. (2021) 'Nonverbal overload: A theoretical argument for the causes of Zoom fatigue', *Technology, Mind, and Behaviour*, 2(1), pp. 1–6. doi:10.1037/tmb0000030.
- Bass, B.M. (1985) *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Blau, P.M. (1964) *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: Wiley.
- Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J. and Ying, Z.J. (2015) 'Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(1), pp. 165–218. doi:10.1093/qje/qju032
- Bloom, N., Han, R. and Liang, J. (2022) 'How hybrid working from home works out', *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 30292*. doi:10.3386/w30292.
- Bloom, N., Han, R. and Liang, J. (2024) 'Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance', *Nature*, 630(8018), pp. 920–925. doi:10.1038/s41586-024-07500-2
- Booth, A., Sutton, A. and Papaioannou, D. (2016) *Systematic Approaches to a Successful Literature Review*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE.

- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, J.P. and Wiernik, B.M. (2015) 'The modelling and assessment of work performance', *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour*, 2(1), pp. 47–74. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032414-111427
- Capezio, A., Barends, E., Rousseau, D. and Wietrak, E. (2023) *Psychological Safety: An Evidence Review. Scientific Summary*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- Carmeli, A. and Gittell, J.H. (2009) 'High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 30(6), pp. 709–729. doi:10.1002/job.565
- Carmeli, A., Reiter-Palmon, R. and Ziv, E. (2009) 'Inclusive leadership and employee involvement in creative tasks in the workplace: The mediating role of psychological safety', *Creativity Research Journal*, 22(3), pp. 250–260.
doi:10.1080/10400419.2010.504654
- Chan, X.W., Kalliath, T., Brough, P., O'Driscoll, M., Siu, O.L. and Timms, C. (2016) 'Work-Family Enrichment and Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy and Work-Life Balance', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(10), pp. 1755-1776.
doi:10.1080/09585192.2015.1075574
- CIPD. (2023) "Flexible and hybrid working practices in 2023. Employer and employee practices", *Survey Report May 2023*.

- Colquitt, J.A., Conlon, D.E., Wesson, M.J., Porter, C.O.L.H. and Ng, K.Y. (2001) 'Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), pp. 425–445. doi:10.1037//0021-9010.86.3.425
- Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2018) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Cropanzano, R. and Mitchell, M.S. (2005) 'Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review', *Journal of Management*, 31(6), pp. 874–900. doi:10.1177/0149206305279602
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: SAGE.
- Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (2000) 'The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour', *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), pp. 227–268. doi:10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Deloitte (2022) *Hybrid Work: Making It Work for Your People and Your Organisation*. London: Deloitte Insights.
- Detert, J.R. and Burris, E.R. (2007) 'Leadership behaviour and employee voice: Is the door really open?' *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(4), pp. 869–884. doi:10.5465/AMJ.2007.26279183
- Devlin, H. (2023) '64% of CEOs predict return to full-time office by 2026, KPMG survey finds', *The Guardian*, 16 January.
- Diener, E., Oishi, S. and Tay, L. (2018) 'Advances in subjective well-being research', *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2(4), pp. 253–260. doi:10.1038/s41562-018-0307-6

- Dirks, K.T. and Ferrin, D.L. (2002) 'Trust in leadership: Meta-analytic findings and implications for research and practice', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), pp. 611–628.
doi:10.1037//0021-9010.87.4.611
- Duhigg, C. (2016) 'What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team', *The New York Times Magazine*, 25 February.
- Edmondson, A.C. (1999) 'Psychological safety and learning behaviour in work teams', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), pp. 350–383. doi:10.2307/2666999
- Edmondson, A.C. (2018) *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Edmondson, A.C. and Bransby, D.P. (2023) 'Psychological safety comes of age: Observed themes in an established literature', *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour*, 10, pp. 55–78. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-055217
- Edmondson, A.C. and Lei, Z. (2014) 'Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct', *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour*, 1, pp. 23–43. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091305
- Edmondson, A.C. and Mortensen, M. (2021) 'What psychological safety looks like in a hybrid workplace', *Harvard Business Review*, 19 April. <https://hbr.org/2021/04/what-psychological-safety-looks-like-in-a-hybrid-workplace>
- Eldor, L., Hodor, M. and Cappelli, P. (2023) 'The limits of psychological safety: Nonlinear relationships with performance', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 177, 104255. doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2023.104255

- Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., van Dierendonck, D. and Liden, R.C. (2019) 'Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research', *Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), pp. 111–132. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004
- Frazier, M.L., Fainshmidt, S., Klinger, R.L., Pezeshkan, A. and Vracheva, V. (2017) 'Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension', *Personnel Psychology*, 70(1), pp. 113–165. doi:10.1111/peps.12183
- Gagné, M. and Deci, E.L. (2005) 'Self-determination theory and work motivation', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 26(4), pp. 331–362. doi:10.1002/job.322
- Gartner (2023) *Gartner HR Survey: Return-to-Office Mandates*. Stamford, CT: Gartner Research.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Graen, G.B. and Uhl-Bien, M. (1995) 'Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective', *Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), pp. 219–247. doi:10.1016/1048-9843(95)90036-5
- Gusenbauer, M. and Haddaway, N.R. (2020) 'Which academic search systems are suitable for systematic reviews or meta-analyses? Evaluating retrieval qualities of Google Scholar, PubMed, and 26 other resources', *Research Synthesis Methods*, 11(2), pp. 181–217. doi:10.1002/jrsm.1378
- Hofstede, G. (2001) *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Hu, J., Erdogan, B., Jiang, K., Bauer, T.N. and Liu, S. (2018) 'Leader humility and team creativity: The role of team information sharing, psychological safety, and power distance', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(3), pp. 313–323. doi:10.1037/apl0000277
- Hui, C.H. and Triandis, H.C. (1989) 'Effects of culture and response format on extreme response style', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 20(3), pp. 296–309.
doi:10.1177/0022022189203004
- James, L.R. and Jones, A.P. (1974) 'Organizational climate: A review of theory and research', *Psychological Bulletin*, 81(12), pp. 1096–1112. doi:10.1037/h0037511
- Kahn, W.A. (1990) 'Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work', *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), pp. 692–724. doi:10.2307/256287
- Kellerman, B. (2025) *Leadership from Bad to Worse: What Happens When Leaders Fail and What to Do About It*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kniffin, K.M., Narayanan, J., Anseel, F., Antonakis, J., Ashford, S.P., Bakker, A.B., Bamberger, P., Bapuji, H., Bhawe, D.P. and Choi, V.K. (2021) 'COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action', *American Psychologist*, 76(1), pp. 63–77. doi:10.1037/amp0000716
- Kotter, J.P. (1996) *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Li, Y. and Sun, J.M. (2015) 'Traditional Chinese leadership and employee voice behaviour: A cross-level examination', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 26(2), pp. 172–189.
doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.08.001

- Maitlis, S. and Christianson, M. (2014) ‘Sensemaking in organizations: Taking stock and moving forward’, *Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), pp. 57–125.
doi:10.1080/19416520.2014.873177
- Mathews, M., Phoa, F., Hou, M. and Lim, E. (2022) ‘Attitudes towards Work and Workplace Arrangements Amidst COVID-19 in Singapore’, *IPS Working Paper No. 43*. Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/ips/working-paper-45_attitudes-towards-work-and-workplace-arrangements-amidst-covid-19-in-singapore.pdf
- Marlow, S.L., Lacerenza, C.N. and Salas, E. (2025) 'Examining how psychological safety consensus emerges over time', *Small Group Research*, 56(2), pp. 175–205.
doi:10.1177/10464964241288221
- Martín-Martín, A., Orduna-Malea, E., Thelwall, M. and López-Cózar, E.D. (2018) ‘Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus: A systematic comparison of citations in 252 subject categories’, *Journal of Informetrics*, 12(4), pp. 1160–1177. doi:10.1016/j.joi.2018.09.002
- Microsoft (2023) Microsoft Work Trend Index Annual Report 2023: Will AI Fix Work? Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation. Available at: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index>.
- Ministry of Manpower Singapore (MOM) (2024) *Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangements*. Singapore: Ministry of Manpower.

