

Organizational Trust, Psychological Safety and Employee Advocacy in Hybrid Work Environments: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The transition from conventional office-based work to hybrid work environments has significantly changed the nature of employee–organization relationships. While hybrid work provides employees with greater flexibility and autonomy, it may also create challenges related to communication, trust, social connection, visibility, and psychological security. In this context, organizational trust and psychological safety have emerged as important factors influencing how employees perceive and represent their organizations. The present study examines the relationship between organizational trust, psychological safety, and employee advocacy in hybrid work environments. Organizational trust is considered in terms of employees' confidence in organizational leadership, communication, fairness, and managerial support, while psychological safety reflects employees' willingness to express opinions, raise concerns, ask questions, and acknowledge mistakes without fear of negative consequences. Employee advocacy represents employees' willingness to recommend their organization, speak positively about it, and support its reputation among external stakeholders. The study proposes an empirical framework in which organizational trust and psychological safety function as key predictors of employee advocacy. A structured questionnaire may be administered to employees working under hybrid arrangements, and the collected data can be analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, multiple regression, and, where appropriate, mediation analysis. The study is expected to contribute to the growing literature on hybrid work, employee attitudes, organizational behaviour, and strategic human resource management. The findings can help organizations develop trust-based leadership practices, psychologically safe work cultures, and stronger employee advocacy.

Keywords: Organizational Trust, Psychological Safety, Employee Advocacy, Hybrid Work, Employee Behaviour, Workplace Culture, Human Resource Management

1. Introduction

The nature of work has undergone substantial transformation in recent years. Advances in digital technologies, changing employee expectations, and the widespread adoption of remote working practices have encouraged organizations to move beyond traditional office-based work arrangements. One of the most prominent outcomes of this transformation is the emergence of hybrid work environments, where employees divide their working time between organizational offices and remote locations. Hybrid work has become an important organizational arrangement because it combines elements of physical and virtual work while providing employees with greater flexibility.

Although hybrid work offers several potential advantages, it also creates new challenges for organizations. Employees may experience reduced face-to-face interaction, communication gaps, difficulties in maintaining team cohesion, concerns regarding visibility and career development, and uncertainty about managerial expectations. Consequently, organizational effectiveness in a hybrid environment depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the quality of relationships between employees, managers, and the organization.

2. Background of the Study

Hybrid work represents a significant change in the traditional employment relationship. In conventional workplaces, employees and managers often interact physically on a daily basis. Such interaction provides opportunities for informal communication, relationship building, immediate feedback, and observation of organizational behaviour. Hybrid work reduces some of these interactions and increases reliance on digital communication.

This change creates a greater need for organizational trust. Managers must depend on employees to complete responsibilities without constant physical supervision, while employees must trust managers to evaluate their performance fairly despite reduced visibility. Trust therefore becomes an important mechanism through which hybrid work relationships can be maintained.

Psychological safety is similarly relevant because digital and hybrid communication may influence how employees express themselves. Employees may hesitate to challenge managerial decisions or communicate concerns if they believe that their comments could negatively affect their careers. A psychologically safe environment can reduce such concerns and encourage open communication.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Organizational Trust

Organizational trust has been widely recognized as an important component of organizational relationships. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) conceptualized trust as the willingness of one party to become vulnerable to another party based on positive expectations regarding the latter's intentions or behaviour. In an organizational setting, employees may develop trust when they perceive leaders as competent, honest, fair, and supportive.

Dirks and Ferrin (2002) demonstrated that trust in leadership is associated with several important employee outcomes, including job attitudes, performance-related outcomes, and organizational citizenship behaviours. Trust becomes particularly significant in situations involving uncertainty and interdependence.

In hybrid work environments, uncertainty may increase because employees and managers interact through both physical and digital channels. Organizational trust can consequently provide a foundation for cooperation when direct monitoring is limited.

3.2 Psychological Safety

Psychological safety was prominently developed by Edmondson (1999), who described it as a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Employees in psychologically safe environments feel able to speak up, ask for assistance, discuss mistakes, and provide suggestions.

Psychological safety is particularly important for learning and team effectiveness. When employees do not fear negative interpersonal consequences, they are more likely to share information and contribute ideas.

Hybrid work may create both opportunities and challenges for psychological safety. Digital communication can facilitate access to colleagues but may also reduce informal interactions. Therefore, organizations need deliberate practices that encourage openness and inclusion among physically dispersed employees.

3.3 Employee Advocacy

Employee advocacy refers broadly to employees voluntarily communicating favourable attitudes toward their organization. It may include recommending the organization as a workplace, speaking positively about the organization, supporting its reputation, and sharing organizational achievements.

Employee advocacy is closely related to employee engagement, organizational identification, organizational commitment, and positive employee experience. Employees who perceive their workplace positively may become informal ambassadors for their organization.

In the contemporary digital environment, employee advocacy has acquired additional importance because employees can communicate organizational experiences through professional and social networks. Consequently, employee advocacy can influence employer branding and organizational reputation.

