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## Management Influence on Psychological Safety: Results from Employees in U.S. Federal Government Organizations in the State of Hawaii

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### Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study aimed to investigate how federal employees in Hawaii described psychological safety and the impact of their supervisors' influence on psychological safety at work. This study examined the phenomena of psychological safety in the workplace using transformational leadership theory and the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) theory as its theoretical underpinnings. In conducting this study, two research questions (RQs) were employed: 1) How do federal government employees describe psychological safety in their workplace? and 2) How do federal government employees describe their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in their workplace? To reach a total of 46 participants for the study, the study recruited from an estimated 12,053 federal government workers who were members of the LinkedIn group for Federal Employees of the U.S. Government. In addition to the study questionnaire, 14 of the questionnaire respondents took part in a subsequent Zoom interview. The six-step method developed by Braun and Clarke was used to analyze the data for relevant themes. Six themes were consequently found to address the RQs. The results imply that motivation and organizational policy have an impact on behavioral output, which in turn affects how well individuals contribute, express ideas, speak up, and participate in a psychologically safe workplace. It is advised that this study be replicated for future research in order to cover all levels of government (e.g., municipal, state, and federal) across the United States and various government demographics.

### Keywords

Psychological safety, transformational leadership, psychosocial safety climate, federal employees in Hawaii, workplace safety in government, organizational development, organizational leadership, qualitative descriptive research

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## 1. Background

Psychological safety, a term introduced by [Schein and Bennis in 1965](#), denotes a space where individuals can express themselves without fear of judgment. This concept, which was largely overlooked until the late 20th century, gained traction as rapid business environment changes highlighted its role in organizational adaptability ([Edmondson, 2018](#); [Frazier et al., 2017](#)). [Edmondson \(1999\)](#) redefined it from an individual cognitive state to a characteristic of organizational culture, underscoring its influence on employee engagement and productivity.

Current studies have extensively examined psychological safety's broad antecedents and outcomes, yet more niche investigations remain. A significant research gap pertains to the influences of various leadership styles on psychological safety. [Maximo et al. \(2019\)](#) linked authentic leadership with trust and psychological safety, but other leadership paradigms remain unexplored. Similarly, [Frazier and Tupper \(2018\)](#) emphasized the role of supervisor perceptions in shaping employee behavior but failed to delve into employee perceptions of these influences.

Moreover, while much of the literature focuses on corporate settings, there's a paucity of knowledge on psychological safety in non-corporate environments, like federal government organizations. Existing studies have been localized to specific sectors and regions, emphasizing a need for diverse research settings, such as governmental entities in Hawaii.

This study, therefore, sought to fill these gaps by examining supervisor influences on psychological safety within federal government organizations in Hawaii. The findings aim to contribute to broader applications, potentially informing policies and strategies in diverse organizational contexts.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

There is a discernible gap in the literature regarding the qualitative exploration of how federal government employees perceive psychological safety, especially in relation to their supervisors' influence on psychological safety within the workplace context. Notably, the majority of studies on psychological safety have predominantly centered on for-profit organizations and have been quantitative or mixed-methods in design. Given this background, there is a pressing need to investigate the role of leadership in fostering psychological safety within non-profit sectors, such as federal government organizations.

To address this gap, this study specifically targeted federal government employees in Hawaii, leveraging qualitative methodologies to delve into their experiences and perceptions. By examining the narratives of 46 federal government employees in Hawaii who have been with their respective organizations for over two years, the study aimed to provide evidence-based insights that can aid federal government leaders in promoting an organizational culture emphasizing psychological safety. Such insights are pivotal, as cultivating psychological safety has profound implications for enhancing the well-being, productivity, adaptability, and overall performance of federal government entities.

A comprehensive discussion of the methodologies and results can be found in the subsequent sections of this study.

#### 1.1.1 Research Questions

This study delves into the perceptions of federal government employees regarding psychological safety and its connection to supervisory influence. Despite considerable research on psychological safety across various disciplines, there remains a noted gap in understanding the role of leaders in shaping psychological safety, particularly within non-corporate entities such as government organizations ([Lee et al., 2020](#); [Page et al., 2019](#)). Underpinned by the transformational leadership theory ([Burns, 1978](#)) and the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) theory ([Dollard & Bakker, 2010](#)), this investigation sought to address this gap.

The guiding research questions used in the study were:

*RQ1:* How do federal government employees describe psychological safety in their workplace?

*RQ2:* How do federal government employees describe their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in their workplace?

To obtain comprehensive insights, the study employed open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The questionnaire was assessed by a panel of scholarly experts, followed by field testing to measure validity and applicability to the phenomenon under investigation. Data collection, facilitated via the platforms LinkedIn and SurveyMonkey, and inclusive of voluntary virtual interviews on Zoom, aimed to gather rich, meaningful perspectives on the topic.

### 1.1.2 Theoretical Framework

The foundation of the study is anchored on two principal theories: Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978) and Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) Theory (Dollard & Bakker, 2010), which guide the exploration of employees' perceptions of their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in federal government organizations.

#### Transformational Leadership Theory:

Burns (1978) posits that transformational leadership is a process where leaders and followers uplift each other to higher levels of motivation and morality. This theory provides a lens for examining the interaction and influence of leaders in promoting a higher moral position, which can motivate individuals to follow a leader. Key pillars of transformational leadership, as identified in the literature, include:

1. Inspirational Motivation: Leaders communicate a compelling vision and mission, instilling a sense of purpose and challenge in their followers (Al-edenat, 2018; Khan et al., 2016).
2. Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders encourage innovation and creativity among their followers by fostering a safe environment where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities (Chebon et al., 2019; J. Yin et al., 2019).
3. Idealized Influence: Leaders act as role models, earning trust and respect through their actions, inspiring a shared vision and engagement (Krishna, 2011; J. Yin et al., 2019).
4. Individualized Consideration: Leaders mentor their followers, treating them as valuable contributors to the organization, and tailoring their support to the unique abilities and needs of each follower (Khan et al., 2016; Turnnidge & Côté, 2019).

These dimensions of transformational leadership are hypothesized to be fundamental in shaping the values of followers, fostering a sense of psychological safety, and empowering employees to engage in interpersonal risk-taking within an organization (Carmeli et al., 2014).

#### Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) Theory:

The PSC theory, developed by Dollard and Bakker (2010), serves as a framework for examining the policies, practices, and procedures implemented within an organization to protect workers' psychological health and safety. PSC is conceptualized as an organizational resource that influences worker well-being, engagement, and productivity. Key components of the PSC theory as related to this study include:

1. Management Commitment: Leadership support for stress prevention, demonstrated through their involvement in and commitment to achieving a psychologically healthy and safe work environment (Dollard & Bakker, 2010).
2. Supervisor Influence: The behaviors and attitudes of supervisors that can shape the PSC, either directly or indirectly, through organizational policies, procedures, and practices (Dollard & Bakker, 2010).
3. Worker Well-being: The PSC is hypothesized to have direct and indirect effects on workers' psychological health, mediated by factors such as emotional exhaustion and workplace mistreatment (Dollard et al., 2017; Zadow et al., 2017).