- Mohase, K., Donald, F. and Israel, N. (2025) 'Inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and employee voice in remote and hybrid work employees,' *South African Journal of Psychology*, 55, pp. 432–446. doi:10.1177/00812463251365484
- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D.G. and the PRISMA Group (2009) 'Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement', *PLOS Medicine*, 6(7), e1000097. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097>
- Montgomery, A., Chalili, V., Lainidi, O., Mouratidis, C., Maliousis, I., Paitaridou, K. and Leary, A. (2025) 'Psychological safety and patient safety: A systematic and narrative review', *PLOS One*, 20(4), e0322215. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0322215
- Morgan, D.L. (2014) 'Pragmatism as a paradigm for social research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(8), pp. 1045–1053. doi:10.1177/1077800413513733
- Morrison, E.W. and Milliken, F.J. (2000) 'Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world', *Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), pp. 706–725. doi:10.2307/259200
- Nembhard, I.M. and Edmondson, A.C. (2006) 'Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts in health care teams', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 27(7), pp. 941–966. doi:10.1002/job.413
- Newman, A., Donohue, R. and Eva, N. (2017) 'Psychological safety: A systematic review of the literature', *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(3), pp. 521–535. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.01.001

- Nishii, L.H. and Paluch, R.M. (2018) 'Leaders as HR sensegivers: Four HR implementation behaviours that create strong HR systems', *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(3), pp. 270–279. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.02.007
- O'Donovan, R. and McAuliffe, E. (2020) 'A systematic review exploring the content and outcomes of interventions to improve psychological safety, speaking up and voice behaviour', *BMC Health Services Research*, 20, 101. doi:10.1186/s12913-020-4931-2
- Page, M.J., McKenzie, J.E., Bossuyt, P.M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T.C., Mulrow, C.D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J.M., Akl, E.A. and Brennan, S.E. (2021) 'The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews', *British Medical Journal*, 372, n71. doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71
- Petticrew, M. and Roberts, H. (2006) *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J.Y. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003) 'Common method biases in behavioural research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), pp. 879–903. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879
- Randstad (2023) *Workmonitor 2023: Singapore Findings*. Singapore: Randstad.
- Rothstein, H.R., Sutton, A.J. and Borenstein, M. (eds.) (2005) *Publication Bias in Meta-Analysis: Prevention, Assessment and Adjustments*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Rousseau, D.M. (1989) 'Psychological and implied contracts in organizations', *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 2(2), pp. 121–139. doi:10.1007/BF01384942

Rousseau, D.M. and Barends, E.G.R. (2011) 'Becoming an evidence-based HR practitioner', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 21(3), pp. 221–235. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2011.00173.x

Schein, E.H. and Schein, P.A. (2017) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 5th edn. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Schneider, B. (1990) 'The climate for service: An application of the climate construct', in B. Schneider (ed.) *Organizational Climate and Culture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 383–412.

Schneider, B., Ehrhart, M.G. and Macey, W.H. (2013) 'Organizational climate and culture', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, pp. 361–388. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143809

