

# Building Sustainable Workforce: Investigating the Mediating mechanism of Psychological Safety between Transformational Leadership, Employee Well- Being, and Work Engagement

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**Abstract:** *To maintain a sustainable work culture, an organization must prioritise high employee efficiency by fostering supportive work environments, optimising task resources and mitigating psychological fatigue. This study is based on a comprehensive review of secondary literature published in between 2013 and 2026. It examines the mediating role of psychological safety in linking transformational leadership to employee well-being and job commitment. Moving beyond direct supervisory control and mere charismatic influence, transformational leadership establish a non-punitive, trust based work climate, where mistakes are treated as creative learning opportunities. Under transformational leadership, the inspiration and psychological safety experienced by employees helps to reduce emotional exhaustion and curb turnover intentions. Additionally, it reinforces key dimensions of work engagement, including vigour, dedication, and absorption. The study concludes by offering practical implications for leadership development*

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Employee Well-Being , Employee Work Engagement, Psychological Safety.

## Introduction

Sustainable workforce is important for organizational effectiveness. While browsing on the employees comments on Ambition box- an online employment and career community of current employees, reveals that the companies ranked top at employee's well-being, respect and values its employees and their families. They ensure the well-being of employees and keep their work hours under control. By contrast, employees at companies that ranks low on employees well-being, comments that employees are required to work 12 to 14-hour days without lunch breaks, with little to no flexibility in scheduling and constant pressure to work additional days. The company's emphasis on activity metrics and growth targets at the expense of team morale has created a hostile work environment. From above it is clear that Organizations differ in their ability to build, support, and sustain a strong workforce. More research is needed to understand the strategies that help create a sustainable workforce.

A sustainable workforce is one in which employees have the positive energy, capabilities, vitality, and resources to meet current and future performance demands while maintaining their economic and mental health both on and off the job. Employment practices that support work-life balance and wellbeing in workplace experiences are critical pathways to long-term workforce effectiveness, or cultivating a sustainable workforce. Organizational strategies designed to foster a sustainable workforce include safeguarding against work intensification, promoting workplace social support, and fostering sustainable careers. (Kossek, 2014) .

Leadership is a critical driver of organizational effectiveness, influencing not only strategic direction but also organizational culture and employee well-being. Leadership and organizational culture are deeply interconnected. Leaders shape cultural norms and values, which in turn influence employees' psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. (Budur, 2020). As noted by (Ahmed, 2024) leadership behaviors directly affect employee experiences, satisfaction, and engagement, which ultimately impact overall well-being. Transformational leadership supports a sustainable workforce by inspiring, empowering, and genuinely caring for employees' well-being and work-life balance, not just their performance. The inspiration and psychological safety fostered by a transformational leadership style significantly alleviate emotional exhaustion among employees and mitigate their turnover intentions. Furthermore, it strengthens the core dimension of employee engagement, namely vigor, dedication and absorption. This paper examines the mediating role of psychological safety in linking transformational leadership to employee well-being and job commitment.

### 1.1 Research problem

Employee well-being has become a central priority for organizations seeking to maintain a productive, engaged, and sustainable workforce. Workplace stressors — such as excessive workload, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflicts, and organizational constraints — have been consistently shown to harm employees' mental and physical health (Uddin, 2015). These stressors can result in burnout, emotional exhaustion, lower job satisfaction, and reduced overall life satisfaction, which in turn negatively impact work engagement of employees. Recent research highlights the critical role of psychological mechanisms in buffering the harmful effects of stress. Psychological safety, as defined as an individual's ability to take risks,

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express ideas, and share concerns without fear of negative consequences such as humiliation or punishment has emerged as a critical factor in this context. Employees who experience higher psychological safety feel empowered to express ideas, raise concerns, admit mistakes, and seek support, even under high workplace stress which lead to their well-being and work engagement. To build psychological safety, Transformational leaders must promote open dialogue and active listening, create a non-judgmental environment where all employees feel valued, and address micro aggressions and biases to ensure every voice is respected. Despite growing recognition of psychological safety, there is still limited empirical research examining its mediating role between transformational leadership to employee well-being and work commitment. This research investigates the Mediating Role of Psychological Safety between Transformational Leadership, Employee Well-Being, and Work Engagement

## 1.2 Research objective

This study was designed to investigate the Mediating Role of Psychological Safety between Transformational Leadership, Employee Well-Being, and Work Engagement

## 1.3 Research Significance

This study explains how and why transformational leadership translate into individual outcomes by establishing psychological safety as a critical explanatory cognitive mechanism. It also gives HRD professionals clear evidence to train leaders in reducing interpersonal risk, practicing active listening, showing vulnerability, and responding to errors without punishment.

