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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND JOB SATISFACTION IN LARGE ENTERPRISES – THE RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Purpose: This article examines the association between psychological safety and overall job satisfaction among employees in large enterprises. It also identifies which psychologically safe experiences are most closely linked to overall job satisfaction.
Design/methodology/approach: The study draws on an anonymous cross-sectional questionnaire completed by employees of large enterprises. Psychological safety was measured with Amy Edmondson's seven-item scale. Overall job satisfaction was measured with a single global item embedded in an adapted work environment questionnaire based on Gallup's Q12 framework. The analysis used correlation coefficients, ordinary least squares regression with selected controls, and an exploratory item-level assessment of psychological safety components.
Findings: The results show a strong positive association between self-reported psychological safety and overall job satisfaction in the analysed sample. The relationship remained visible after adjustment for selected individual and work-context characteristics. At item level, the strongest links concerned recognition of one's distinctive contribution and ease of seeking help.
Research limitations/implications: The study is based on a purposive sample, cross-sectional self-report data, and a large-enterprise setting, which limits causal inference and broader generalisation. The use of a single global satisfaction item narrows measurement scope. Future studies should test these relationships in broader samples, use longitudinal designs, and examine psychological safety, employee engagement, and job satisfaction within one model.
Practical implications: The findings suggest that job satisfaction depends not only on formal job conditions, but also on the daily interpersonal climate shaped by managers and teams. Leaders should lower the social cost of asking for help, respond constructively to mistakes and uncertainty, and make individual contribution more visible.
Social implications: By drawing attention to relational conditions linked to employees' overall evaluation of work, the study may support healthier workplace climates and better quality of working life in complex organisations.
Originality/value: The article offers a focused analysis of psychological safety in relation to overall job satisfaction in a large-enterprise setting. It also shows which psychological safety experiences appear most closely connected to favourable overall work evaluations.
Keywords: psychological safety, job satisfaction, human capital management.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction remains a useful employee-level indicator because it captures how people assess their work as a whole, not only selected parts of it (Locke, 1976). From a management perspective, that matters because broad evaluations of work are linked to retention-related attitudes, day-to-day functioning, and the wider quality of organisational life. In large enterprises, the issue is especially relevant. Employees work within layered structures, formal procedures, and varied local management climates. Their experience of work is shaped by formal role design as well as by the way daily interaction unfolds.

One factor that may be relevant in this context is psychological safety. Psychological safety refers to a climate in which interpersonal risk does not carry disproportionate penalty, for example when people ask for help, admit uncertainty, raise concerns, or discuss mistakes. (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, Lei, 2014). The construct is often discussed in relation to learning, employee voice, and adaptation. It may also matter for broader judgments about work as employees do not experience work only through tasks and targets. They also respond to cues such as whether questions are welcomed, whether difficulty can be acknowledged without loss of standing, and whether individual contribution is recognised.

Research in this area points to a positive relationship between psychological safety and employee outcomes, though the evidence is not uniform. Reviews show that psychological safety is associated with a range of workplace attitudes and behaviours, while also noting variation across settings, measures, and levels of analysis (Abror, Patrisia, 2020; Edmondson, Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017). Recent studies also suggest links with job satisfaction, though much of that evidence is context-specific and based on cross-sectional self-report data (Etti et al., 2025; Kim, Kim, 2020; Kuo et al., 2019; Stühlinger et al., 2019). That pattern supports further study, but it does not justify strong causal claims.

The construct has also received growing attention in Polish management scholarship. Recent work has discussed psychological safety both as an organisational phenomenon and as a measurement issue in enterprises operating in the Polish context (Pfejfer-Buczek, 2023; Steinerowska-Streb, 2020, 2022). This local body of work strengthens the relevance of the topic, though it does not replace direct evidence from specific organisational settings.

This article examines the relationship between self-reported psychological safety and overall job satisfaction among employees working in large enterprises. It also explores which psychological safety experiences are most closely linked to overall job satisfaction. The study treats the observed links as associations within the analysed sample, not as proof of causal direction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Job satisfaction as a global employee evaluation

Job satisfaction is usually understood as an employee's overall appraisal of work, reflecting how positively or negatively the person evaluates the job as a whole (Locke, 1976). In management research, that makes job satisfaction a useful summary indicator as it reflects the combined effect of work demands, social relations, rewards, support, and the wider organisational setting (Brief, Weiss, 2002). In this article, overall job satisfaction is treated as an outcome in its own right.

Even though single-item global measures do not capture the full multidimensional structure of satisfaction, they can still provide a defensible estimate when the main interest lies in broad evaluative judgment rather than in separate facets of work (Dolbier et al., 2005; Wanous et al., 1997). This logic was adopted in the current paper.

