

Building a psychosocial safety climate (PSC) for decent work

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International actors such as the International Labour Organisation have issued a statement on their position on promoting and enhancing a humane world of work and have identified a specific gap on how to create a high 'psychosocial safety climate (PSC)'. This thesis aims to contribute to academic and practical knowledge about creating a decent workplace by providing solid empirical evidence, extending plausible theoretical pathways and engaging in real-world organisational intervention. In a complex organisational system, we need stable platforms to manage external challenges and turbulence, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. We propose that PSC is the key ingredient in creating these platforms. In a high PSC context, a dynamic stability platform is formed, which enables efficient operation through a high level of resource availability, the ability to take stable actions and clear signals on how external challenges can be managed.

Low PSC suggests that organisations may have suffered from low leadership effectiveness, failed interventions, reduced professional resources and higher professional demands, leading to poor organisational performance. It is essential to understand that PSC is a stable platform to prepare organisations for future interventions and external challenges. Therefore, this thesis provides evidence on how PSC can be improved, when it can be improved and who can facilitate the process.

Five studies were included in the thesis, including one review, three longitudinal studies and one organisational intervention case study. The results told us that to create real change in workplaces, middle-level leaders should be trained to translate organisational policies into their day-to-day practices. However, it should be noted that mid-level leaders are not the main driver of a strong and positive climate. Their role is to reinforce and stimulate the climate rather than to create it. Management teams should therefore consider changing their organisational policies, practices and procedures, which are fundamental to improving organisational PSC.

However, our study revealed that continuous improvement in PSC only occurs when the starting level of the organisation's PSC is high. This highlights a problem, in that only organisations whose PSC is already high will move towards further improvement. We also provide concrete examples of how organisations could proactively participate in building PSC by incorporating PSC ideals into their existing policies and practices. Therefore, this thesis concludes with a practical example of how academics and practitioners collaborate and play a role in promoting a higher level PSC to achieve decent work for all workers. In addition, although this thesis focuses on top-down factors to improve the PSC, it also highlights the need to establish social dialogue between stakeholders, including trade unions and employees, through bottom-up processes. It is essential to empower employees to participate democratically within an organisation.