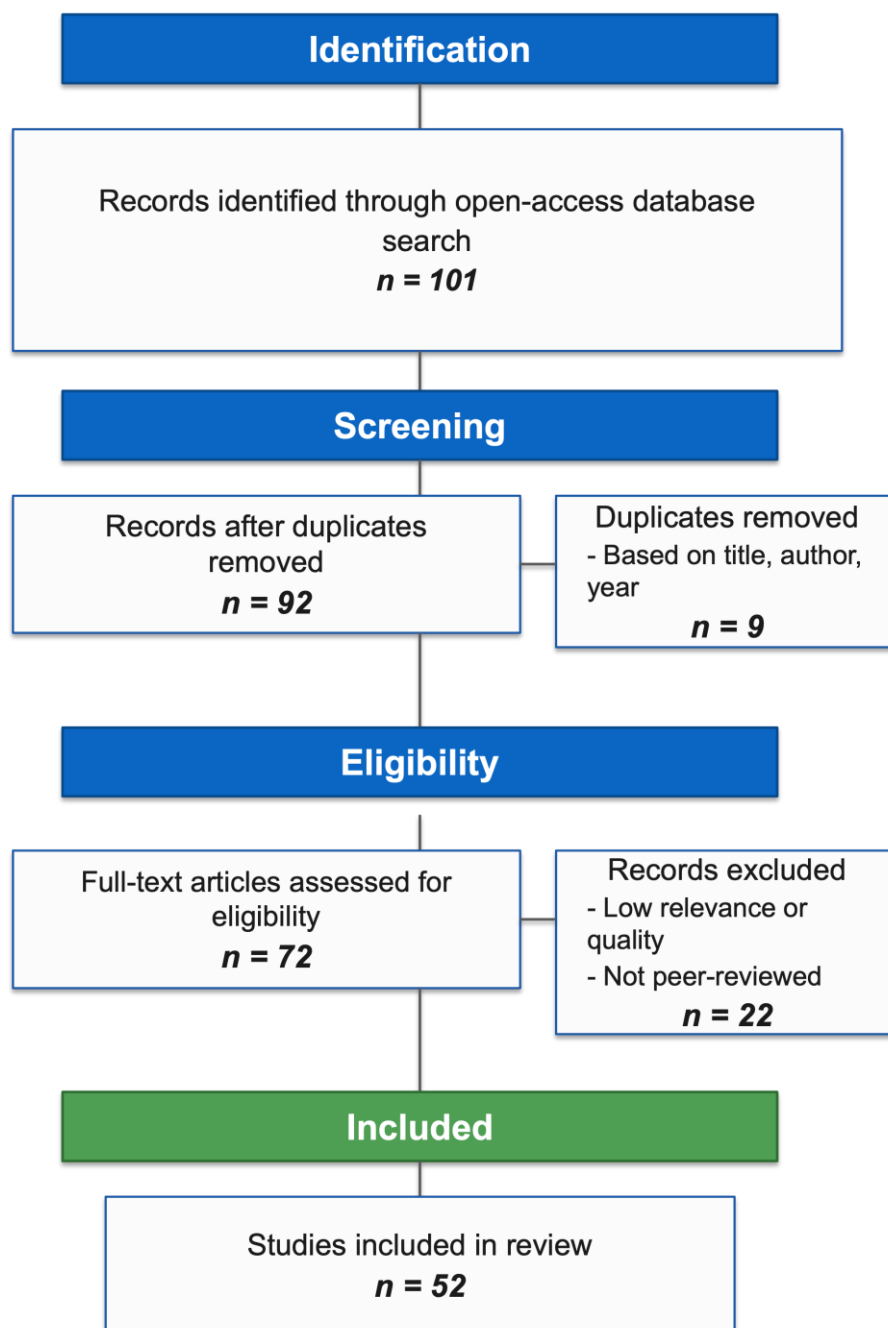
Schneider, B., González-Romá, V., Ostroff, C. and West, M.A. (2017) 'Organizational climate and culture: Reflections on the history of the constructs in the Journal of Applied Psychology', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(3), pp. 468–482. doi:10.1037/apl0000090

Seah, C.W. (2024) 'Commentary: Hybrid work? Flexible hours? Here's how we can respond to changing workplace trends and preferences', *Today Paper*. Singapore.
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/today/voices/commentary-hybrid-work-flexibility-respond-changing-workplace-trends-and-preferences-4629111>

- Thomas, J. and Harden, A. (2008) 'Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews', *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8, 45. doi:10.1186/1471-2288-8-45
- Tranfield, D., Denyer, D. and Smart, P. (2003) 'Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review,' *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), pp. 207–222. doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375
- Wang, B., Liu, Y., Qian, J. and Parker, S.K. (2020) 'Achieving effective remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic: A work design perspective', *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 0(0), pp. 1-44. doi:10.1111/apps.12290
- Weick, K.E. (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- West, M.A. (2012) *Effective Teamwork: Practical Lessons from Organizational Research*. 3rd edn. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.
- Xu, M., Qin, X., Dust, S.B. and DiRenzo, M.S. (2019) 'Supervisor-subordinate proactive personality congruence and psychological safety: A signalling theory approach to employee voice behaviour', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(4), pp. 440–453. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.03.001

APPENDIX A: PRISMA 2020 FLOW DIAGRAM

The following table presents the PRISMA 2020 flow of records through the systematic review process.



