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What is the link between Psychosocial Safety Climate and organisational outcomes?

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Psychosocial safety climate (PSC) refers to an organisation's climate around employee psychological safety and wellbeing, shaped by senior management's beliefs, values, and practices. Organisations with high PSC prioritise psychological health, actively prevent workplace stress, foster open communication about mental health, and engage employees in shaping relevant policies. A growing amount of research demonstrates that high PSC environments promote better working conditions, job quality, and, in turn, improved employee mental health and wellbeing. Conceptually, these improvements are believed to have benefits for the organisation through improved productivity and performance related outcomes. However, to date limited research has sought to bring together and critically evaluate the existing evidence base exploring this link between PSC and organisational outcomes. This state-of-the-art review aims to address this key gap in knowledge. The findings highlight that high PSC is strongly associated with key productivity indicators, including reduced turnover, absenteeism, and presenteeism, as well as increased worker engagement, motivation, and performance. We conclude that fostering a positive organisational climate that prioritises psychological health and safety is not only essential for employee wellbeing but also serves as a strategic investment in organisational productivity and performance. The review concludes by identifying key gaps and directions for future research.

Background

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the United Kingdom (UK) has experienced slower growth in productivity compared to other affected countries like France, Germany and the United States (The Productivity Institute, 2024). Understanding this "Productivity Puzzle" remains priority for UK policymakers and business leaders to maintain competitive advantage and increased economic growth (National Institute of Economic and Social Research, 2022). Traditionally researched drivers of the Productivity Puzzle include technology (Kafouros, 2005), labour market factors (Goldin & Katz, 2009), infrastructure (Crafts, 2009), and capital investments (Goodridge et al., 2013). However, there has also been a more recent focus on the human and cultural drivers of productivity that extend beyond conventional economic factors. To this end, organisational climate - defined as employees' shared

perceptions and beliefs of the policies, practices, and procedures shaping their work environment (Schneider et al., 2017), has increasingly gained research attention (CIPD, 2022) and may be considered a potential 'missing piece' of the UK's productivity puzzle.

Defining psychosocial safety climate & understanding its influence on employee wellbeing

Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) refers to employees' shared perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures in place to protect and promote psychological health and safety at work (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). PSC is characterised by four key domains: management commitment, management priority, organisational communication, and organisational participation (see Table 1; Dollard & Bakker, 2010).

Table 1. Key Components of PSC and Their Definitions

PSC Component	Definition
Management Commitment	The extent to which senior leaders demonstrate a commitment to protecting employees' mental health.
Management Priority	The emphasis placed by senior leaders on psychological health relative to other organisational goals.
Organisational Communication	The quality and transparency of communication regarding psychological health and safety in the workplace.
Organisational Participation	The involvement of employees and stakeholders in shaping mental health-related policies and practices.

PSC is conceptually considered an upstream organisational factor that influences key aspects of the work environment, particularly job demands and job resources (Dollard, Dormann and Idris, 2019).

- **Job demands** refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that require sustained effort and are associated with certain physiological or psychological costs - examples include high workload, time pressure, and emotional demands.
- **Job resources** are the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that help in achieving work goals, reduce job demands and their associated costs, or stimulate personal growth and development. These may include supervisor support, autonomy, opportunities for learning, and participation in decision-making (Demerouti et al., 2001).

In organisations with a high PSC, where employees perceive senior leadership as strongly committed to psychological health, working conditions tend to be more favourable. Excessive job demands are minimised, work-related stress is actively managed, and job resources are effectively mobilised to enhance motivation, buffer stress, and prevent burnout (Zadow et al., 2019).

Evidence from a scoping review by Amoadu et al. (2023) supports this perspective, showing that PSC significantly shapes job demands, job resources, and workplace social dynamics. High PSC is associated with lower levels of work stressors (such as workload and work–family conflict) and increased access to resources (such as support, autonomy, and decision-making authority). These improvements in job quality protect employee wellbeing and enhance engagement.

Conceptually, these improvements in working conditions, job quality, and employee wellbeing are expected to indirectly enhance organisational outcomes such as performance, productivity, and retention (Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard et al., 2019). Moreover, it is also theorised that PSC may have a direct effect on organisational

performance and productivity by shaping a positive, health-focused organisational climate and culture. A climate that visibly prioritises psychological health and safety and employee wellbeing can enhance employee trust, foster collective efficacy, and improve team functioning. Factors that contribute to performance beyond individual-level wellbeing (Dollard et al., 2019; Zadow et al., 2019). See Figure 1.

