The Relationship between Working Models and Psychological Safety

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Abstract : Background: New ways of working, such as teleworking or hybrid working, have changed and have impacted both employees and organizations. To understand the individuals' perceptions among different working models, this study aimed to investigate levels of psychological safety among employees working in person, hybrid, and remote environments and the correlation of demographic or professional characteristics. Methods: A cross-sectional survey was distributed electronically. A self-administered questionnaire was composed of sociodemographic data, academic status, professional contexts, working models, and the seven-item instrument of psychological safety. The psychological safety instrument was computed to determine its reliability, showing a Cronbach's 0.75, considering a good scale when compared to the original, analyzed with 51 teams from a North American company, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. Results: The survey was completed by 328 individuals, 60% of whom were in-person, 29.3% hybrid, and 10.7% remote. The Chi-Square test with the Bonferroni post-test for qualitative variables associated with the working models indicates a significant association (p 0.001) for academic qualifications. In-person models present 29.4% of individuals with secondary education and 38.1% undergraduate; hybrid present 51% postgraduate and 35.4% undergraduate. This was similar to remote workers, with 48.6% postgraduate and 34.3% undergraduate. There were no significant differences in gender composition between work models (p = 0.738), with most respondents being female in all three work groups. Remote workers predominated in areas such as commerce, marketing, and services; education and the public sector were common in the in-person group, while technology and the financial sector were predominant among hybrid workers (p < 0.001). As for leadership roles, there was no significant association with working models (p = 0.126). The decision on the working model was predominantly made by the organization for in-person and hybrid workers (p < 0.001). Preference for the working model was in line with the workers' scenario at that time (p < 0.001). Kruskal-Wallis test with Bonferroni's post hoc test compared the psychological safety scores between working groups, reveling statistically higher scores in hybrid group x̃ = 5.64 compared to in-person group x̃ = 5, with remote workers showing scores similar to other groups x̃ = 5.43 (p = 0.004). Age demonstrated no significant difference between the working groups (p = 0.052). On the other hand, organization tenure and job tenure were higher in in-person groups compared to the hybrid and remote groups (p < 0.001). The hybrid model illustrates a balance between in-person and remote models. The results highlight that higher levels of psychological safety can be correlated with the flexibility of hybrid work, as well as physical interaction, spontaneity, and informal relationships, which are considered determinants of high levels of psychological safety. Conclusions: Psychological safety at the group level using the seven-item scale is widely employed in comparison to other commonly employed measures. Despite psychological safety having been around for decades, primarily studied in in-person work contexts, the current findings contribute to expanding research with hybrid or remote settings. Ultimately, this investigation has demonstrated the significance of work models in assessing psychological safety levels.

Keywords : hybrid work, new ways of working, psychological safety, workplace, working models

Conference Title : ICAPP 2025 : International Conference on Applied Psychology

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : June 12-13, 2025