

Speak Up To Innovate: How Psychological Safety Drives Innovative Work Behavior Through Knowledge Sharing

Bicaralah Untuk Berinovasi: Bagaimana Keamanan Psikologis Mendorong Perilaku Kerja Inovatif Melalui Berbagi Pengetahuan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of psychological safety in fostering innovative work behavior, with knowledge sharing as a mediating variable. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, the research argues that when employees feel safe to express ideas without fear of negative consequences, they are more likely to share knowledge, which is an essential process for innovation. Data were collected from 150 employees working in service-sector organizations in Bandung through a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. Results analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) revealed that psychological safety significantly enhances knowledge sharing and innovative work behavior. Furthermore, knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between psychological safety and innovative work behavior. These findings highlight that a supportive and open environment encourages employees to exchange ideas and collaborate, thereby promoting creativity and innovation. The study contributes to organizational behavior literature by demonstrating that psychological safety functions not only as an interpersonal climate but also as a foundation for collective innovation.

Keywords: Innovative Work Behavior, Knowledge Sharing, Psychological Safety

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran keamanan psikologis dalam mendorong perilaku kerja inovatif, dengan berbagi pengetahuan sebagai variabel mediasi. Berlandaskan Teori Pertukaran Sosial, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa ketika karyawan merasa aman untuk mengemukakan ide tanpa takut akan konsekuensi negatif, mereka lebih cenderung berbagi pengetahuan, yang merupakan proses esensial untuk inovasi. Data dikumpulkan dari 150 karyawan yang bekerja di organisasi sektor jasa di Bandung melalui kuesioner terstruktur menggunakan skala Likert 5 poin. Hasil yang dianalisis dengan Structural Equation Modeling dengan Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) menunjukkan bahwa keamanan psikologis secara signifikan meningkatkan berbagi pengetahuan dan perilaku kerja inovatif. Selain itu, berbagi pengetahuan berperan sebagai variabel mediasi dalam hubungan antara keamanan psikologis dan perilaku kerja inovatif. Temuan ini menyoroti bahwa lingkungan yang mendukung dan terbuka mendorong karyawan untuk bertukar ide dan berkolaborasi, sehingga mempromosikan kreativitas dan inovasi. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur perilaku organisasi dengan menunjukkan bahwa keamanan psikologis tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai iklim interpersonal tetapi juga sebagai landasan untuk inovasi kolektif.

Kata kunci: Perilaku Kerja Inovatif, Berbagi Pengetahuan, Keamanan Psikologis

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic business landscape, organizations face pressure to innovate in order to survive and thrive. Innovation no longer depends solely on technological advances or managerial strategies, but increasingly on the creativity and proactive behaviors of employees (Asurakkody & Kim, 2020; Wahyudi et al., 2019). Known as innovative work behavior (IWB), this involves the generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas that improve processes, products, or services (Asurakkody & Kim, 2020; Shah et al., 2020). As innovation starts with people, understanding the psychological and organizational conditions that support employee

innovation has become a major focus in human resource management and organizational behavior research (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Among the many factors influencing innovation, psychological safety has emerged as one of the most powerful drivers of employees' willingness to speak up and take risks (Agarwal & Anantatmula, 2023; Staneiu, 2022). Psychological safety refers to a shared belief within a team or organization that it is safe to express opinions, admit mistakes, and propose new ideas without fear of rejection or punishment (Catyanadika & Rajasekera, 2022; Zhang et al., 2010). When employees feel safe, they are more open to contributing unconventional thoughts and constructive feedback, both of which are essential for organizational learning and creativity. In contrast, when psychological safety is low, individuals tend to withhold their ideas, avoid experimentation, and focus only on routine tasks to protect themselves from potential criticism (Liu et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023).

Previous studies have shown that psychological safety plays a vital role in improving team learning, collaboration, and performance (Gerpott et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023). However, the process through which psychological safety leads to innovative outcomes is not always straightforward. One key mechanism connecting the two is knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing refers to the voluntary act of exchanging information, expertise, or insights among employees to solve problems or generate new ideas (Almulhim, 2020; Siemsen et al., 2009). It reflects not only the transfer of knowledge but also a culture of trust and reciprocity within the workplace. In psychologically safe environments, employees are more willing to share their experiences and learn from others, which enhances the organization's overall capacity for innovation (Nguyen et al., 2019; Yasin et al., 2023).