This theory is pertinent to the present study as it provides a comprehensive approach to understanding how leader influences, through enacted policies and practices, contribute to the establishment of a psychosocial safety climate. This, in turn, is hypothesized to influence the psychological safety of employees within federal government organizations.

In summary, this study leverages the Transformational Leadership Theory to examine how leaders, through their moral, motivating, and engaging behaviors, may foster a sense of psychological safety among their followers. Concurrently, the PSC Theory is used to explore the structural and policy-related aspects of organizations, particularly how leaders influence the psychosocial safety climate through their commitment and policies that promote workers' psychological health. Together, these two theories guide the research questions aimed at addressing the gap in the literature concerning employees' descriptions of their supervisors' influence on their perception of psychological safety within federal government organizations.

## 2. Methodology

In terms of methodology, a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design was employed. Factors justifying this methodology are detailed in the following sub-sections, including the study's purpose and rationale. Furthermore, population and data selection are discussed, detailing the qualitative sample size and the recruitment strategy. Throughout the study, emphasis was placed on the trustworthiness of the research to ensure credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability were maintained. Ethical considerations complemented the methodology to ensure the study was guided and conducted with the utmost respect for human participants.

### 2.1 Purpose of the Study

This qualitative descriptive study aimed to explore how federal government employees in Hawaii describe psychological safety and the influence of their supervisors on their psychological safety in the workplace. The study sought to address the existing gap of guidance and understanding in psychological safety within government organizations. The theoretical foundations for this study were the transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) and the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) theory (Dollard & Bakker, 2010).

### 2.2 Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative method was selected to conduct open-ended explorations of participants' perceptions of supervisors' influence on employee psychological safety within the context of U.S. federal government organizations. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of phenomena in their natural settings, grounded in the specific perspectives of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2019; R. K. Yin, 2017). Although the qualitative method may limit the transferability of findings to other settings due to its richly contextualized data, this method was deemed fitting for the study's intention to understand the lived experiences of the participants rather than confirming specific relationships (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). This choice was informed by recommendations for further qualitative investigations in the field of psychological safety (Maximo et al., 2019).

### 2.3 Rationale for Research Design

A qualitative descriptive design was utilized to explore employee psychological safety and supervisors' influence on the psychological safety within U.S. federal government organizations. This design allows for the acquisition of direct and candid information from participants about their lived experiences (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Unlike other qualitative designs, the qualitative descriptive design remains close to the data and free of predefined theoretical emphasis or prejudice (Sandelowski, 2010).

Other qualitative designs, including phenomenological, grounded theory, case study, and narrative inquiry approaches, were considered but deemed unsuitable due to the distinct focus and requirements of this study. The primary goal was to gather unfiltered, detailed descriptions of participants' perceptions of leader influences on psychological safety, rather than to generate theories or deeply explore subjective experiences.

### 2.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews and online open-ended questionnaires. Participants were expected to share their perspectives in response to open-ended questions, allowing for rich, contextual data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2019). The qualitative methodology was chosen due to its potential to uncover how employees in a natural setting describe their supervisors' influence on their perceptions of psychological safety.

### 2.5 Population and Data Collection

The study was conducted in the State of Hawaii, focusing on federal government organization employees. From the Federal Employees of the U.S. Government LinkedIn Group, comprised of an estimated 12,053 members, a sample of 46 federal government employees were selected based on two criteria: (1) being a current employee in a federal government organization within Hawaii and (2) having an employment duration exceeding two years.

### 2.6 Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is crucial to enhancing the quality of research findings, providing confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used in a study (Connelly, 2016; R. K. Yin, 2017). Essential criteria for qualitative research

include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For this study with a focus on leadership and psychological safety, quality assurance measures were implemented using both general qualitative methods and specific criteria tailored to each method used during the study.

The quality assurance measures to ensure trustworthiness include the components of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

1. Credibility: Emphasizes confidence in the study's findings and their alignment with reality (Connelly, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2019). In this study:
  - A thorough data collection plan was adopted that considered the culture of U.S federal government organizations.
  - Research was conducted in natural settings with relevant participants, focusing on government organizations in Hawaii.
  - Member checking and thematic analysis techniques were used to enhance credibility and reduce biases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).
2. Dependability: Concerns the consistency and reliability of research procedures (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study:
  - Rigorous and transparent data collection procedures were employed.
  - An audit trail, which includes detailed notes on the research process, was established to enhance dependability.
3. Transferability: Deals with the applicability of the research findings in different contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study:
  - A detailed description of participants and research processes was provided.
  - Bracketing was used during data collection and analysis to reduce biases and enhance data transferability, supported by a reflexive journal (Janak, 2018).
4. Confirmability: Refers to the neutrality of the study, ensuring data interpretation isn't influenced by the researcher's biases (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this study:
  - An audit trail was used to detail decisions and reflections throughout the research process.
  - Researcher reflexivity was emphasized, with bracketing techniques applied to counteract biases, supported by a reflexive journal (Janak, 2018).

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, ethical standards were consistently maintained. The research process adhered to the principles of the Belmont Report, emphasizing respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Belmont Report, 1979). By ensuring ethics were in place from the start of the study, protections for all participants and their data were placed at the forefront allowing a comprehensive and protected process from recruitment to data analysis and post conduct of the study. The following details the steps taken to ensure this was successful.

Participant autonomy was respected through a clear and voluntary informed consent process. The online questionnaire commenced with terms of informed consent, which participants were required to understand and agree to before proceeding. By using stringent measures to protect participant identity, an enhanced level of assurance was conveyed to participants that the access to all study information, including raw data, would be safeguarded and accessible to only the researcher.

Data security was prioritized; questionnaire data were encrypted per SurveyMonkey guidelines, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Audio recordings from Zoom interviews were securely downloaded and stored, safeguarding participant privacy and affirming the principle of beneficence.

The principle of justice was upheld through careful handling of participant information, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Participants were also informed of the right to terminate their involvement at any stage, emphasizing the voluntary nature of the study.

Although participants were recruited from the researcher's resident region of Hawaii, care was taken to avoid conflicts of interest and coercion. The researcher remained impartial and maintained integrity throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. Recruitment via LinkedIn, a platform unaffiliated with the researcher, was chosen strategically to mitigate bias. To further enhance the study's trustworthiness, an expert panel of scholars was consulted, and a field test of data instruments was conducted with individuals similar to, but not part of, the target population. The researcher practiced bracketing during data collection and analysis to identify and mitigate potential biases.

After the study's completion, electronic data were transferred to a password-protected USB thumb drive and hard-copy data were securely stored in manila folders labeled with participant pseudonym and data source (e.g., questionnaire or interview). Both the electronic data and hard-copy data were locked in file cabinets in the researcher's personal office. The data will be retained for a minimum of three years following the study's conclusion. After a period of three years, electronic files will be permanently deleted from the USB thumb drive, and hard copies will be shredded and discarded.