## 1.4 Research Hypothesis

- **H1:** Transformational leadership is positively associated with psychological safety.
- **H2:** Psychological safety is positively associated with employee well-being.
- **H3:** Psychological safety is positively associated with work engagement.
- **H4:** Psychological safety mediates the positive relationship between transformational leadership ,employee well-being and work engagement.

## 1.5 Research methodology

Secondary sources of information are purely used for this study. It described, summarised and discussed information initially presented in other academic publications sources like journal articles, textbooks, book reviews, blogs, eBooks, etc.

## Review of literature

- 1. Transformational leadership is positively associated with psychological safety.
1. (Marlapa, 2026)Examines how green human resource management (GHRM) and transformational leadership (TL) relate to perceived labour productivity in Indonesia's manufacturing sector, with psychological safety (PS) conceptualized as a human capital-related intangible mediating mechanism. Using a cross-sectional survey of 300 employees and middle managers from sustainability-oriented manufacturing firms, data were analysed with PLS-SEM. Results show that TL is strongly associated with PS, and PS is positively associated with perceived labour productivity (LP), producing a significant indirect effect of TL → PS → productivity, while the direct TL → productivity path was not significant. GHRM showed a

modest positive direct association with perceived labour productivity but no significant association with PS, indicating a structural-relational gap whereby formal green HR systems may need to be enacted through leadership to foster psychologically safe climates. The study clarifies the role of PS as a key social sustainability pathway and offers implications aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 8 in emerging-economy manufacturing contexts

2. (samsidar, 2024) Examines how transformational leadership (TL) fosters innovative work behavior (IWB) across public, educational, and private sector organizations, with a particular focus on the psychological pathways that mediate this relationship. Findings consistently show that transformational leadership influences IWB largely through these psychological resources and conditions, suggesting that its impact is primarily indirect. Leaders who provide individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation simultaneously build the psychological foundation employees need to generate, champion, and implement novel ideas.

3. (Raman, 2024) conclude that transformational leadership significantly enhances employees' psychological well-being. By fostering a supportive and inspiring work environment, transformational leaders create workplaces where employees feel safe, valued, and motivated.

4 (Rabiul & Harun O.R. Rashid, 2023) Reveals that Psychological safety positively predicted meaningful work and mediated the relationship between transformational leadership (TFL) and meaningful work. Additionally, customer incivility was found to be a negative predictor of safety and acted as a moderator, reversing the association between psychological safety and meaningful work

- 2. Psychological safety is positively associated with employee well-being.
- 3. Psychological safety is positively associated with work engagement.

1. (Vionica, 2022) Explores the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement, with perceived organizational support as an intervening variable. The study was conducted among 155 Generation Z employees in Central Java using regression analysis. Results show that psychological safety significantly influences employee engagement and also significantly influences perceived organizational support. However, perceived organizational support was not found to mediate the effect of psychological safety on employee engagement.

2. (Singh, 2026) Examined whether psychological safety and meaning in work predict psychological well-being among working adults in India. A sample of 200 working adults was recruited through convenience and snowball sampling across diverse occupational sectors. The findings suggest that both psychological safety and meaning in work are important workplace factors associated with employee psychological well-being in the Indian context, highlighting the need to address structural and relational workplace factors to improve psychological health.

3. (Sondhi, 2024) Psychological safety is not only about improving organizational performance; it is also deeply connected to employees' mental health and well-being. A workplace where individuals feel safe is less likely to become a source of chronic stress or anxiety. Employees can express concerns, seek help when needed, and take the necessary steps to manage their workload and personal well-being.

4. (Lovett, 2026) Psychological safety at work is one of the most critical elements of a healthy workplace culture. It enhances employee well-being and voice, and empowers everyone in the organization to take chances, think big, and operate without fear of failure. Even after progressing through all the stages mentioned above, organizations must actively maintain psychological safety to continue reaping benefits such as improved employee retention and engagement.

**4.:** Psychological safety mediates the positive relationship between transformational leadership, employee well-being and work engagement.