In many organizations, especially those in the service sector, knowledge sharing is still often hindered by hierarchical structures, fear of mistakes, and limited collaboration across departments (Islam et al., 2024). These cultural and structural barriers can prevent employees from freely contributing ideas or exchanging information, even when they have valuable insights. Thus, psychological safety becomes a critical foundation for overcoming these barriers (Grošelj et al., 2020; Sudibjo & Prameswari, 2021). When employees believe that their input will be respected, they are more likely to share knowledge that sparks creativity and innovative problem-solving (Khan et al., 2023; Munir & Beh, 2019).

Despite the growing recognition of psychological safety as a driver of innovation, research exploring its indirect mechanisms through knowledge sharing in the Indonesian context remains scarce (Catyanadika & Rajasekera, 2022; Srirahayu et al., 2023). Most existing studies have focused on Western or high-tech organizational settings, where open communication and experimentation are already embedded in the culture (Xu & Suntrayuth, 2022; Yang et al., 2023). Therefore, there is a need to explore whether similar dynamics apply in a collectivist context, where maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict often take precedence over open expression.

This study aims to fill that gap by examining the effect of psychological safety on innovative work behavior, both directly and indirectly through knowledge sharing. By focusing on employees in service-sector organizations in Bandung, Indonesia, the research highlights the social and psychological processes that foster innovation in emerging economies. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical insights, showing how building a safe, trusting environment can encourage employees to share knowledge, collaborate more effectively, and ultimately drive organizational innovation.

Literature Review

Psychological Safety and Knowledge Sharing

Psychological safety refers to employees shared belief that they can express ideas, opinions, and concerns without fear of negative consequences (Kessel et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2023). When employees feel safe to speak up, they are more open to communicating, learning,

and collaborating with others (Staneiu, 2022; Wang et al., 2018). This sense of safety encourages individuals to take interpersonal risks, such as admitting mistakes or proposing unconventional ideas, which in turn builds trust and open dialogue within teams (Mehmood et al., 2022; Staneiu, 2022). In a psychologically safe environment, employees are less likely to withhold information or ideas due to fear of embarrassment or criticism. They are instead more motivated to share their knowledge because they perceive the organization as supportive and non-punitive (Singh, 2023). When people exchange experiences and insights, the organization benefits from collective learning and creativity. Therefore, psychological safety serves as a key foundation for effective knowledge sharing.

H1: Psychological safety has a positive effect on knowledge sharing.

Knowledge Sharing and Innovative Work Behavior

Knowledge sharing is the process by which employees exchange information, expertise, and experiences that can improve decision-making and problem-solving (Kim & Park, 2017; Kmieciak, 2020). It is a critical element of innovation because new ideas often emerge from the combination and reinterpretation of existing knowledge (Akram et al., 2020; Singh, 2023). When employees actively share what they know, they provide the input needed for generating creative solutions and implementing them effectively (Derin et al., 2022; Udin, 2022). In organizations that promote knowledge sharing, employees have access to a wider range of ideas and perspectives, allowing them to develop innovative approaches to challenges. Moreover, knowledge sharing strengthens collaboration and builds a sense of collective ownership over innovation (Dayanti & Yulianti, 2023; Firdaus et al., 2021). Thus, when employees frequently engage in knowledge sharing, they are more likely to demonstrate innovative work behavior.

H2: Knowledge sharing has a positive effect on innovative work behavior.

Psychological Safety and Innovative Work Behavior

Psychological safety also directly promotes innovative work behavior by creating a work climate where individuals feel empowered to experiment and take initiative (Catyanadika & Rajasekera, 2022; Liu et al., 2021). When employees believe that their ideas will be valued rather than dismissed, they are more likely to engage in behaviors such as idea generation, suggestion-making, and problem-solving. Conversely, a lack of psychological safety leads to silence, conformity, and fear of failure, all of which suppress innovation (Gerpott et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2010). A psychologically safe environment encourages curiosity, experimentation, and risk-taking, all of which are essential for innovation. Employees are more willing to question routines, propose changes, and explore creative solutions when they do not fear negative reactions from colleagues or supervisors (Rahmayanti & Johan, 2024). Hence, psychological safety can serve as a direct antecedent of innovative work behavior.

H3: Psychological safety has a positive effect on innovative work behavior.