As outlined above, the researcher vigilantly addressed all matters relevant to study data management, data analysis, and publication of findings to ensure adherence to the Belmont Report's fundamental principles ([Belmont Report, 1979](#); [Marshall et al., 2013](#)).

## 2.8 Summary

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to explore perceptions of psychological safety among federal government employees in Hawaii and the influence of their supervisors on the psychological safety in the workplace. The underpinnings for this inquiry were based on the transformational leadership theory ([Burns, 1978](#)) and the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) theory ([Dollard & Bakker, 2010](#)). A qualitative method was deemed appropriate to facilitate open-ended exploration of participants' experiences, aiming to garner rich, context-specific data from their natural settings.

The research design of choice was qualitative descriptive, which captures direct information from participants about their experiences without the influence of predefined theoretical emphasis. Data was gathered through individual semi-structured interviews and online open-ended questionnaires, with participants drawn from the Federal Employees of the U.S. Government LinkedIn Group. A total of 46 participants met the criteria of being current employees of a federal government organization in Hawaii with over two years of service.

Trustworthiness was a prime focus throughout the entirety of the study, emphasizing criteria and quality assurance measures based on credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Additionally quality assurance measures included member checking, thematic analysis techniques, audit trails, bracketing, and researcher reflexivity.

Ethical considerations were paramount, aligning with the [Belmont Report's principles \(1979\)](#) and respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Participants' autonomy was upheld through informed consent; data security measures included encryption and pseudonym assignment; and measures ensuring participant confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary involvement were strictly adhered to. The study employed additional strategies to minimize bias, including consultation with scholarly experts, field testing, and rigorous data management protocols.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 Organization Safety

In the field of organizational safety, three key concepts emerge: organizational safety, organizational climate, and safety climate. Organizational safety is a multifaceted construct, representative of safety beliefs and practices founded on the social structure of the organization. [Le Coze \(2019\)](#) suggests that organization safety is shaped by organizational rules and integrates both human and social aspects as well as environmental and managerial components. Indeed, a dynamic shift in human and social interactions can potentially compromise safety, as underlined by [Hasan et al. \(2019\)](#). [Trinchero et al. \(2020\)](#) further highlight that the efficacy of organizational safety is contingent on employees believing in their ability to influence safety procedures and outcomes.

Organizational climate, on the other hand, pertains to how employees perceive their working environment, encompassing workplace behaviors, interactions, and energy. As [Schneider et al. \(2017\)](#) and [J. Hu et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasize, the organizational climate affects productivity, employee satisfaction, and overall motivation. When there's an emphasis on openness and psychological safety within the organizational climate, it fosters improved communication, creativity, and a convergence of perception and reality.



Safety climate, as described by [Huang et al. \(2020\)](#), emerges from both supervisory influences and organizational commitment to employee safety. It encompasses both physical and psychological safety dimensions. Physical safety entails the elimination of workplace hazards and the assurance of employee well-being, as highlighted by [Jonathan \(2016\)](#) and [Stoewen \(2016\)](#). Meanwhile, psychological safety, as detailed by [Stephen et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Kostovich et al. \(2020\)](#), is characterized by environments where individuals can freely express ideas and concerns without fear of judgment, thereby fostering innovation and organizational learning.

A harmonious interplay of these concepts, as deduced from the works of [Le Coze \(2019\)](#), [Griffin and Curcuruto \(2016\)](#), and [Schneider et al. \(2017\)](#), suggests that organizational safety, organizational climate, and safety climate are often interwoven, guiding the perception of safety and productivity in the workplace. The literature underscores the paramount importance of psychological safety in nurturing a robust organizational safety climate, highlighting the need for proactive measures that prioritize both psychological and physical well-being to achieve optimal organizational outcomes.

### 3.2 Leadership and Psychological Safety

Leadership behavior critically shapes the psychological safety within an organization. The crux of the available literature underscores the intrinsic link between leadership practices and the ensuing psychological safety of an organization. A leader's actions directly inform team members about organizational norms and expectations. Notably, [Frazier et al. \(2017\)](#) highlighted how team members respond primarily to a leader's behavior, making leaders instrumental in setting the tone for psychological safety.

Leaders who prioritize transparency, approachability, and regular feedback foster an environment where team members feel safe, facilitating proactive information sharing, innovation, and continuous learning. This positive climate emerges when leaders encourage open communication, establish trust, and demonstrate emotional vulnerability. Policies and practices reflecting trust, candidness, and optimism have also been underscored as pivotal in enhancing an organization's psychological safety.

Emphasizing the power of leadership practices, [Chughtai \(2016\)](#) affirmed that the leadership type dictates the psychological safety climate by inspiring employees and giving them a voice. This sentiment is echoed in numerous studies, including those by [Appelbaum et al. \(2016\)](#), [Guchait et al. \(2019\)](#), and [Y. Hu et al. \(2018\)](#), all pointing towards the significant influence supervisors wield through leadership practices.

Transformational leadership, in particular, has garnered attention for its profound influence on psychological safety. Such leaders not only create an atmosphere conducive for learning and high performance but also ensure that employees feel free to express their ideas, reasoning, and undertaking of risks. Empirical studies, like the one by [Li, Sajjad, et al. \(2019\)](#), indicate that under transformational leadership, employees tend to trust their leaders more, learn from their mistakes, and develop innovatively.

Leadership behaviors and styles, especially transformational leadership, play a crucial role in enhancing psychological safety within an organization. This interplay between leadership and psychological safety emerges as an essential field of study, with existing literature mostly leaning towards quantitative or mixed-method approaches. Future research could benefit from a qualitative exploration, focusing on personal experiences and contexts, to further understand this relationship.

### 3.3 Factors that Influence Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is integral to fostering innovation and thereby elevating organizational success. The aspects influencing psychological safety encompass individual behavior, mutual trust and respect, group dynamics, organizational climate, communication, and the inclusion of practice fields and simulation spaces.

**Individual Behavior:** Individuals in psychologically safe environments are free to express opinions, acknowledge mistakes, and engage without fear of negative consequences. Studies, like those by [Kim et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Roussin et al. \(2018\)](#), emphasize the pivotal role of individual behavior in enhancing psychological safety in teams and the broader organization. Moreover, the concept of self-efficacy impacts one's confidence and function in such environments.

**Mutual Trust and Respect:** Psychological safety thrives on mutual trust and respect. Individuals must sense their team's trustworthiness to feel confident in expressing themselves. Lacking this mutual trust can hinder individuals from

voicing their opinions and concerns. When trust and respect prevail, it promotes shared knowledge, fostering a stronger psychological safety net.

Group Dynamics: [Delizonna \(2017\)](#) and [Gissel and Johnstone \(2017\)](#) underscore the importance of nurturing positive group dynamics. Team members should approach conflicts collaboratively rather than adversarial, and leaders should endorse an environment conducive to idea sharing.