1. (KARADEMİR, 2025) Examines the impact of inclusive leadership on innovative work behaviour — a factor of strategic importance for organizational success in today's increasingly competitive business environment — and explores the potential mediating role of psychological safety in this relationship. The findings reveal a statistically significant, strong, and positive relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior. However, a notable and original finding of the study indicates that the mediating effect of psychological safety on the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior was not statistically significant. These results underscore the importance of prioritizing inclusive leadership competencies in leadership development programs and suggest that the underlying psychological mechanisms of such relationships may vary across cultural contexts.

2. (Pfaff, 2013) Suggests that transformational leadership — a style that conveys trust and meaningfulness while individually challenging and developing employees — has a positive effect on employee well-being. The article also focused that, One leadership style receiving increased attention is transformational leadership. It is considered economically attractive because it enhances employee performance and appears particularly well-suited to today's complex working conditions

3. (Hoekx, 2024) Aims to unravel a potential determinant of employee engagement in family firms. In particular, it focuses on the role of the CEO by examining the influence of CEO transformational leadership on employee engagement and exploring the potential mediating role of psychological safety in this relationship. The results confirm a positive relationship between CEOs' transformational leadership and employee engagement. Moreover, the findings show that psychological safety mediates this relationship

4. (Sharifirad, 2013) Illuminates two mechanisms — leader's active empathetic listening and psychological safety — through which transformational leaders may enhance employee well-being and promote creative work behavior. These findings highlight the need for researchers and managers to consider how transformational leadership and the interpersonal work context can foster employee well-being and innovative work behavior. Viewing listening as a simple yet effective tool can help unearth employees' internal feelings and needs; thus, a transformational leader can capitalize on employees' ideas and position himself as a coach and supporter in the workplace.

## Analysis

**3.1 Table showing the Review of Empirical Studies on Transformational Leadership, Psychological Safety Employee Outcomes, and work engagement**

| Sl. No | Author & Year         | Focus of the Study                                                                                                                                                        | Sample / Context                                                                                | Method / Analysis                                                  | Major Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1      | <b>Marlapa (2026)</b> | Examined the relationship between Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Transformational Leadership (TL), Psychological Safety (PS), and perceived labour productivity. | 300 employees and middle managers from sustainability-oriented manufacturing firms in Indonesia | Cross-sectional survey; PLS-SEM                                    | Transformational leadership was strongly associated with psychological safety. Psychological safety was positively associated with perceived labour productivity. PS significantly mediated the relationship between TL and productivity, while the direct TL–productivity relationship was not significant.            |
| 2      | Samsidar (2024)       | Examined how transformational leadership fosters innovative work behaviour, particularly through psychological pathways.                                                  | Public, educational, and private sector organizations                                           | Focus on psychological pathways mediating the TL–IWB relationship. | Transformational leadership influences innovative work behaviour largely through psychological resources and conditions. Individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation create the psychological foundation necessary for employees to generate, support, and implement new ideas |

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|   |                                   |                                                                                                                                          |                                             |                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | Raman (2024)                      | Examined the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' psychological well-being.                                   | Employees /workplace context.               |                                                 | Transformational leadership significantly enhances employees' psychological well-being by creating a supportive and inspiring work environment where employees feel safe, valued, and motivated.                                                                                                |
| 4 | Rabiul & Harun O.R. Rashid (2023) | Examined transformational leadership, psychological safety, meaningful work, and customer incivility.                                    | Workplace employees.                        | Examined mediation and moderation relationships | Psychological safety positively predicted meaningful work and mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and meaningful work. Customer incivility negatively predicted psychological safety and moderated the relationship between psychological safety and meaningful work. |
| 5 | Vionica (2022)                    | Examined the influence of psychological safety on employee engagement, with perceived organizational support as an intervening variable. | 155 Generation Z employees in Central Java. | Regression analysis                             | Psychological safety significantly influenced employee engagement and perceived organizational support. However, perceived organizational support did not mediate the relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement.                                                        |

|   |                   |                                                                                                                          |                                                                |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 | Singh (2026)      | Examined whether psychological safety and meaning in work predict psychological well-being                               | 200 working adults from diverse occupational sectors in India. | Convenience and snowball sampling.    | Psychological safety and meaning in work were identified as important workplace factors associated with psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of structural and relational workplace factors.                          |
| 7 | Sondhi (2024)     | Examined the relationship between psychological safety and employee mental health and well-being                         | Employees /workplace context.                                  |                                       | Psychological safety was connected with employee mental health and well-being. Safe workplaces may reduce chronic stress and anxiety and enable employees to express concerns, seek help, and manage workload and personal well-being. |
| 8 | Lovett (2026)     | Examined psychological safety as an element of healthy workplace culture.                                                | Organizational/workplace context.                              |                                       | Psychological safety enhances employee well-being and voice and encourages employees to take risks and think creatively without fear of failure. Maintaining psychological safety can support employee retention and engagement.       |
| 9 | Karademi r (2025) | Examined the impact of inclusive leadership on innovative work behaviour and the mediating role of psychological safety. | Organizational/workplace context.                              | Examined relationships and mediation. | Inclusive leadership had a statistically significant and strong positive relationship with innovative work behaviour. However, psychological safety did not significantly mediate this                                                 |