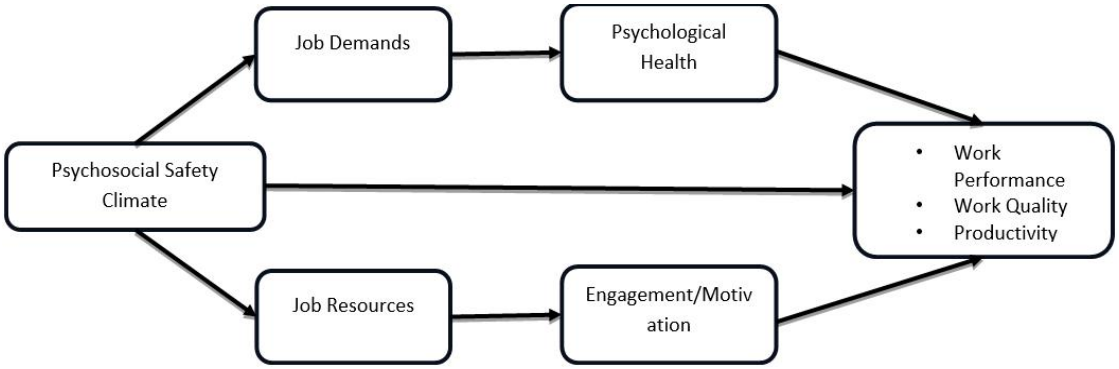

Figure 1. Direct and Indirect Effects of PSC on Organisational Productivity

Ultimately, a strong PSC fosters a positive and psychologically safe work environment, which reduces work stressors, enhances employee wellbeing and motivation, and is expected to contribute to reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, improved employee performance, and greater organisational productivity. While there is growing empirical evidence supporting the relationship between PSC, improved working conditions, and employee outcomes (Zadow et al., 2019; Amoadu et al., 2023), to date there has been no comprehensive attempt to review and critically evaluate the existing research that examines both the pathways from PSC to organisational performance and productivity. A focused synthesis of this literature is needed to better understand the mechanisms at play and to guide future workplace strategies and interventions.

The aim of this review is to identify, examine, and critically evaluate the existing evidence base exploring the link between PSC and organisational performance and productivity. While previous research has firmly established the role of PSC in protecting employee wellbeing, there remains a need to better understand how PSC influences key organisational outcomes, including work performance, absenteeism, presenteeism, employee retention, and turnover.

Research Evidence

Summary of Evidence Linking PSC to Organisational Outcomes

We identified 15 relevant studies that examined the association between PSC and a range of organisational outcomes (see Table 2 for a summary). These studies spanned diverse occupational sectors and employee populations. Sample sizes ranged from as small as 86 participants (Zadow et al., 2023) to over 8,700 (Bronkhorst & Vermeeren, 2016), with most studies drawing on moderate-to-large working populations and using cross-sectional research designs.

A significant proportion of studies focused on healthcare workers and nurses (e.g., Mansour et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Huyghebaert, 2018; Bronkhorst & Vermeeren, 2016), while others explored flight attendants (Mansour & Azeem, 2024), and employees in the transport and logistics sector (Thurston & Glendon, 2018). Several studies targeted broader, varied employee groups, such as those working in multinational companies (Loh

et al., 2024), on construction projects (Xie et al., 2022), or in the general working population (e.g., Sandrin et al., 2022; Gerich et al., 2023). A few focused on more specialised cohorts, including software engineers (Zadow et al., 2023), bank employees and customers (Siami et al., 2023), and employees managing chronic illnesses (DeOrsey & Agars, 2024).

These studies examined a wide array of organisational outcomes, including presenteeism (e.g., Mansour et al., 2022; Biron et al., 2021), absenteeism (e.g., Gerich et al., 2023; McLinton et al., 2019), turnover and turnover intentions (e.g., Mansour & Azeem, 2024; Huyghebaert, 2018), intention to stay or quit (e.g., Thurston & Glendon, 2018; Xie et al., 2022), work performance (e.g., Sandrin et al., 2022; Zadow et al., 2023), and positive service behaviours (Siami et al., 2023). See Table 2 for a summary.

Table 2. Characteristics of studies and key findings.