Organizational Climate: An organization's prevailing atmosphere or "climate" directly influences employee behavior and psychological safety. Positive organizational climates, as demonstrated by [Silla and Gamero \(2018\)](#) and [Wong and Chan \(2020\)](#), have tangible benefits in fostering psychological safety, whereas hostile climates can exert negative pressure on employees.

Communication: Effective communication is crucial for reinforcing psychological safety. Barriers to communication in the organizational structure can undermine psychological safety. Conversely, an environment promoting open communication, as illustrated by [Parker and du Plooy \(2020\)](#), can bolster psychological safety and advance organizational objectives.

Practice Field and Simulation Space: Simulated environments prepare individuals for real-world challenges. As introduced by [Senge \(2014\)](#) and furthered by [Kang and Min \(2019\)](#), these safe spaces for practice and reflection are foundational to instilling psychological safety while familiarizing individuals with organizational culture and practices.

In conclusion, understanding these influential factors and their interplay is pivotal for leaders aiming to cultivate a culture underpinned by psychological safety.

### 3.4 The Influence of Psychological Safety on Employees

Psychological safety, as articulated by [Boylan and Turner \(2017\)](#), promotes open, trustful relationships allowing for candid discussions without fear of retaliation. This environment enables employees to express feelings and emotions freely, fostering innovation as those who perceive a lower interpersonal risk are more inclined to explore new methods and strategies ([Brown, 2023](#); [Newman et al., 2017](#)). With that, the positive impacts of psychological safety extend to several organizational outcomes, including employee engagement, employee voice, and organizational citizen behavior.

Employee Engagement: An engaged employee is invested intellectually and emotionally in the organization's values and mission. Psychological safety bolsters such engagement by allowing employees to connect authentically with their roles, spanning cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions ([W. Kahn, 1990](#)). [Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot \(2016\)](#) highlight the link between psychological safety and engagement, emphasizing that a lack of the former can hint at disengaged employees. Engagement levels are further influenced by leadership dynamics and management style, with inclusive environments promoting a culture of experimentation without fear of negative repercussions ([Kostovich et al., 2020](#)).

Employee Voice: Employee voice, defined as the sharing of ideas and concerns, thrives in a psychologically safe environment ([Ghani & Hyder, 2020](#)). In such environments, employees feel empowered to voice opinions and suggest improvements. However, when psychological safety is compromised, employees may restrain from speaking up due to fear of embarrassment or criticism ([Roussin et al., 2018](#)). A psychologically safe workspace enhances employees' feelings of inclusivity and equality, ultimately leading to improved performance and innovation.

Organizational Citizen Behavior (OCB): OCB refers to voluntary behaviors exhibited by employees that promote the well-being of the organization and its members. Such behaviors include altruism, voice behavior, and contextual performance ([LePine et al., 2002](#)). When psychological safety is emphasized, there's a positive shift in OCB, suggesting employees are more inclined towards beneficial behaviors for both themselves and the organization ([Kim et al., 2020](#)).

In summary, psychological safety is pivotal for organizations aiming to boost employee engagement, voice, and OCB. By fostering a psychologically safe environment, organizations not only benefit from improved individual performance but also reap the rewards of collective innovation and collaboration.

### 3.5 Psychological Safety and The Organization

Psychological safety, underpinned by the freedom to communicate, gather information, and share ideas, critically shapes organizational adaptability and performance. It is especially pertinent in complex structures where errors could have grave outcomes ([McLinton et al., 2018](#)). Organizations navigating the fluctuating business landscape must



prioritize adaptability, encompassing agile responses, innovative solutions, and efficient information dissemination (Geiger et al., 2020). Central to this is a culture of psychological safety, where employees can freely express, innovate, and adapt without fear of repercussions (Brown, 2023; Kwon et al., 2020). Such environments, fostered by leadership, promote collaboration, idea sharing, and proactive information seeking, thereby enhancing organizational adaptability (S. Kim et al., 2020; Turner & Harder, 2018).

In the realm of organizational performance, psychological safety demonstrates a strong correlation. The well-being of an organization is, in many ways, a reflection of its workforce's well-being, where employees thrive in supportive and trust-rich environments (Edmondson, 2018). Leaders play a pivotal role here; their relationship with employees drives motivation and commitment, crucial for high organizational performance (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2016). Fostering psychological safety spurs innovation, knowledge sharing, and cooperation - key drivers for success (Iqbal et al., 2020). High-performing companies, like Apple and Google, exemplify this by heavily leveraging employee insights for their evolution (Gehani, 2016). However, striking a balance is essential; while idea sharing is vital, its execution needs meticulous oversight to mitigate potential risks (Mura et al., 2016).

In summary, psychological safety is a cornerstone for organizational adaptability and peak performance. A psychologically secure environment is where employees find belonging, freely contribute, and collaboratively drive their organizations forward.

### 3.6 The influence of Psychological Safety on Non-Profit Organizations

Organizations, as outlined by Stogdill (1950), exist as social groups with members assigned different responsibilities to achieve a shared objective. These entities thrive on positive attitudes and purpose-driven attributes, such as individual well-being and psychosocial constructs (Dhanesh, 2020). Stakeholders exert pressure that forms organizational objectives and responsibilities, wherein psychological safety plays a pivotal role when properly incorporated (Edmondson, 2018).

Though prevalent studies emphasize the significance of psychological safety in for-profit organizations (Frazier & Tupper, 2018; Maximo et al., 2019; Page et al., 2019), this section underscores its role within non-profit entities. Unlike for-profits where monetary gains dominate, non-profit organizations witness employees and leaders working voluntarily to fulfill consumers' needs (Benevene et al., 2018). This altruistic environment necessitates a heightened sense of psychological safety, ensuring employees feel genuinely integrated into the organization (Johnson, 2020).

The nature of leadership in non-profits greatly influences organizational success (Webb, 2018). Leaders must foster a psychologically safe atmosphere, characterized by open communication, inclusive decision-making, and an environment where errors are collectively addressed (J. Yin et al., 2019). Such an ambiance not only promotes teamwork but also emphasizes collective responsibility and mutual support (Diegmann & Rosenkranz, 2017). Marques and Gomes (2020) highlight the perils of a segmented strategy, where ill-defined roles can potentially hinder unity.

In conclusion, psychological safety, when rightly implemented, shapes organizational roles and objectives, irrespective of the profit orientation. For non-profits, it particularly enhances mutual responsibility, teamwork, and unity, which are instrumental for their success.

## 4. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

This qualitative descriptive study aimed to understand the perceptions of federal government employees in Hawaii on psychological safety and the role of their supervisors in influencing it. The focus was on capturing real-world perceptions related to psychological safety in government organizations, an area that has been relatively unexplored in the literature.

Through the analysis, participant feedback was predominantly positive, echoing prior studies indicating that the organizational climate greatly affects individual expression (Chughtai, 2016). However, areas of concern emerged, notably surrounding organizational culture, leaders as change agents, and the implications of isolation due to COVID-19 on psychological safety. As corroborated by past research, factors such as individual behavior, trust, group dynamics, organizational climate, and communication significantly influence psychological safety (Kostovich et al., 2020; Stephen et al., 2020).