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|    |                   |                                                                                                                                       |                               |                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Pfaff (2013)      | Examined the influence of transformational leadership on employee well-being.                                                         | Employees /workplace context. |                                                   | Transformational leadership, through trust, meaningfulness, and individual employee development, had a positive effect on employee well-being. The study also emphasized its relevance to complex working conditions. |
| 11 | Hoekx (2024)      | Examined the influence of CEOs' transformational leadership on employee engagement and the mediating role of psychological safety.    | Employees in family firms.    | Mediation analysis                                | CEO transformational leadership had a positive relationship with employee engagement. Psychological safety mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement.                     |
| 12 | Sharifirad (2013) | Examined transformational leadership, innovative work behaviour, employee well-being, empathetic listening, and psychological safety. | Employees /workplace context. | Examined leadership and interpersonal mechanisms. | Active empathetic listening and psychological safety were identified as mechanisms through which transformational leaders can enhance employee well-being and promote creative work behaviour.                        |

### Discussion

The extrapolation of data and information from the various reviewed studies led to the following themes.

#### 4.1 Transformational leadership style

Transformational leadership has emerged as an important leadership approach for creating a supportive, motivating, and psychologically positive work environment. The studies reviewed indicate that transformational leadership goes beyond the traditional emphasis on supervision

and task completion. It involves providing inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, trust, meaningfulness and support to employees.

Marlapa(2026) found a strong association between transformational leadership and psychological safety. The study further indicated that psychological safety was positively associated with perceived labour productivity and acted as an important pathway through which transformational leadership influenced productivity. Similarly, Samsidar(2024) observed that transformational leadership contributes to innovative work behaviour through psychological resources and favourable psychological conditions. In particular, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation help to create an environment in which employees are encouraged to generate and implement new ideas.

The findings of Pfaff(2013) also indicate that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee well-being. The study emphasizes the importance of trust, meaningfulness, and individual development in creating positive employee experiences. Sharifirad(2013) further highlights the role of transformational leaders in promoting employee well-being and creative work behaviour through empathetic listening and psychological safety.

Thus, the literature suggests that transformational leadership can influence employee outcomes not merely through direct managerial practices but also by creating favourable psychological and interpersonal conditions within the workplace.

#### **4.2 Psychological safety**

Psychological safety is another major concept emerging from the reviewed studies. It refers within the framing of these studies, to a workplace environment in which employees feel sufficiently safe to express their views, raise concerns, seek assistance, take interpersonal risks, and contribute ideas without fear of negative consequences.

The reviewed literature provides considerable evidence connecting leadership with psychological safety. Marlapa(2026) reported a strong relationship between transformational leadership and psychological safety.

While Rabiul and Harun O.R Rashid (2023) found that psychological safety positively predicted meaningful work and mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and meaningful work. These findings suggest that leadership behaviour can contribute to the creation of psychologically safe workplace conditions. Psychological safety is also associated with employee engagement and well-being. Vionica(2022), based on 155 generation Z employees in central Java, found that psychological safety significantly influenced employee engagement. Singh(2026), using a sample of 200 working adults in India, similarly identified psychological safety as an important workplace factor associated with psychological well-being.

However, the literature also demonstrates that the role of psychological safety is not necessarily identical across all organizational settings. Karademir(2025), found a strong positive relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour, but the mediating

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effect of psychological safety was not statistically significant. This suggests that psychological safety may operate differently depending on organizational and contextual conditions.

#### **4. 3.Employee well-being**

employee well-being is another important outcome associated with leadership and psychological safety in the reviewed literature. Transformation leadership is described as contributing to a workplace in which employees feel supported, valued motivated and psychologically secure.

Raman (2024) reported that transformational leadership significantly enhances employees' psychological well-being by fostering a supportive and inspiring work environment. Pfaff(2013) similarly reported a positive effect of transformational leadership on employee well-being, particularly through trust, meaningfulness, and employee development.