Study	Sample	Sample size (N); Study design	Organisational Outcome	Key Finding
Mansour et al. (2022)	Registered nurses	344; cross-sectional	Presenteeism	Higher PSC was associated with lower presenteeism.
Siami et al. (2023)	Bank employees and customers	100; cross-sectional	Positive service behaviour	PSC positively predicted service-oriented behaviours.
Sandrin et al. (2022)	Working population	2004; cross-setional	Work performance	High PSC was linked to better self-reported work performance.
Zadow et al. (2023)	University qualified software engineers	86; longitudinal	Work performance	PSC positively influenced work performance.
Gerich et al. (2023)	Working population	411; cross-sectional	Presenteeism	Low PSC was associated with higher presenteeism and increased sickness absence.
			Sickness absence	
DeOrsey & Agars (2024)	Full-time employees who self-identifed as having a chronic illness	288; cross-sectional	Turnover intentions	Employees with chronic illness in high PSC environments reported lower intentions to quit, highlighting PSC's buffering role.
Mansour & Azeem (2024)	Flight attendants	1664; cross-sectional	Turnover	Flight attendants in organisations with strong PSC were less likely to leave their jobs, showing PSC's role in retention.
Loh et al. (2024)	Multinational company	617; cross-sectional	Sickness absence	High PSC was negatively associated with both sickness absence and turnover.
			Turnover	
Thurston & Glendon (2018)	Australian transport and logistics employees	205; cross-sectional	Intention to quit	PSC reduced intention to quit.
			Absenteeism	PSC was positively associated with absenteeism.
Biron et al. (2021)	Working population	275; longitudinal	Presenteeism	PSC was negatively associated with presenteeism.
Bronkhorst & Vermeeren (2016)	Healthcare workers	8,761; cross-sectional	Absenteeism	Among healthcare workers, higher PSC was linked to lower absenteeism and presenteeism rates.
			Presenteeism	
Liu et al. (2020)	Healthcare staff	386; cross-sectional	Presenteeism	PSC was negatively associated with presenteeism.
Huyghebaert (2018)	French nurses	269; cross-sectional	Turnover	PSC was negatively associated with turnover.
Xie et al. (2022)	Workers on construction projects	489; cross-sectional	Intention to stay	High PSC increased workers' intentions to remain.
McLinton et al. (2019)	Healthcare workers	463; cross-sectional	Absence	High PSC reduced workers' absenteeism.

Overall, findings consistently showed that high PSC is associated with positive organisational outcomes, including:

- Lower rates of presenteeism and absenteeism (e.g., Mansour et al., 2022; Gerich et al., 2023; Biron et al., 2021),
- Reduced turnover intentions and higher retention (e.g., Huyghebaert, 2018; DeOrsey & Agars, 2024),
- Enhanced work performance (e.g., Sandrin et al., 2022; Zadow et al., 2023),
- And improved service-related behaviour (Siami et al., 2023).

However, despite the strength of these associations, the majority of studies relied on cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to make causal inferences. Only a small number of longitudinal studies (e.g., Zadow et al., 2023; Biron et al., 2021) have begun to explore PSC's effects over time. This reflects a significant gap in the evidence base, reinforcing the need for more rigorous longitudinal and intervention-based research to assess causality.

Understanding the Mechanisms Linking PSC to Outcomes

There is growing evidence that the relationship between PSC and organisational outcomes is mediated by key psychosocial work mechanisms, particularly job demands, job resources, and employee wellbeing. These mechanisms are well-articulated within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), which suggests that high PSC environments reduce excessive demands (e.g., workload, emotional strain) and enhance supportive resources (e.g., autonomy, supervisor support).

For example:

- **Inoue et al. (2023)** found that PSC was associated with lower psychological distress and greater work engagement in Japanese workers, mediated by perceived job demands and resources.
- **Afsharian et al. (2022)** demonstrated in a healthcare setting that PSC reduced burnout and enhanced job satisfaction through its effects on work environment factors.
- **Jain et al. (2022)** showed that PSC indirectly improved nurses' safety behaviours by increasing access to resources like communication quality and supervisory support.
- **Loh et al. (2024)** also observed that the link between PSC and reduced absenteeism and turnover was partially explained by improved employee wellbeing.

Together, these findings suggest that employee wellbeing and work conditions are critical mechanisms through which PSC impacts organisational performance and staff retention.

The precise mechanisms through which high PSC improves organisational outcomes are complex but appear rooted in the quality of the work environment. High PSC climates are characterised by proactive policies, leadership commitment to psychological health, and open communication. These conditions help reduce harmful job demands (e.g., time pressure, work–family conflict) and amplify resources (e.g., role clarity, support, control), creating a more resilient and motivated workforce. In this way, PSC not only protects employee wellbeing but also acts as a strategic driver of productivity, engagement, and organisational sustainability.

Economic Analysis of Psychosocial Safety Climate

Building on the growing body of evidence linking PSC to organisational outcomes, such as reduced presenteeism, absenteeism, turnover, and enhanced performance, emerging research also highlights the significant financial implications of PSC at both organisational- and national-levels. These economic findings further underscore the strategic value of investing in a strong PSC from a productivity perspective. We found

three studies that estimated the economic cost of PSC on productivity indictors.

Empirical studies suggest that neglecting PSC can result in substantial economic costs due to its influence on workforce health, productivity, and stability. For example, Dollard and Neser (2013) analysed data from 31 European countries and found compelling evidence that low PSC is associated with reduced national productivity. PSC, alongside physical safety climate, was one of two key predictors of both gross domestic product (GDP) and self-reported worker health. Their analysis revealed that worker health explained 13% of the variance in national GDP, with poorer health, often driven by low PSC environments, contributing to diminished economic output. These findings suggest that PSC influences economic performance indirectly, by fostering better employee health, which in turn enhances productivity.