3.4 Hybrid Work Environment

Hybrid work combines remote and office-based work. It provides flexibility but also requires organizations to manage communication, coordination, performance evaluation, inclusion, and organizational culture across physical and virtual settings.

The effectiveness of hybrid work depends on organizational policies as well as employee perceptions. Employees need clarity regarding expectations, communication norms, autonomy, performance assessment, and access to organizational resources.

Trust and psychological safety can therefore serve as important social foundations of successful hybrid work.

3.5 Relationship Between Organizational Trust and Employee Advocacy

Employees who trust their organization are more likely to believe that the organization acts in their interests and fulfils its commitments. Such positive perceptions can encourage favourable organizational attitudes and behaviours. Trust may consequently contribute to employees' willingness to recommend and positively represent their organization.

3.6 Relationship Between Psychological Safety and Employee Advocacy

Psychological safety encourages employees to communicate openly and participate actively in organizational life. When employees feel respected and valued, they may develop stronger positive perceptions of their organization. These perceptions may contribute to employee advocacy.

3.7 Combined Influence of Trust and Psychological Safety

Organizational trust and psychological safety represent related but distinct aspects of the employee experience. Trust concerns confidence in organizational actors and systems, whereas psychological safety concerns the perceived safety of interpersonal risk-taking. Together, they may create an organizational environment in which employees feel both secure in their relationship with the organization and comfortable expressing themselves within it.

This combination may provide a stronger foundation for employee advocacy than either factor alone.

4. Research Gap

Existing literature has extensively examined organizational trust, psychological safety, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and workplace behaviour. However, several gaps remain.

First, much of the earlier research was conducted in traditional office-based environments. The increasing adoption of hybrid work requires these relationships to be reconsidered in a context characterized by physical and virtual interaction.

Second, psychological safety research has frequently focused on team learning, voice behaviour, innovation, and performance. Comparatively less attention has been given to its potential relationship with employee advocacy.

Third, organizational trust has generally been studied in relation to commitment, satisfaction, performance, and citizenship behaviour. Its combined relationship with psychological safety and employee advocacy in hybrid work environments remains an area requiring further empirical investigation.

5. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the level of organizational trust among employees working in hybrid environments.
2. To assess the level of psychological safety experienced by employees in hybrid workplaces.
3. To examine the level of employee advocacy among employees working under hybrid arrangements.
4. To analyse the relationship between organizational trust and employee advocacy.

5. To examine the relationship between psychological safety and employee advocacy.

6. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between organizational trust and employee advocacy in hybrid work environments.

H₁₁: There is a significant relationship between organizational trust and employee advocacy in hybrid work environments.

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between psychological safety and employee advocacy in hybrid work environments.

H₁₂: There is a significant relationship between psychological safety and employee advocacy in hybrid work environments.

7. Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework considers:

Independent Variables

- Organizational Trust
- Psychological Safety

Dependent Variable

- Employee Advocacy

The proposed relationship can be represented as:

Organizational Trust → Employee Advocacy

Psychological Safety → Employee Advocacy

Organizational Trust + Psychological Safety → Employee Advocacy

The model assumes that employees who experience greater organizational trust and psychological safety are more likely to demonstrate positive advocacy behaviours toward their organization.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

The study may employ a descriptive and analytical research design. A quantitative approach can be used to examine the relationships among organizational trust, psychological safety, and employee advocacy.

8.2 Population of the Study

The population may consist of employees working in organizations that follow hybrid work arrangements, where employees regularly divide their working time between organizational premises and remote locations.

8.3 Sample Size

For an empirical study, a sample of approximately 300–500 respondents can provide a suitable basis for statistical analysis, depending on the research setting and sampling feasibility.

8.4 Sampling Technique

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling may be adopted to identify employees who have sufficient experience with hybrid work arrangements.

8.5 Data Collection

Primary data may be collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire can use a five-point Likert scale:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Secondary information may be obtained from academic journals, books, research reports, and relevant organizational behaviour literature.

9. Measurement of Variables

Organizational Trust

Organizational trust may be measured through statements concerning:

- Trust in senior management
- Reliability of organizational leadership
- Fairness in organizational decisions
- Management's commitment to employees
- Transparency of communication
- Confidence in organizational policies

Psychological Safety

Items may assess:

- Freedom to express opinions
- Ability to ask questions
- Comfort in reporting mistakes
- Freedom to disagree respectfully
- Acceptance of new ideas
- Absence of fear regarding interpersonal consequences

Employee Advocacy

Employee advocacy may be measured through:

- Willingness to recommend the organization
- Speaking positively about the organization
- Recommending the organization as a workplace
- Sharing positive organizational experiences
- Defending the organization's reputation
- Feeling proud to represent the organization

10. Statistical Techniques

The collected data may be analyzed using SPSS, R, Python, or equivalent statistical software.

Descriptive Statistics

Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation may be used to describe respondents and major study variables.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha can be used to assess internal consistency of the measurement scales.