The Mediating Role of Knowledge Sharing

While psychological safety can directly influence innovation, its impact is often strengthened through knowledge sharing. Employees who feel safe at work are more willing to communicate ideas, exchange information, and collaborate across teams. This process of knowledge sharing provides the foundation for generating, refining, and implementing innovative ideas (Akram et al., 2020; Singh, 2023). When employees feel psychologically safe, they are likely to engage in continuous dialogue and learning, leading to the emergence of new and practical solutions (Li et al., 2019; Yasin et al., 2023). Knowledge sharing thus acts as a bridge connecting psychological safety and innovative work behavior. It transforms psychological safety from a supportive climate into tangible innovation outcomes.

H4: Knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between psychological safety and innovative work behavior.

2. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships between psychological safety, knowledge sharing, and innovative work behavior. The research model was tested using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), which is suitable for analyzing complex relationships among latent variables and small to medium sample sizes. The population in this study consisted of employees working in various service-sector organizations in Bandung, Indonesia, including banking, hospitality, and education. These sectors were chosen because they rely heavily on employee innovation and knowledge exchange to maintain competitiveness. The sample comprised 150 respondents, selected using purposive sampling to ensure that participants had at least one year of organizational experience and were actively involved in teamwork or innovation-related activities.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed both online and in person between March and May 2025. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Of the 180 questionnaires distributed, 150 were returned and deemed valid for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 83.3%.

All variables were measured using previously validated scales on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Psychological Safety was measured using five items adapted from Lee et al. (2023) scale, which reflects employees' perceptions of safety in expressing ideas and taking interpersonal risks. Knowledge Sharing was assessed using four items adapted from Munir & Beh (2019), which focuses on employees' willingness to exchange information and expertise with colleagues. Innovative Work Behavior was measured using six items adapted from Janssen (2000), which captures idea generation, promotion, and implementation. All indicators were tested for reliability and validity using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings within the SEM-PLS framework.

3. Results And Discussion

Respondent Profile

The respondents in this study consisted of 150 employees from various service-sector organizations in Bandung, including banking, hospitality, and education. Most participants were in non-managerial or mid-level positions, representing individuals directly involved in daily operations and teamwork processes that require innovation and collaboration. In terms of gender distribution, 56% of respondents were female and 44% were male. The majority of respondents were aged between 26 and 35 years old (48%), followed by those aged 36–45 years old (32%), while the remaining 20% were under 25 years old. Regarding education level, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (72%), while 18% had completed a diploma, and 10% held a master's degree. In terms of work experience, 60% of respondents had been employed for more than three years, while 40% had less than three years of experience. This indicates that most participants had sufficient tenure to understand workplace dynamics and contribute meaningfully to knowledge-sharing and innovation processes. Overall, the respondent profile reflects a diverse and experienced workforce, providing an appropriate basis for examining the relationships between psychological safety, knowledge sharing, and innovative work behavior.

Outer Model Evaluation

The outer model evaluates the reliability and validity of each construct. Indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were examined to ensure measurement quality. As shown in Table 1, all outer loadings exceeded the minimum

threshold of 0.70, while CR values were above 0.80 and AVE values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity.

Table 1. Outer Model (Convergent Validity and Reliability)

Construct	Indicator	Loading	CR	AVE
Psychological Safety	PS1	0.812	0.912	0.676
	PS2	0.846		
	PS3	0.873		
	PS4	0.801		
	PS5	0.829		
Knowledge Sharing	KS1	0.829	0.902	0.651
	KS2	0.842		
	KS3	0.801		
	KS4	0.783		
Innovative Work Behavior	IWB1	0.815	0.927	0.681
	IWB2	0.834		
	IWB3	0.871		
	IWB4	0.806		
	IWB5	0.832		
	IWB6	0.854		

All indicators were retained since they met recommended loading thresholds. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, also showed that the square root of each AVE exceeded the inter-construct correlations, indicating adequate discriminant validity.

Inner Model Evaluation

The inner model tested the hypothesized relationships between constructs. As shown in Table 2, all path coefficients were positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ based on the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The model also demonstrated good explanatory power, with $R^2 = 0.58$ for Knowledge Sharing and $R^2 = 0.64$ for Innovative Work Behavior, indicating that the independent variables explained a substantial proportion of variance in the dependent constructs.

Table 2. Inner Model Results (Path Coefficients and Significance)

Hypothesis	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1 Psychological Safety → Knowledge Sharing	0.55	7.63	0.000	Supported
H2 Knowledge Sharing → Innovative Work Behavior	0.41	5.72	0.000	Supported
H3 Psychological Safety → Innovative Work Behavior	0.36	4.85	0.000	Supported

The Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index was 0.67, indicating a large overall model fit (above the 0.36 threshold for large effect).