The data collection protocols, comprising of questionnaires and interviews, were methodically designed to align with the study's framework, ensuring the acquisition of pertinent data to address the research questions. Specifically, 7 out

of 11 open-ended questionnaire questions and 11 out of 18 semi-structured interview questions were instrumental in addressing RQ1, which explores the perception of psychological safety among Federal Government Employees in their workplace. Similarly, 5 open-ended questionnaire questions and 9 semi-structured interview questions contributed to the investigation of RQ2, which focuses on how employees perceive their supervisors' impact on psychological safety.

The ensuing analysis yielded three primary/core themes germane to RQ1, which include: (1) impactful to motivation and quality of work, (2) supportive network that is family like, and (3) all-inclusive environment. Each of these themes was underpinned by a total of five distinct initial themes. RQ2, in turn, also revealed three primary/core themes: (4) commitment that affects employee needs, (5) agent of change to organizational barriers, and (6) enabler to personnel engagement. Mirroring RQ1, these three primary themes were also substantiated by five corresponding initial themes.

The identification of these themes, both primary and initial, materialized through an intricate analysis of prevalent codes and code clusters extrapolated from participant data. For an at-a-glance comprehension of the outcomes, Table 1 succinctly summarizes in a snapshot the research-identified themes pertaining to the research questions, setting the stage for their comprehensive discussion in the following sections. The outcomes of the analytical process are further presented in Table 2, encapsulating the interrelation between research-identified themes and the underlying research questions.

**Table 1: Results: Summarized Research Question to Themes**

Research Questions	Themes
<i>RQ1: How do federal government employees describe psychological safety in their workplace?</i>	RQ1 - T1: <i>As: Impactful to Motivation and Quality of Work</i> RQ1 - T2: <i>A: Supportive Network that is Family Like</i> RQ1 - T3: <i>An: All-inclusive Environment</i>
<i>RQ2: How do federal government employees describe their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in their workplace?</i>	RQ2 - T4: <i>A: Commitment that Affects Employee Needs</i> RQ2 - T5: <i>An: Agent of Change to Organizational Barriers</i> RQ2 - T6: <i>An: Enabler to Personnel Engagement</i>

**Table 2: Themes by Research Question**

Research Questions	Research-Identified Themes by Research Question
<i>RQ1: How do federal government employees describe psychological safety in their workplace?</i>	RQ1 - T1: <i>As: Impactful to Motivation and Quality of Work</i> <i>Federal government employees describe psychological safety in the workplace as an environment of mutual respect to share ideas to enhance personal and professional performance.</i> RQ1 - T2: <i>A: Supportive Network that is Family Like</i> <i>Federal government employees describe psychological safety in the workplace as an environment of innovation and respect where people are valued and treated like family.</i> RQ1 - T3: <i>An: All-inclusive Environment</i> <i>Federal government employees describe psychological safety in the workplace as an environment of inclusion and respect with policies and practices that support safety and open communication.</i>
<i>RQ2: How do federal government employees describe their supervisors' influence on psychological safety in their workplace?</i>	RQ2 - T4: <i>A: Commitment that Affects Employee Needs</i> <i>Federal government employees describe their supervisors influence on psychological safety in the workplace as impactful to the basic human need of feeling safe and the willingness to openly express oneself.</i> RQ2 - T5: <i>An: Agent of Change to Organizational Barriers</i>

*Federal government employees describe their supervisors influence on psychological safety in the workplace as a measure of investment in employee value and worth that impacts employee engagement and collaboration.*

RQ2 - T6: An: Enabler to Personnel Engagement

*Federal government employees describe their supervisors influence on psychological safety in the workplace as an enabler of personal engagement, communication, and safety through transparency.*

#### 4.1 Impactful to Motivation and Quality of Work

Federal government employees' perception of psychological safety in the workplace plays a pivotal role in shaping their motivation and the quality of their work. This study explored how psychological safety, characterized by an atmosphere of mutual respect and idea-sharing for personal and professional growth, influences employees' attitudes and contributions (RQ1). The findings illuminate that participants' perceptions of psychological safety significantly impact their work-related enthusiasm, willingness to engage, and output quality. This theme emerged from initial sub-themes centered around the significance and dimensions of psychological safety, addressing the research question on federal government employees' descriptions of psychological safety in their workplace.

Aligned with the review of literature, which emphasizes the importance of a trusting and respectful work environment fostering psychological safety (Kim et al., 2020), this study revealed a direct connection between psychological safety and employees' motivation. Previous research has similarly highlighted the necessity for implementing and enforcing aspects of psychological safety to facilitate effective communication, idea-sharing, and a sense of trust and respect (Edmondson, 2018; Geiger et al., 2020; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017).

Organizational commitment to psychological safety influences employees to embrace shared objectives and a common vision, fostering their adaptive responses to the evolving needs of the organization (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Consequently, this study underscores that a supportive psychological safety environment profoundly influences employee motivation resulting in the caliber of their work output. These findings hold vital implications for the overarching theme, as participants revealed that their commitment to work quality and exertion was directly impacted by their organization's dedication to psychological safety.

#### Importance of Psychological Safety

Central to participants' accounts was the vital role of psychological safety across various organizational layers, particularly its impact on motivation and contribution. This study's outcomes align with previous research (Dhanesh, 2020; Geiger et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020), which demonstrate that a psychologically safe environment stimulates information seeking and idea sharing, bolstering organizational adaptation. Participants' accounts mirrored this sentiment, with most emphasizing that psychological safety significantly influenced their capacity to deliver their best work. For instance, participant narratives vividly elucidated the impact of psychological safety on motivation and the quality of their work output.

Drawing on the work of W. Kahn (1990), this study underscores that heightened engagement is facilitated by a psychologically supportive work atmosphere, which in turn kindles employees' allegiance and responsibility toward the organization. Crucially, the study emphasizes that when organizations elevate the significance of psychological safety, a tangible influence on employee engagement and work quality becomes apparent.

Participants' narratives reinforced that psychological safety spurs engagement, encouraging active involvement in projects, collaborative efforts, problem-solving, and interactions with external stakeholders. As demonstrated by prior research (S.-X. Liu et al., 2020), a workplace that prioritizes psychological safety nurtures employee well-being, cultivating trust and engagement. Consequently, employees are inspired to contribute optimally to the organization's goals.

#### Aspects of Psychological Safety

The study underscored that while federal government organizations provided a secure work environment, they often neglected explicit efforts to cultivate vital aspects of psychological safety, such as open communication and

collaborative spaces. These omissions signaled an absence of value and inclusivity, dampening employees' team spirit and the overall quality and productivity (W. Kahn, 1990; W. A. Kahn & Heaphy, 2013). Participant descriptions echoed this, highlighting concerns about communication, engagement, collaboration, problem-solving, and a safe working space—hallmarks of psychological safety. For example, one participant account reinforced the pivotal role of psychological safety in enabling productive interactions and creativity by sharing:

*When employees feel safe at work, it's more open to engage. This includes working on projects together, solving problems, collaboration and working with other stakeholders external to the organization.*

This study further substantiated the importance of open communication and effective engagement, reinforcing that these facets drive psychological safety and subsequently elevate employee contributions and innovation (J. Hu et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2017). The participants' sense of being valued and their input's significance directly harmonized with previous research, indicating that a psychologically secure workplace cultivates innovative thinking and enhances organizational output (W. Kahn, 1990; W. A. Kahn & Heaphy, 2013; Newman et al., 2017).