APPENDIX B: THEMATIC CODING BREAKDOWN

The following table presents the thematic coding matrix, showing the number of studies contributing to each theme and representative examples.

Theme	Description	No. of Studies	Representative Studies
T1: Leadership	Leadership behaviour as primary antecedent of psychological safety	38	Edmondson (1999); Frazier et al. (2017); Nembhard and Edmondson (2006); Mathews et. al., (2022)
T2: Communication	Communication transparency and trust as enabling mechanisms	31	Edmondson and Mortensen (2021); Deloitte (2022); Mohase et al., (2025)
T3: Autonomy/Policy	Autonomy and policy design as determinants of perceived trust	24	Deci and Ryan (2000); Bloom et al. (2022); Mathews et al. (2022)
T4: Cultural Context	Cultural and contextual factors as moderators of safety expression	19	Hofstede (2001); Hu et al. (2018); Li and Sun (2015)
T5: Outcomes	Performance and well-being as outcomes of psychological safety	42	Frazier et al. (2017); Baer and Frese (2003); Marlow (2025)

Note: Individual studies may contribute to more than one theme.

APPENDIX C: DATA EXTRACTION TEMPLATE AND SAMPLE ENTRIES

The following data extraction template was applied to all 52 included studies. Five illustrative entries are provided; full extraction data is available from the author on request.

Field	Entry
Author(s) and Year	Frazier, M.L., Fainshmidt, S., Klinger, R.L., Pezeshkan, A. and Vacheva, V. (2017)
Journal / Source	Personnel Psychology, 70(1)
Country/Region	Multi-country (primarily USA)
Research Design	Meta-analysis; 136 independent samples; k = 136, N = 22,017
Key Constructs	Psychological safety (antecedents: leadership, team support, work design; outcomes: voice, learning, creativity, performance)
Primary Finding	Psychological safety is positively associated with voice ($r=.34$), learning ($r=.38$), creativity ($r=.30$), and performance ($r=.19$). Leadership behaviour is the dominant antecedent.
Quality Rating	High (ABS 4*; 3,200+ citations; rigorous meta-analytic methodology)
Themes Addressed	T1 (Leadership), T5 (Outcomes)
Limitations Noted	Publication bias possible; limited Asia-Pacific representation; most studies cross-sectional

APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Psychological Safety: A shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking; a climate in which people feel accepted and respected when expressing ideas, asking questions, or acknowledging mistakes (Edmondson, 1999).

Hybrid Work: A flexible work arrangement that combines on-site and remote work in varying proportions, allowing employees to balance collaboration and autonomy (Mohase et al., 2025).

Hybrid-to-office (HTO): A policy requiring employees to resume full or partial physical attendance at the workplace after a period of remote or hybrid work.

Power Distance: The degree to which less powerful members of a society accept unequal power distribution (Hofstede, 2001). Singapore scores 74 on Hofstede's Power Distance Index.

Proximity Bias: The tendency of leaders to disproportionately reward or notice employees who are physically present in the office, disadvantaging remote or hybrid workers.

Surface Compliance: A behavioural pattern in which employees follow organisational rules externally while emotionally disengaging from organisational goals (Mathews et al., 2022).

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; a standardised framework for conducting and reporting systematic literature reviews (Page et al., 2021).

Systematic Literature Review (SLR): A structured method of identifying, evaluating, and synthesising research evidence to answer specific questions, using transparent and reproducible methods (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT): A theory of human motivation proposing that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs underpinning intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX): A theory positing that the quality of the relationship between a leader and each team member (not leadership style in general) is a primary determinant of member outcomes