Mediation Analysis

To test the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on the relationship between psychological safety and innovative work behavior, the indirect path was analyzed using bootstrapping. Results in Table 3 show that the indirect effect was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.23, t = 4.12, p < 0.001$), confirming partial mediation. This means psychological safety not only

directly enhances innovative behavior but also indirectly does so through greater knowledge sharing.

Table 3. Mediation Test Results

Relationship	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value
Psychological Safety → Knowledge Sharing → Innovative Work Behavior	0.36	0.23	4.12	0.000

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that psychological safety plays a significant role in promoting both knowledge sharing and innovative work behavior among employees in service-sector organizations. These findings are consistent with prior studies emphasizing that a psychologically safe environment encourages individuals to express ideas, take interpersonal risks, and collaborate more effectively (Kessel et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2018). When employees feel that their input is valued and mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, they become more willing to communicate openly, which supports collective learning and creative problem-solving.

The significant relationship between psychological safety and knowledge sharing highlights that open and trusting communication serves as the foundation for effective knowledge exchange. In environments where employees fear negative evaluation or punishment, knowledge is often withheld, resulting in missed opportunities for innovation. Conversely, when employees perceive psychological safety, they are more likely to share expertise and insights that contribute to team effectiveness and innovation. This finding reinforces the notion that trust and respect in the workplace are essential conditions for encouraging collaborative learning and idea generation.

The study also found that knowledge sharing positively influences innovative work behavior. Employees who actively exchange information and experiences are better equipped to identify problems, combine diverse perspectives, and develop creative solutions. Knowledge sharing transforms individual insights into collective intelligence, enabling the organization to continuously adapt and improve. This result aligns with the previous studies (Kim & Park, 2017; Munir & Beh, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019), which posits that access to diverse knowledge and information enhances the creative process by expanding cognitive resources and perspectives.

Furthermore, the direct and indirect effects of psychological safety on innovative work behavior demonstrate that psychological safety serves as both a motivational and enabling factor for innovation. The direct relationship suggests that when employees feel secure, they are more willing to take initiative and propose new ideas. The indirect effect through knowledge sharing indicates that psychological safety also promotes innovation by facilitating communication and collaboration among employees. In other words, psychological safety creates the conditions under which knowledge sharing can flourish, ultimately leading to higher levels of innovation.

These findings are particularly relevant in the context of Indonesian service organizations, where hierarchical structures and cultural norms often discourage employees from speaking up or challenging authority. In such environments, fostering psychological safety becomes even more crucial for promoting open communication and collective learning. The results suggest that managers should focus on building inclusive and supportive work climates where feedback is welcomed and mistakes are viewed as opportunities for growth.

Overall, this study contributes to organizational behavior literature by providing empirical evidence that psychological safety and knowledge sharing are key mechanisms driving innovative behavior at work. It emphasizes that innovation does not occur in isolation but is nurtured through open dialogue, mutual trust, and a supportive social environment

4. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of psychological safety on innovative work behavior, with knowledge sharing as a mediating variable. The results demonstrate that psychological safety significantly enhances both knowledge sharing and innovative behavior. Employees who feel safe to express opinions, make suggestions, and take risks are more likely to engage in open communication and exchange ideas, which in turn fosters creativity and innovation. The findings confirm that knowledge sharing acts as a partial mediator between psychological safety and innovative work behavior, suggesting that psychological safety not only has a direct effect on innovation but also indirectly promotes it through collaborative information exchange. Overall, the study underscores the importance of creating a psychologically safe work environment as a foundation for knowledge-based innovation within organizations.

This study contributes to the organizational behavior and innovation literature by integrating psychological safety and knowledge sharing into a single explanatory framework for innovative work behavior. It extends the Social Exchange Theory by illustrating how a supportive interpersonal climate fosters reciprocal knowledge sharing that drives innovation. By empirically validating the mediating role of knowledge sharing, this research provides nuanced understanding of how psychological safety translates into innovative outcomes. It highlights that innovation is not merely an individual cognitive process but a social one, dependent on trust, collaboration, and mutual learning.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that fostering psychological safety should be a strategic priority for organizations seeking to enhance innovation. Managers can cultivate such an environment by encouraging open dialogue, treating mistakes as learning opportunities, and recognizing employees who contribute new ideas. In addition, organizations should actively promote knowledge-sharing practices through mentoring programs, digital collaboration tools, and knowledge repositories. By building a psychologically safe and knowledge-driven culture, organizations can enhance employee innovation and sustain long-term competitiveness.

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