PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND TRUST.
A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT. Working in an environment that feels safe is one of the most important aspects when studying performant teams. Team or group members must trust each other while working together on various tasks. This trust is gained over time, after successfully passing through all phases of team development. In this theoretical paper, we discussed the concept of psychological safety in the relation between trust and performance. We approached both Edmondson's idea of interpersonal trust as a prerequisite for psychological safety and the idea that psychological safety might be a mediator that influences the well-known relationship between interpersonal trust and team performance. After making the required theoretical clarifications, we concluded that further investigation is needed to have a clear conclusion on this topic.

Keywords: psychological safety, trust, performance, teams, groups, members, relations, organisations

When working in group or team projects, one can encountered all sort of challenges in such contexts. One of the aspects that strikes the most is the influence of trust between team members upon the performance of the entire team.

The concept that best describes and analyzes the connection between trust and performance is psychological safety. This has become a

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widely studied concept in large areas such as business, education and health (Turner & Harder, 2018) and less in the field of human development (Wanless, 2016). This concept is linked to the concept of interpersonal trust and also has components that are distinguished, which brings new directions for understanding the differences in performance between groups with the same level of trust (either high or low).

In our present-day organizations, groups have become a very common work unit, roughly 80% of the large organizations are using them (Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Drach-Zahavy, 2004). Hackman (1987) describes work as the proper way for a team to form and develop itself and working as the main activity for team members to connect between themselves and the environment.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the concept of psychological safety in connection to trust and team performance. There are five stages of team development (forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning) and in each one psychological safety can be a mediator that influences the connection between trust and performance. Team cannot become performant if there is no trust and if they don't feel safe enough to experiment and make mistakes. Therefore, understanding psychological safety is essential for developing performant teams.

A team can be defined as a collection of individuals that share a common purpose, whose actions and results are interdependent, perceived by themselves and others as a social entity and placed in an organizational context (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Hackman, 1987). When trying to understand teamwork and team learning (Newman, Donohue & Eva, 2017), psychological safety is a critical factor (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

According to Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro (2001), the work group is a number of people that work together to achieve a certain result, which would not be reached individually, because they would be lacking the required skills. Likert (1961, 1967) argued that efficient organizations should capitalize the groups potential to reach their objectives. It is considered that the organizations that use work groups have members which are very involved (Cohen, 1994; Lawler, 1996), have access to a wider range of knowledge and skills and enjoy a more efficient and adaptive decision making process (Kellermans, Floyd, Pearson & Spencer, 2008; Nielsen, 1996), set far more challenging purposes (Likert, 1967), bring more satisfaction to their members (Forsyth, 1999) and

achieve greater performance (Likert, 1961) than the organizations oriented solely towards the individual. The interactions that take place between team members, with other teams or people from the work context bring a change in those teams in terms of complexity.

In the attempt to discover what can predict the efficiency and efficacy of a team and why certain teams are more efficient than others, several researchers (Steiner, 1972; McGrath, 1984; Hackman, 1987) have developed models for studying how groups and teams work. All these theoretical models have in common the input - process - output (IPO) structure. Although in the beginning researchers have looked at the output, at how efficient teams were, nowadays the focus is on the processes that explain how certain inputs influence the output. Marks et al. (2001) have noticed that many of the constructs presented by the researchers as processes within the IPO model were rather emergent affective or cognitive states. Emergent states describe cognitive, affective and motivational group states because of the members interactions. These are the attitudes, values, thoughts and motivations of the team members (Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro, 2001). These states are developed within the existence of a team, are dynamic and vary according to the team context, inputs, processes and results. Emergent states are not team actions or interactions but rather products of the team experiences and become new inputs for the next processes and results (Marks, et. al, 2001). Ilgen et al. (2005) have proposed an alternative model, called IMOI (Input-Mediator-Output-Input), which considers the emergent states as concepts different from the team processes. They have replaced the P (process) letter in the IPO model with M (mediator), which reflects a wider range of variables that can explain the variability and viability of teams' efficacy. Adding the I (input) letter in the end, the authors have invoked the notion of cyclic causal feedback. The IMOI model includes the stages of team development as following: the IM (input-mediator) phase is the forming stage, the MO (mediator-output) phase is the performing stage and OI is the changing stage, the last one in the team development. In the forming stage, the team members learn to trust each other based on the feeling that the team is competent enough to get the job done. They also base this trust on the psychological safety, which offers team members the freedom to express themselves, knowing that the other team members will not behave in a manner to harm them.

