

Psychological Safety, Conflict, and Team Performance

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Introduction

- **Psychological Safety (PS)** is a feeling that one can be oneself, speak up, and be heard without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career.
- PS is linked to team performance. Team conflict is also linked to performance and recent work has distinguished between two types of team conflict:
 - **Task conflict** - the extent to which members openly expose disagreements about tasks, challenge other's views, and engage in productive exchange of opinions.
 - **Relationship conflict** - the extent to which members work well together, or whether there is friction, negative tension or personal conflict among them.
- The current study examined the relationship between both types of team conflict and PS, which in turn relates to team performance, and whether these relationships are stable over time.

WINDSOR PROUD.

Method

- Archival data from Norwegian top management teams in government sector
 - **Sample 1:** N = 28
 - **Sample 2:** N = 15
- Team size ranged from 4 to 12 members.
- Data were aggregated and analyzed at the team level.
- Participants in both samples completed scales measuring **Psychological Safety, Task Conflict, Relationship Conflict,** and **Team Performance** twice, at 9-month intervals.
- Linear regression analyses were used to examine whether both types of conflict predict PS, and whether PS predicts team performance, in both samples and across time.

Results

- Task conflict did not predict PS in either sample at T1 or T2, however, relationship conflict negatively predicted PS in both samples at T1 and T2.

T1 - Sample 1: $R^2=.334$, $\beta=-.578$, $p<.001$; Sample 2: $R^2=.551$, $\beta=-.743$, $p=.002$

T2 - Sample 1: $R^2=.557$, $\beta=-.747$, $p<.001$; Sample 2: $R^2=.756$, $\beta=-.870$, $p<.001$

- PS positively predicted team performance in both samples at T1 and T2

T1 - Sample 1: $R^2=.424$, $\beta=.651$, $p<.001$; Sample 2: $R^2=.432$, $\beta=.658$, $p=.008$

T2 - Sample 1: $R^2=.460$, $\beta=.679$, $p<.001$; Sample 2: $R^2=.360$, $\beta=.600$, $p=.018$

Discussion

- Findings suggest that interpersonal dynamics within a team impact the extent to which one feels safe to express themselves, take risks, and feels safe from others embarrassing, rejecting, or punishing them for speaking up, but task conflict does not. Findings also suggest that PS has important implications for team performance. These relationships are stable over time.
- Though this study is limited by sample size, it is one of few to assess the stability of these relationships over time and across samples. Future work should aim to replicate these findings in larger samples and across different organizational sectors.