Psychological safety also appears to have an important relationship with employee well-being. Singh(2026) found that psychological safety and meaning in work were important workplace factors associated with psychological well-being among working adults in India. Sondhi(2024) emphasized that psychologically safe workplaces may enable employees to express concerns, seek help, and manage their workload and personal well-being. Lovett(2026) similarly identifies psychological safety as an important element of a healthy workplace culture that supports employee well-being and voice.

Therefore, the reviewed literature indicates that employee well-being can be understood as being influence by both leadership behaviour and the psychological climate created within the organization.

#### **4. 4. Work engagement**

Work engagement is closely connected with the psychological conditions experienced by employees. The reviewed studies suggest that when employees perceive their workplace as supportive and psychologically safe, they may be more willing to participate actively in their work and organizational activities. Vionica (2022) found that psychological safety significantly influenced employee engagement. More specifically, Hokx(2024) examined the relationship between CEO transformational leadership and employee engagement and found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement and found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. The study further reported that psychological safety mediated this relationship.

The findings therefore suggest a possible conceptual pathway in which transformational leadership contributes to psychological safety, which in turn support employee engagement. However, this relationship should be understood an empirical finding from particular organizational contexts rather than as a universally established causal sequence.

#### **4.5 Interrelationship among the four concepts.**

The literature reviewed provides a useful conceptual understanding of the relationship among transformational leadership, psychological safety, employee well-being, and work engagement

### Conceptual relationship:



### 6. 1.Findings

1. Transformational leadership is associated with psychological safety.

The reviewed studies shows that transformational leadership can create a supportive environment in which employees feel safe, valued and encouraged to express their views and contribute ideas.

2. Transformational leadership is associated with employee well-being.

Studies by Raman(2024) and Pfaff (2013) indicate that transformational leadership contributes positively to psychological well-being through supportive, inspiring, trust-based, and meaningful workplace relationships.

3. Psychological safety is associated with employee well- being.

The literature shows that psychological safety provides employees with an environment in which they can express concerns, seek assistance, manage their workload, and participate without excessive fear of negative consequences. Singh(2026), Sondhi(2024) and Lovett(2026) support this relationship.

4. psychological safety is associated with work engagement.

Vionica (2022)found that psychological safety significantly influence employee engagement. Hoekx(2024) further found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement, with psychological safety playing a mediating role.

5 Psychological safety can function as a mediating mechanism.

Several studies suggest that psychological safety may provide a pathway through which leadership influences employee outcomes such as meaningful work, productivity, and engagement. However, this mediation is not consistent across all studies.

6. The findings are context-dependent.

The non-significant mediation results reported by Karademir(2025) and vionica(2022) indicate that psychological safety does not necessarily explain every relationship between leadership and employee outcomes. Organizational and contextual conditions may influence these relationships.

7. A contextual research gap exists in higher education.

The reviewed studies cover manufacturing, family firms, public and private organizations, and general working population. Comparatively less attention is given to faculty members in higher education institutions. This provides a basis for further investigation in the higher education context.

## 6.2. Suggestions

1. Leadership development programmes should be strengthened.

Training programmes for college principals and academic administrators can emphasize transformational leadership competencies such as communication, motivation, individualized support, active listening and intellectual stimulation

2. Organisations should adopt supportive leadership practices.

Leadership practices emphasizing individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspiration, trust and support may help to create a positive workplace environment for employees.

3. Organisations should strengthen psychological safety.

Employees should be provided with opportunities to express opinions, communicate difficulties, raise concerns, and contribute suggestions without fear of negative consequences

4. Open communication mechanism should be developed.

Regular employee meetings, feedback mechanisms, and participative decision making can provide opportunities for employees to communicate their concerns and ideas.

5. Further research should focus on self-financed colleges.

Further studies can specifically examine the relationship between principal leadership style, psychological safety, employee well-being, work engagement, and faculty job satisfaction in self-financed colleges

## Conclusion

Literature shows transformational leadership, psychological safety, well-being, and engagement are closely linked. Transformational leadership fosters psychological safety, which in turn promotes well-being, engagement, and innovation, though its mediating role varies by context. However, most studies focus on corporate/family firms, with little attention to higher education, especially self-financed colleges. This gap justifies studying principal leadership styles. Faculty well-being, work engagement and job satisfaction in self-financed colleges

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