Another important mediator that can appear in this stage is careful and efficient planning. This resides in information gathering, a process that involves developing strategies, searching, communicating and sharing information. Another mediator discussed by Ilgen et al (2005) is structuring, a process that involves developing and maintaining roles, norms and patterns of action within the team. The two cognitive structuring constructs identified by Ilgen are (1) common mental models, which state that performance is greater when members have more cognitive elements in common and (2) transactive memory, which states that performance is greater when members are shared according to their majors.

In the performing stage, on the affective level connections are created and feelings appear between members and towards the team. For this to happen, a proper management is required for team diversity, attitudes, values and personality and a correct conflict management between members. In terms of attitudes, there are three sets of attitudes that can affect the perception of psychological safety: attitudes toward inclusiveness, trust in collective responsibility and openness in communication (Thorgren & Caiman, 2019). The second mediator included by Ilgen et al (2005) in this stage is team adaptation when the work environment for a task is changed from routine to new conditions or vice versa. Another aspect of adaptation is the degree in which team members help each other and share their work volume, especially when requests are high. As a precursor of adaptation, another mediator appears: learning. This refers to learning from the minorities in the group or team and also from the best member of the team. The last stage (change stage) shapes the moments when a team ends and episode in the development cycle and begins a new cycle. Ilgen et al (2005) noted that the processes in the change stage completely lack in the empirical literature on teams. According to Kozlowski & Ilgen (2006, pp. 78), "teams are complex dynamic systems that exist in a context, develop as members, interact over time, and evolve and adapt as situational demands unfold", therefore it is important to understand how team functioning can be affected by the interaction between team members (Soares & Lopes, 2014).

Trust between group or team members

One of the emergent states that researchers have studied most is trust. This concept is a very complex and emotionally challenging, with a lot of meanings for different persons (Reina, Reina & Rushton, 2007). This is one of the reasons why researchers still have to agree upon a definition. One of the oldest definitions of trust belongs to Barber (1983), who sees trust as a set of socially learned and confirmed expectations that people share. Another definition on trust is the willingness to be vulnerable to others (Frazier et al, 2017). Although there is not an unanimously accepted definition, we can agree that there are three common elements to all definitions on interpersonal trust. First, trust is an expectation or a belief that the other person is well intended. Second, a person cannot control or force another person to behave according to his/her expectation. Third, trust involves a certain level of dependency because the results of one person can be influenced by another person (Costa, Roe & Taillieu, 2001; Cook & Wall, 1980; Cummings & Bromley, 1996; Dirks, 1999; Homer, 1995; Jones & George, 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; McAllister, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Rousseau et al., 1998; Spector & Jones, 2004; Tan & Lim, 2009).

Within work groups we can study the trust that members have in their leader or the trust relationship developed between the group members. A series of models have been suggested for explaining interpersonal trust, each with applications in certain work areas.

According to the relational model of trust, a proper theory of organizational trust must include the social and relational fundamentals of choices linked to trust (Mayer et Al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Tyler & Kramer, 1996).

Trust is not only conceptualized as a "calculated risk orientation, but also as a social orientation towards other persons and society as a whole" (Kramer, 1999, p. 573). In this model, the choices are more affective and intuitive than calculated. In the opposite direction there is the model suggested by Lewicki and Bunker (1995) that considers trust to be "positive expectations about another person's reasons regarding themselves in a risk situation" (pp 139). The two authors have identified three types of trust within the work relations: trust based on calculation,

trust based on knowledge and trust based on identification. Trust based on calculation is dependent on the behavioral consistency through punishments and rewards. Although the authors claim that this type of trust can be driven both through potential benefits as well as costs, they have discovered that the most influential are the intimidation elements. They also state that the efficacy of intimidations depends on a person's ability to impose sanctions when needed. Lewicki & Bunker (1995) have defined knowledge-based trust as being the trust in the other person's predictability and the support it offers. This trust comes from working together and regulate communication and it is based on a deep interpersonal familiarity and the understanding that it appears in time, after repeated interactions.