#### 4.2 Supportive Network that is Family Like

Within federal government organizations, a prevailing sense of psychological safety has been identified as a catalyst for innovation, respect, and a familial atmosphere (RQ1). Employees emphasize the value of an environment where they are cherished and treated like family. The research uncovers that coworker interaction is pivotal, fostering a support network closely tied to family bonds. This network enables individuals to freely express feelings, share ideas, and embrace their vulnerabilities without fear of judgment (Brown, 2023; Stephen et al., 2020). The profound impact of this network on psychological safety is evident, with participants describing it as a tight-knit unit comparable to their own personal families.

Narratives from several participants illuminate the depth of these interpersonal relationships. The camaraderie and mutual support among colleagues are reminiscent of familial connections. This level of trust and closeness promotes open dialogue, active listening, and a shared sense of belonging (Boylan & Turner, 2017). Such psychological safety engenders teamwork, engagement, and a positive work atmosphere (Chaudhary, 2019; W. A. Kahn & Heaphy, 2013).

Interpersonal coworker relationships further accentuate the theme of a supportive network that mirrors a family dynamic. Kolbe et al. (2020) have previously noted the role of psychological safety in enhancing work outcomes through supportive interactions. Remarkably, the impact of coworker relationships on psychological safety has been underexplored, making this study's findings noteworthy.

The study highlights the significance of interpersonal relationships among peers in enhancing psychological safety. The depth of relationships influences employees' freedom to voice ideas and provides a safe space to engage in both work and non-work conversations. Such connections contribute to improved engagement and productivity, akin to the influence of higher-level organizational relationships (W. Kahn, 1990; Subhakaran & Dyaram, 2018). This underscores that the coworker level of the hierarchy holds immense potential in fostering psychological safety and boosting engagement.

In conclusion, federal government employees attribute their workplace's positive psychological safety climate to a familial network of supportive coworkers. These relationships foster an environment where open expression, trust, and collaboration thrive, mirroring the bonds found within families. By understanding and nurturing the influence of interpersonal relationships at all hierarchical levels, organizations can foster psychological safety that propels engagement, innovation, and productivity.

#### 4.3 All-Inclusive Environment

In this study, the focus was on understanding the perception of psychological safety among federal government employees in their workplace. The findings underscore the paramount importance of an all-inclusive environment characterized by respect, open communication, and supportive policies (RQ1). Such an environment is foundational for establishing key aspects of psychological safety, including the freedom to voice opinions, foster innovation, and share information.

As highlighted by Kang and Min (2019), the creation of a psychologically safe workplace is fundamental for organizational stability, particularly in non-profit sectors such as government. This environment hinges on leadership's efforts to promote a friendly atmosphere and involve employees in decision-making, aligning with Ghani and Hyder (2020) and Tu et al. (2019). Furthermore, according to Webb (2018), employee ownership positively

impacts non-profit organizations, a principle reflected in the study's findings, particularly within government organizations where financial incentives are relatively lower than for-profit counterparts.

Crucially, organizational policies and practices emerged as pivotal determinants of an all-inclusive workplace. Participants' narratives underscored the significance of policies encouraging safe expression. These policies align with the broader organizational goal of fostering psychological safety by promoting open communication and inclusion. Encouragement from supervisors to voice ideas before critique, as exemplified by participant experience, and the value placed on feedback regardless of rank or service duration, also noted in the study, highlight the practice's effectiveness.

[Roussin et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasized the correlation between employee voice and psychological safety, emphasizing that managerial focus on a safe and empathetic environment encourages employees to speak up. Furthermore, as [Tu et al. \(2019\)](#) noted, a supportive and equitable organization reflects a psychologically safe space where employee voice is as influential as management's. The research observation within federal government organizations suggests that inclusive management practices effectively promote employee expression, reinforcing the significance of an all-inclusive environment in cultivating psychological safety.

#### 4.4 Commitment that Affects Employee Needs

In examining the influence of supervisors on psychological safety within the federal government workplace, the study identified a pivotal commitment that deeply impacts employee needs and experiences (RQ2). This commitment entails fostering genuine human connectivity within the organization. Participants emphasized the significance of leadership's flexible and open-hearted approach that recognizes individuals beyond their roles ("the employee").

Although participants generally perceived their federal government workplace as psychologically safe, the study data underscored the necessity for a more humanistic leadership style. Previous research by [Frazier et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Yi et al. \(2017\)](#) indicates that leadership engagement significantly shapes the employees' sense of safety. [Chughtai \(2016\)](#) further affirm that leadership behavior profoundly influences the psychological safety climate through inspiring employee voice. Therefore, the perception of leadership engagement, especially if it resonates with employees' human aspects, holds an utmost of importance.

Under the overarching theme, two interrelated sub-themes emerged: "Supervisor Commitment to Employee Needs" and "Supervisor Soft Skills." These sub-themes encapsulate the dynamics of leadership's role in meeting employee needs and nurturing psychological safety.

##### Supervisor Commitment to Employee Needs

This sub-theme encapsulates participants' call for supervisors to fulfill their fundamental human needs within the workplace. It centers on the desire for supervisors to understand and support employees' well-being. Notably, participants highlighted differences of opinions, attentive listening, time availability, and the open-door policy as integral components of such commitment.

Remarkably, the impact of supervisor commitment was most pronounced when immediate supervisors were involved, indicating the diminishing influence as the leadership hierarchy extends. This decline detrimentally affects employees' perceptions of overall commitment, as they observe leaders' behaviors as indicators of workplace norms. The lack of essential skills for genuinely caring for employees was a common observation among participants, often causing personal matters to be overshadowed by work concerns.

Previous research by [Y. Liu et al. \(2018\)](#) affirmed that leadership influence on psychological safety is optimized through feedback promotion, approachability, and transparency. When supervisors are accessible and trustworthy, employees' willingness to voice ideas and feedback surges. In contrast, feeling unheard or devalued erodes this willingness.

##### Supervisor Soft Skills

Complementary to supervisor commitment, participants underscored the vital role of supervisor soft skills—communication and collaboration—in sustaining psychological safety. These skills foster personal connections and enhance human interactions between supervisors and employees. Effective engagement, encouragement, and active participation, as illustrated by participants in the study, reinforce the creation of bonds and a safe environment.

This resonates with prior research (Kim et al., 2020) highlighting the positive impact of engagement skills on interpersonal connections and teamwork. As Iqbal et al. (2020) suggest, leaders depend on employees for productivity, while employees rely on leaders for a psychologically safe setting.