A value of approximately 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for exploratory social-science research.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficient can be used to determine the direction and strength of relationships among organizational trust, psychological safety, and employee advocacy.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression can be used to examine the combined effect of organizational trust and psychological safety on employee advocacy.

The model may be represented as:

$$EA = a + b_1OT + b_2PS + e$$

Where:

- EA = Employee Advocacy
- OT = Organizational Trust
- PS = Psychological Safety
- a = Constant
- b₁, b₂ = Regression coefficients

- e = Error term

The statistical significance of the regression coefficients can be evaluated using the corresponding p-values.

11. Proposed Data Analysis Structure

The empirical findings section can be organized as follows:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables may include:

- Gender
- Age
- Educational qualification
- Work experience
- Organizational position
- Industry
- Frequency of remote work
- Duration of hybrid work experience

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Organizational Trust	—	—
Psychological Safety	—	—
Employee Advocacy	—	—

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Organizational Trust	—	—
Psychological Safety	—	—
Employee Advocacy	—	—

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	OT	PS	EA
Organizational Trust	1	—	—
Psychological Safety	—	1	—
Employee Advocacy	—	—	1

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	β	t-value	p-value
Organizational Trust	—	—	—
Psychological Safety	—	—	—

Dependent Variable: Employee Advocacy

The regression model can additionally report R^2 , Adjusted R^2 , F-value, and significance level.

12. Expected Findings and Discussion

Based on the theoretical framework, the study expects organizational trust to have a positive association with employee advocacy. Employees who perceive their organization as reliable, fair, transparent, and supportive may be more willing to communicate positive views about the organization.

Psychological safety is also expected to demonstrate a positive relationship with employee advocacy. Employees who feel comfortable expressing opinions and raising concerns may develop stronger perceptions of organizational inclusion and support. Such perceptions can contribute to positive organizational representation.

The combined influence of organizational trust and psychological safety may be particularly important in hybrid work environments. Hybrid employees operate across physical and digital spaces and may experience greater uncertainty regarding communication, performance expectations, and organizational visibility. Trust can reduce uncertainty concerning organizational intentions, while psychological safety can facilitate open communication and interpersonal confidence.

13. Managerial Implications

The study has several implications for human resource managers and organizational leaders.

13.1 Strengthening Trust-Based Leadership

Managers should emphasize transparency, consistency, fairness, and reliability. Employees in hybrid environments should be evaluated based on outcomes rather than physical visibility.

13.2 Developing Psychological Safety

Organizations should create channels through which employees can express concerns, provide feedback, and propose new ideas without fear of negative consequences.

13.3 Improving Hybrid Communication

Organizations should establish clear communication norms regarding meetings, response expectations, availability, and information sharing.

13.4 Supporting Employee Voice

Employees should be encouraged to participate in organizational decision-making. Their suggestions and concerns should receive meaningful managerial responses.

13.5 Developing Employee Advocacy

Organizations should focus on improving actual employee experiences rather than simply asking employees to promote the organization. Positive advocacy is more sustainable when it emerges from trust, fairness, meaningful work, and psychological safety.

14. Limitations of the Study

The study may have certain limitations. First, if convenience or purposive sampling is used, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all employees or industries. Second, the use of self-reported questionnaire data may introduce response bias. Third, cross-sectional data can identify relationships among variables but may provide limited evidence regarding long-term causal relationships. Fourth, hybrid work practices differ across industries and organizations, which may influence employee perceptions. Finally, organizational trust and psychological safety may also be influenced by leadership style, organizational culture, job characteristics, and individual differences that are not fully captured in the proposed model.

15. Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies can extend the present framework by incorporating additional variables such as:

- Employee engagement
- Organizational commitment
- Leadership style
- Perceived organizational support
- Work-life balance
- Job satisfaction

- Organizational identification
- Employee voice behaviour
- Digital communication quality
- Remote-work autonomy

Longitudinal studies could further examine whether changes in organizational trust and psychological safety lead to changes in employee advocacy over time. Comparative studies across industries, organizational sizes, and countries could also provide broader insights into the dynamics of employee advocacy in hybrid work environments.

16. Conclusion

Hybrid work has transformed the way employees interact with their organizations and colleagues. While technological infrastructure provides the foundation for hybrid work, organizational relationships remain central to its effectiveness. Organizational trust and psychological safety are particularly important because employees working across physical and virtual environments require confidence in organizational leadership as well as freedom to communicate openly.

The present study proposes that organizational trust and psychological safety are important predictors of employee advocacy. Employees who trust their organization and feel psychologically safe may be more willing to recommend their organization, communicate positive experiences, and represent the organization favourably to external stakeholders.

The study therefore positions employee advocacy not simply as an outcome of communication strategies but as a behavioural consequence of a positive organizational environment. For organizations operating in hybrid work settings, developing trust-based leadership, transparent communication, psychological safety, and employee voice can contribute to stronger and more sustainable employee advocacy.

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