Identification based trust is that type of trust that appears from understanding the fact that the internalizing of the other person's wishes and intentions has been achieved. This means that the persons involved in this relation understand each other, agree with each other and offer support in reaching a common goal.

This form of trust allows each part to act as a support agent for the other part and to reciprocate in certain moments.

The transactional model of trust created by Reina, Reina & Rushton (2007) helps understanding trust and offers a set of behaviors to build it. This model defines trust as being transactional due to its reciprocal nature: one has to offer in order to receive. This model has three components: contractual trust, communication trust and competences trust.

Contractual trust is character trust, a trust in the intentions and consistency of people and the engagements they take. This sets the tone and direction of collaboration and is built from behaviors like expectations management, encouraging mutual help and ensuring consistency.

Communication trust creates an environment where the members of a group, team or organization members feel safe to ask what they need. These members want open and unrestricted access to information. They want to ask questions before making a decision, to express an honest opinion, to challenge assumptions, give and receive feedback and ask for help. Such behaviors have the ability to increase and maintain a high level of communication trust. This type of trust sets the course of communication and the way the team members will discuss.

Competences trust involves recognizing the competences of a person in doing what it takes in a certain situation, even if it involves an interaction between individuals, roles or specific aptitudes. This is built from behaviors like recognizing the skills and abilities of team members, their contributions or helping them learn new skills. The third component of the transactional model allows the team members to raise the level of performance and further develop new abilities.

Another main model about trust is the one created by Costa, Roe & Taillieu (2001). They define trust as a psychological state that is manifested in behaviors towards others, is based on expectancies according to their behaviors, reasons and intentions in situations that involve a risk towards their relations.

According to these authors, trust is formed of three components: the tendency to have trust, the perceived credibility and trust behaviors. The tendency to have trust is a general desire to trust others. Mayer et al. (1995) claim that this tendency in the context of work relations should be seen as a situational characteristic, affected by the team members and situational factors. Perceived credibility resides in evaluating the actions and characteristics of the person being trusted. Good (1988) defined perceived credibility as how individuals except others to behave according to their requests, implicit or explicit. This judgement is based on the evaluation a person does regarding the character, competence, motivation and intentions of the other person (McAllister, 1995).

Cummings & Bromiley (1996) claim that this perceived credibility can be accessed within groups through the following dimensions: the belief that the other person is making an honest effort to behave according to any engagement, both implicit and explicit, and the belief that the other person is honest.

Smith & Barclay (1997) have identified four categories of trust behaviors: openness to communication, acceptance of influence, tolerance to opportunities and control reduction.

According to these authors, we can distinguish two types of trust behaviors: cooperation and monitoring. Cooperation behaviors reflect how much team members communicate in an open manner about work, accept other colleagues influence and feel involved in the team. Monitoring behaviors refer to how much team members feel the need to control other people's work and supervise this work.

Psychological Safety

In a large study done over two years, by one of the world's IT giants, Google, over 200 Google employees were interviewed and over 250 attributes were analyzed. The conclusion was that there are five key attributes that set successful teams apart from other teams, and psychological safety was the first of them, along dependability, structure & clarity, meaning of work and impact of work (Rozovsky, 2015).

Making sure that all team members will cooperate and get involved in team activities is critical for diverse and talented team leaders. It is possible that one or several team members don't feel enough psychological safety in the work environment in order to participate completely and honestly (Edmondson, 2004).

This idea was supported by Kahn (1990), who discovered that psychological safety was one of the three main conditions that paved the way employees would take on their role in the organization. Kahn (1990, p. 708) gave the following definition to the concept of psychological safety: "being able to expose yourself and engage into an action, without fear of any negative consequence upon self-image, status or career". Edmondson (2004) adds to this definition by stating that psychological safety is a team level concept that describes the perceptions of individuals regarding the consequences of interpersonal risks in their work environment. Psychological safety perception tends to be similar among persons that are close or work together, because they are the subjects of the same contextual influences and also because these perceptions are being developed from joint and strong experiences (Edmondson, 1999a). This concept is built from unquestioned beliefs about how others will reply when someone is making their voice heard.