In conclusion, the study revealed that while participants generally perceive psychological safety as positive in their respective organization, it is contingent on supervisors embracing a more humanistic approach. Through open communication, proactive engagement, and commitment, supervisors can fortify psychological safety by prioritizing employees' human aspects and basic needs. This commitment paves the way for a psychologically safe environment, reflecting foundational skills and a commitment to fostering therapeutic communication and trust (W. Kahn, 1990; Turner & Harder, 2018; Vandekerckhof et al., 2018).

#### **4.5 Agent of Change to Organizational Barriers**

Within federal government organizations, the influence of supervisors on psychological safety in the workplace significantly impacts employee engagement and collaboration. This study delves into the intricate relationship between leadership practices, organizational hierarchy, and their impact on psychological safety (RQ2). Participants' narratives reveal a perception that upper leadership, often out of touch with employees, influences the level of psychological safety experienced in the workplace.

Underlying within the participant narratives is a notable lack of trust and interaction between employees and senior leaders. The rigid hierarchical structure within federal government organizations erects barriers to effective communication, collaboration, and engagement. This hierarchy often leads to perceptions of distant and unapproachable senior leadership. These perceptions of "leadership being out of touch" with employee concerns and needs undermines the foundation of psychological safety.

The study results resonate with prior research highlighting the pivotal role of leadership in fostering psychological safety. Trust, integrity, and caring emerge as essential components that senior leaders must exhibit to bridge the gap and disrupt the barriers present within the organizational hierarchy. Trust forms the bedrock of psychological safety, creating an environment where employees can express ideas and concerns without fear of retribution.

To address these barriers and foster psychological safety, a transformation in senior leadership behavior is crucial. This entails embracing transparency, engaging with employees at all levels, and dismantling the segmented design of employee-leader relationships. By actively committing to breaking down these barriers, senior leaders can create an atmosphere of trust and openness, ultimately promoting a psychologically safe environment that empowers collaboration and innovation.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significance of senior leadership commitment in dismantling organizational barriers that hinder psychological safety. Through fostering trust, transparency, and genuine care for employees, senior leaders can transform the hierarchical structure of federal government organizations, thereby cultivating an environment where psychological safety thrives and employees feel able to contribute effectively to the organization's mission.

#### **4.6 Enabler to Personnel Engagement**

In the context of federal government employees, supervisor influence on psychological safety within the workplace emerges as a pivotal catalyst for enhancing personal engagement, communication, and overall safety, underpinning transparency. A dominant theme in this study underscores that employees' perception of psychological safety in government organizations hinges upon the quality of engagement, interpersonal relationships, and mutual trust shared between supervisors and employees (RQ2). It is evident that a reciprocal effort between supervisors and employees is imperative to fortify personnel engagement across all organizational dimensions.

While organizational management does offer mechanisms such as the "open door" policy to encourage employee engagement, the study uncovers that a commensurate commitment from leaders to proactively engage with employees is equally indispensable. Participants express a clear desire for heightened supervisor engagement, trust, and interpersonal connections to cultivate a sense of psychological safety. This aligns with existing research indicating that psychological safety flourishes within an environment where trust and interpersonal relationships promote open expression and minimize inhibitions, thereby fostering innovation and creativity (Boylan & Turner, 2017).

Significantly, participants indicate that proactive efforts by supervisors are pivotal in establishing the foundation for psychological safety through engagement, openness, and trust. However, respondents note a prevalent deficit in the



appropriate level of engagement and trust exhibited by their supervisors, often due to operational demands hindering effective engagement. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of positive interpersonal relationships with supervisors. These relationships, defined by rapport built across work and personal domains, contribute to fostering openness, trust, and care among employees.

Participants' narratives consistently illustrate that positive interpersonal relationships with supervisors imbue the workplace with openness, trust, and mutual consideration. This aligns with research that asserts transparent sharing of relevant information by leaders enhances approachability and feedback, thereby cultivating psychological safety (Yi et al., 2017). The study underscores that leaders play a pivotal role in bridging the divide between organizational and individual spheres, necessitating the initiation of proactive personal connections.

In line with this, previous research (May et al., 2004) advocates for proactive leader-led personal connections to bridge this gap. Moreover, studies by Ghani and Hyder (2020) and Tu et al. (2019) emphasize that supportive and free environments yield psychological safety, promoting innovation and employee engagement equal to that of managerial voices. As the study concludes, closing the engagement gap across all organizational aspects becomes a critical undertaking for effective leadership recognition.

In summary, the supervisors' influence on psychological safety emerges as a critical enabler of personnel engagement in federal government organizations. This influence hinges on proactive engagement, trust-building, and positive interpersonal relationships. The study's findings underscore the necessity for bi-directional efforts between supervisors and employees to foster psychological safety, thereby promoting innovation and engagement within the organization.

## 5. Conclusion

This qualitative descriptive study delved into the perceptions of psychological safety among federal government employees in Hawaii and the role of their supervisors in shaping this dynamic. By investigating first-hand accounts and employing a theoretical framework rooted in transformational leadership and psychosocial safety climate theories, the study addressed gaps in existing research and explored the experiences of employees within this context.

Six overarching themes emerged from the findings, encompassing the impact of psychological safety on motivation and work quality, the establishment of a supportive familial network, an all-inclusive environment, commitment that addresses employee needs, a catalyst for organizational change, and an enhancer of personnel engagement. These themes resonated with previous literature and underscored the influence of supervisor behavior, interpersonal relationships, trust, and organizational structure on creating a safe environment for expression and collaboration.

While aligning with prior research, the study introduced a novel theme, revealing the significance of a "family-like" supportive network among employees in the Hawaii federal government workforce. This highlighted the unique cultural context of the multi-ethnic and diverse Hawaii workplace (Say, 2012; Vales, 2014), suggesting that the sense of "family" or *'ohana* played a role in fostering psychological safety.

Overall, the study demonstrated that federal government employees in Hawaii perceive positive psychological safety within their organizations, driven by a culture of openness and supervisor care. However, discrepancies between perception and reality were noted, particularly in the realm of interpersonal relationships and senior leadership interactions. Leadership behavior was shown to profoundly impact employee interactions, contributions, and engagement.

Furthermore, the study emphasized the importance of explicit support for safety and fearlessness within organizations, alongside the actual implementation of these principles through policies and actions. The mutual effort between supervisors and employees in promoting engagement and psychological well-being was highlighted as a crucial factor in enhancing psychological safety.

While the findings are context-specific to federal government employees in Hawaii, the study's meticulous data collection and analysis contribute to its transferability and potential application across different organizational settings and geographical regions. The study provides practical implications for organizational policy and leadership practices, aiming to foster psychological safety, job satisfaction, and productivity. By addressing the research gap and utilizing participants' lived experiences, this study contributes to our understanding of psychological safety within government organizations, shedding light on the intricate interplay between perceptions, leadership, and organizational dynamics.