At the organisational level, further evidence from an Australian study of 2,000 employees across two states identified low PSC environments (marked by elevated job strain and workplace bullying) as significant contributors to sickness absence and presenteeism, primarily through increased rates of depression. The study estimated that depression-related productivity losses associated with job strain and bullying cost Australian employers nearly AUD $693 million annually, highlighting the potential scale of avoidable financial loss in the absence of a supportive PSC (McTernan et al., 2013).

A more explicit economic analysis was conducted by Loh et al. (2020) using longitudinal data from a multinational organisation. Their findings showed that employees in low PSC environments took more sick days (up to 8.39 per year) compared to those in high PSC environments (6.18 days). This difference translated to an estimated USD $9.2 million in annual costs attributed to sickness absence alone. Modelling scenarios for an organisation with 5,000 employees, the authors estimated that improving PSC could generate cost savings between USD $0.6 million and $2.7 million annually through reduced absenteeism. In addition to these direct costs, the study found that employee turnover was significantly higher in low PSC environments (up to 39%) compared to high PSC settings (14%). Factoring in recruitment, onboarding, and training, the potential annual savings in turnover-related costs were estimated at USD $2.7 million, if high PSC levels were maintained across the workforce.

This small body of research underscores the view that PSC is not only a driver of employee wellbeing and organisational performance, but also a key economic lever. Investing in strategies that enhance PSC (such as leadership commitment to mental health, inclusive policy development, and open communication) can yield tangible returns by reducing health-related costs and improving workforce stability. In this way, PSC emerges as a critical, yet often underutilised, element of sustainable and cost-effective organisational practice.

Overview and Evidence Gaps

The existing evidence base establishes a clear link between PSC and workplace outcomes, particularly in relation to productivity, engagement, absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover. High PSC environments foster improved job resources, reduced job demands, and better psychological wellbeing. It appears these, in turn, enhance employee performance and the organisation's overall productivity (Amoadu et al., 2023); McLinton et al., 2018). & Vermeeren, 2016). Research demonstrates that workplaces with high PSC not only experience fewer health-related absences but also see improvements in work engagement, job satisfaction, and overall workforce stability, all of which contribute to sustained productivity gains (Dollard et al., 2011).

However, a critical gap identified by this review is a limited focus on performance indicators. While many studies explore PSC's impact on job demands, resources, and wellbeing, fewer studies systematically assess its direct impact on productivity, work performance, and organisational outcomes. To date, there has been limited effort to try and critically review and summarise the small, but growing evidence base exploring the link between PSC and organisational productivity and performance. Future research should incorporate objective measures of performance, such as absenteeism rates, turnover, and financial productivity, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how PSC influences both employee wellbeing and organisational success.

There are also gaps in our understanding of the mechanisms through which PSC influences productivity over time. Evidence confirms that high PSC workplaces increase job resources and buffers the effects of high job demands. Yet, the causal pathways linking these effects to tangible productivity metrics (e.g., revenue per employee, task completion rates, customer satisfaction scores) require further exploration. In particular, a meta-analysis would provide important insights to the strength of these relationships across studies. Moreover, longitudinal studies which investigate the economic benefits of PSC, such as cost savings from reduced absenteeism or improved retention, are limited.

Additionally, the role of PSC in different organisational contexts remains underexamined, with most studies focusing on healthcare and high-stress professions (McLinton et al., 2018; Winwood et al., 2013). Further research is needed to understand whether similar benefits are observed across diverse sectors such as academia, manufacturing, construction, and finance, to name a few. The literature also establishes that PSC moderates job demands and stress-related outcomes. However, less is known about how organisational interventions which are targeted at enhancing PSC translate into long-term improvements in productivity and financial performance.

Taken together, this review underscores the growing recognition of PSC as a key predictor of organisational productivity and work performance. For policymakers, the key takeaway is the need to emphasise the important role of PSC in occupational health and workforce management policies and practices. Industry leaders should prioritise PSC-enhancing initiatives. This includes embedding values surrounding mental health and wellbeing into leadership development training, programmes, and integrating PSC considerations into occupational health and safety regulations and broader workplace mental health and wellbeing initiatives. Additionally, further investment in research is needed to develop standardised measures of PSC's impact on organisational performance, particularly in sectors where productivity gains may be more difficult to quantify. A more nuanced understanding of how PSC interacts with broader economic and labour market trends will be essential in shaping future policies aimed at promoting sustainable, high-performing workplaces.

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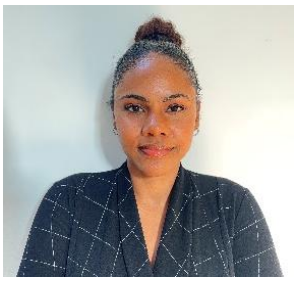

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