At the same time, it is a key team quality, being considered a "shared belief that the team is in a safe environment for taking such interpersonal risks "(Edmondson, 1999, p. 354).

Psychological safety does not always imply a familiar environment, where individuals are friends, nor the lack of pressure, stress or problems. Rather, it describes a climate where the focus is on productive discussions that help an early prevention of problems and reaching common goals, because individuals are less predisposed to focus on self-protection.

Psychological safety is not achieved from the beginning, but rather built in time. With the right guidance and activities, people will expose themselves and get out or their comfort zone.

Based on the research done by Kahn (1990) there are four factors that influence the most psychological safety: interpersonal relations, group and intergroup dynamics, style and management processes and organizational norms. If the interpersonal relations are supportive (Gibb, 1961) or trustworthy and the climate is based on openness (Jourard, 1968), then individuals feel a psychological safety.

In the context of a work environment, group or team members conspire, consciously or unconsciously, to play roles that diminish their mistakes related anxieties. People feel safer when they have a certain degree of control over their work.

As for organizational norms, people feel safer when roles are clearly shaped within those limits. Norms are considered common expectations regarding general behaviors of the system members (Hackman, 1987). The persons that generally act according to those work and behavior Norma usually feel more secure than those who stray from those protective limits. Norms deviation and the possibility to do that can be sources of anxiety and frustration, especially for the persons with lower status or advantages. When employees that work together have common goals that go over their specific roles, when they are connected by common general knowledge about their work process and roles and when they are connected through mutual respect, they are less likely to blame each other for failures. They are more likely to experiment the psychological safety needed to accept failure as an opportunity to learn. Therefore, good quality relationship manifested in common goals, common knowledge and mutual respect will facilitate the development of psychological safety (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009).

Edmondson (2004) connects the concept of psychological safety and trust by stating that they both describe psychological states that involve perception of risk or vulnerability and taking decisions with the purpose of minimizing negative consequences and that they both have potential positive consequences for the group, team or organization.

Because trust and psychological safety describe intrapsychic states related to interpersonal experience, it is important to clarify the conceptual differences between these two constructs, such as establishing

the empirical proofs of the existence of psychological safety, the less known of the two. Psychological safety is a distinct and complementary phenomenon that, like trust, can affect different behavioral or organizational behaviors. Although psychological safety also involves an element of choice, the definition is slightly different from the one of trust, where is assumed that individuals make choices based on evaluating risk by maximizing expected wins and minimizing expected losses. Such rational choices are made through a conscious calculation of advantages, calculation based on an explicit and consistent system of values (Schelling, 1960, p. 4; ref. in Kramer, 1999). The relational model also considers the social aspects and defines trust as a risk calculated orientation and people or society orientation (Kramer, 1999), so in this model, choices are more affective and intuitive than calculated.

Edmondson (2003) has identified three differences between the two concepts: regarding the focus, time limits and level of analysis. Regarding trust, the object of focus is others, their credibility or potential actions. In psychology safety, the focus is on the self or how others will offer the presumption of innocence in case of an error. The calculation done in psychological safety considers the short-term interpersonal consequences that a person expects after doing a specific action. In contrast, trust refers to the anticipated consequences over a larger period, including the future.

Conclusion and Discussion

To conclude, despite the overlapping parts, the two concepts (trust and psychological safety) describe different emergent states which are commonly associated with high team performance. We can see how important trust and psychological safety are in the development and growth of a working group towards a great performance. In order to use this information properly, we need complex research that supports either Edmondson (2003) hypothesis that interpersonal trust is a prerequisite for psychological safety, either the idea that psychological safety might be a mediator that influences the well-known relationship between interpersonal trust and team performance. When groups are faced with the need to learn together in new and uncertain environments

and situations, psychological safety has a vital role in supporting collaboration (Edmondson, 2011). There is strong evidence that trust and psychological safety are two different concepts (Edmondson, 2011) and the former is a prerequisite for the latter. And the main difference is that psychological safety is experienced at a group level, while trust reflects the interactions between two individuals (Edmonson, 2004). Also, when talking about psychological safety, it is others that will give you the benefit of a doubt when taking a risk, while with trust, you will give others the benefit of a doubt when taking a risk.

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