## 6. Limitations

The study encountered several limitations that influenced the scope and applicability of its findings, originating from design choices, methodological decisions, and the researcher's background. These limitations impacted the generalizability and interpretation of results. Initially, five anticipated limitations were acknowledged at the inception of the study, with strategies for mitigation enacted. Subsequently, four additional limitations emerged during the data collection and analysis phases, which include (1) recruitment reach, (2) researcher's background, (3) geographical constraints, and (4) researcher's qualitative research experience. Further details of the limitations are provided.

### 6.1 Recruitment Reach

The recruitment method's reliance on a LinkedIn private group constrained participant reach. Although alternate recruitment plans were developed, the study still lacked full control over recruitment reach due to the limitations of the LinkedIn platform. While recruitment goals were met through secondary methods using the snowball technique (sharing of the study by participants), the inability to fully manage participant recruitment on LinkedIn impacted the quality and breadth of participants.

### 6.2 Researcher's Background

The researcher's federal government employment background introduced potential bias and was recognized during the inception and crafting of the study. Reflexivity and bracketing were employed to mitigate bias, enhancing the study's transferability by acknowledging and addressing potential self-bias risks.

### 6.3 Geographical Constraints

The study's focus on federal government employees in Hawaii restricted the sample's geographical diversity. The COVID-19 pandemic and feasibility considerations led to this choice, impacting the study's generalizability beyond this specific context. The unique benefits of Hawaii's diverse workforce justified this limitation, which mirrored the anticipated limitation identified at the study's inception.

### 6.4 Researcher's Qualitative Research Experience

The researcher's limited experience in qualitative research and descriptive study design influenced data collection and analysis. Expert panel reviews and a field test were employed to enhance the methodological rigor and transferability. This novice perspective was not initially assessed or acknowledged in the anticipated limitations at the study inception.

Despite the limitations, the study's conscious efforts to acknowledge, mitigate, and address these challenges bolstered the study's credibility and applicability, ensuring that its findings remain valuable within the defined context. The implications of these limitations were acknowledged and carefully addressed. They are shared to inform and guide the potential directions for future research.

## 7. Future Implications

The research investigation sheds light on significant future implications concerning the psychological safety experiences of government employees within their organizational contexts. Notably, the study underscores the profound impact of organizational constructs, policies, and leadership on employees' psychological safety. The findings highlight a lack of leadership recognition of the importance of psychological safety and its components, showcasing the pivotal role leadership plays in shaping positive or negative psychological safety outcomes and workplace culture. Previous research has established a link between robust psychological safety, organizational performance, and quality output, emphasizing the need for coordination, consideration, and support (Edmondson, 2018; Geiger et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020).

This section encompasses theoretical and practical implications, building upon the theoretical underpinnings of transformational leadership and psychosocial safety climate theory. Recommendations for fostering psychological safety within government organizations have been addressed, focusing on multiple perspectives identified from within the data and results of the study.

## **Educational Enhancement and Horizontal Exploration**

The study reveals that participants' perceptions of psychological safety were influenced by their organizations and supervisors' understanding of the concept. This highlights the importance of enhancing organizational training to emphasize fundamental aspects of psychological safety, particularly in interpersonal relationship building. Future qualitative research should delve into employees' perspectives on workplace techniques that promote understanding of psychological safety. Educating organizations in this realm could initiate positive change. Furthermore, exploring psychological safety horizontally across government organizations could yield insights into adaptability, culture, and factors influencing workplace dynamics. Researchers should consider mixed-methods or case study approaches.

## **Occupational Variation**

In light of the varying policy landscapes across job occupations, understanding the nuanced factors of psychological safety becomes essential. The research suggests the need for broader exploration across diverse organizational and occupational settings. While this study focused on federal government organizations, future implications lie within the investigation of specific occupations at local, state, and federal levels. This approach could reveal unique challenges and opportunities faced by distinct roles such as that of firefighters, active-duty military personnel, and appointed government officials. Such comprehensive examination can lead to tailored policies and procedures that foster psychological safety, benefiting work environments and enhancing inclusivity.

In essence, the study points towards a comprehensive recipe for cultivating healthy work environments by prioritizing positive psychological safety, thereby mitigating inhibitions to innovation and safety-conscious behaviors. The implications underscore the need for ongoing research and tailored interventions across various organizational hierarchies, settings, and occupations, aiming to enhance psychological safety and ultimately contribute to improved workplace well-being and productivity.

## **8. Recommendations**

The following recommendations for future research emerge from the insights gained through this qualitative study on federal government employees' perceptions of psychological safety and supervisor influence within the workplace.

### **8.1 Exploring Psychological Safety in Diverse Government Organizations**

Future research should extend the investigation of employee psychological safety in government organizations beyond the geographical scope of this study. Replicating this study across various government levels (local, state, federal) and regions within the United States will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different government environments influence psychological safety perceptions. By capturing a wider range of perspectives, researchers may uncover new insights and practices within governmental structures that can aid in the development of programs and policies that support employee well-being and effective engagement in the decision-making processes.

### **8.2 Trust, Commitment, And Transformational Efforts**

To enhance psychological safety, future research should delve into the commitment displayed by senior leaders and their role as agents of change. Investigating leadership commitment's impact on psychological safety, along with exploring specific policies and practices tailored to government hierarchies, will provide actionable insights. Building on transformational leadership and psychosocial safety climate theories, researchers should focus on precursor actions that cultivate psychological safety, foster trust, and facilitate transformational efforts within organizational policies.

### **8.3 Hierarchical Impact and Diverse Occupations**

Further understanding of the influence of psychological safety across different levels of the organizational hierarchy is recommended. Research should adopt a multi-theoretical approach, encompassing diverse occupational roles within various government levels. This approach may shed light on the nuanced ways employees across organizational hierarchies perceive and experience psychological safety. Additionally, investigating the unique effects of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic on psychological safety within government organizations and their hierarchies can provide valuable insights into leadership motivation, inspiration, and policy implementation.

#### 8.4 Enhancing Sample Homogeneity and Recruitment Methods

Researchers should improve recruitment strategies to ensure a more homogenous participant sample, thereby enhancing the study's quality and transferability. While LinkedIn yielded substantial responses, alternative recruitment methods, such as in-person investigations within specific government organizations, should be considered. Overcoming potential privacy concerns and information saturation through strategic recruitment will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of government employees' psychological safety perceptions.

#### 8.5 Exploring Training for Psychological Safety

Practitioners should explore diverse training methods that can foster psychological safety in the workplace. While prior research touched on simulation-based training and safe zones, there remains room for investigating other training methodologies. By employing qualitative methodologies like case studies, phenomenology, or grounded theory, researchers can identify effective ways to educate employees about psychological safety, ultimately promoting a culture of openness and transformation within government organizations.

#### 8.6 Institutionalization's Impact on Psychological Safety

Further qualitative investigations should explore how government institutionalization affects psychological safety and inclusivity within organizations. Research should also delve into the unique cultural and institutional aspects of government organizations and consider the differences between regions and branches of government. Such studies will provide insights into policies, practices, and cultural elements that influence psychological safety and inclusivity, thus enabling governments to enhance their organizational culture and climate for improved employee well-being and innovation.

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