2.2. Psychological safety as a relational condition of work

Psychological safety describes a context in which people believe that questions, concerns, uncertainty, and mistakes can be voiced without excessive interpersonal cost (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, Bransby, 2023). The concept is often tied to learning and speaking up but its relevance is wider than that. Employees also form views about work through repeated relational cues. They notice whether help-seeking is accepted, whether mistakes trigger blame, and whether individual strengths are seen and used. These experiences may shape how people judge the quality of their work life overall.

2.3. Evidence on the link between psychological safety and job satisfaction

The available evidence suggests a positive association between psychological safety and favourable employee attitudes, including satisfaction-related outcomes. At the same time, the strength and meaning of that relationship vary by context and study design. Meta-analytic and review work places psychological safety within a broader network of workplace attitudes and behaviours and reports links with satisfaction-related variables, commitment, and learning-related outcomes (Abror, Patrisia, 2020; Edmondson, Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017).

Recent empirical studies offer more detailed clues. Kim and Kim (2020) found that psychological safety and job satisfaction acted as sequential mediators in the link between perceived corporate social responsibility and performance-related outcomes. Kuo et al. (2019) showed that psychological safety strengthened the relationship between proactive personality and change in job satisfaction. Etti et al. (2025) reported that leader-related and team-related psychological safety were associated with higher job satisfaction and lower intention to leave among early-career physicians. Stühlinger et al. (2019) linked relational coordination and psychological safety to job satisfaction in healthcare. Work on psychosocial safety climate also

points in a similar direction, though that literature places more emphasis on management commitment and communication about psychological health than on local team interaction alone (Lintanga, Rathakrishnan, 2024).

2.4. Gaps in the evidence and study rationale

Nonetheless, several issues remain open. Much of the evidence is based on cross-sectional designs, which limits strong conclusions about directionality and leaves room for reciprocal interpretation (Abror, Patrisia, 2020; Edmondson, Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017). The literature also spans related but distinct constructs, including team psychological safety and psychosocial safety climate, which makes direct comparison less straightforward (Edmondson, Lei, 2014; Lintanga, Rathakrishnan, 2024). In addition, evidence remains uneven across sectors and organisational forms, with a visible concentration in healthcare and other coordination-intensive settings (Etti et al., 2025; Stühlinger et al., 2019). These limits do not weaken the topic, but they show why additional evidence is useful, provided that claims remain modest and tied to the design.

This study addresses that need by examining the relationship between self-reported psychological safety and overall job satisfaction in a purposive sample of employees working in large enterprises. Its contribution is not a claim of a wholly new relationship. The value lies in a focused estimate of that relationship in a large-enterprise setting and in the closer look at which psychological safety experiences show the strongest association with favourable work evaluations.

2.5. Research aim and analytical expectations

The study aims to examine whether self-reported psychological safety is related to overall job satisfaction among employees working in large enterprises. More specifically, it estimates the direction and strength of that association and tests whether it remains visible after adjustment for selected respondent and work-context characteristics. The study also includes an exploratory item-level analysis of the psychological safety scale. Two analytical expectations were specified:

- Hypothesis 1: Self-reported psychological safety is positively related to overall job satisfaction among employees working in large enterprises.
- Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between psychological safety and overall job satisfaction remains statistically significant after adjustment for selected individual and work-context characteristics.

No separate confirmatory hypothesis was specified for the individual psychological safety items. Their analysis is exploratory and serves to extend the managerial usefulness of the findings.

3. Methods

3.1. Study design and analytic focus

The study is based on an anonymous cross-sectional questionnaire and treats the individual employee as the unit of analysis. It does not seek to estimate causal effects – the purpose is to estimate the direction and strength of the observed association, test whether that relationship remains visible after adjustment for selected respondent and work-context characteristics, and explore which psychological safety experiences have the closest link to overall job satisfaction.

For transparency, this article presents a distinct secondary analysis of survey data used previously in a related publication focused on employee engagement (Plezia, Moczydłowska, 2025). Yet, the current paper differs in its focal outcome, analytical emphasis, and interpretation. It concentrates on overall job satisfaction as a global evaluative employee judgment and derives implications tailored to that outcome.

3.2. Sample and eligibility criteria

The target population consisted of employees working in enterprises employing more than 250 people. The sampling strategy was purposive and relied on organisational access channels and the researcher's professional network. Eligibility required employment in a qualifying organisation and at least three months of tenure in the current company. Responses from individuals not meeting these conditions were excluded from the final dataset.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed in two ways, through selected HR channels and through individual invitations within professional networks. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 137 questionnaires were obtained. Eight cases were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The final dataset comprised 129 observations. The sample should be treated as a purposive analytical sample, not as a representative cross-section of all employees in large organisations.

3.3. Questionnaire construction and measures

Two self-report instruments were combined into one digital questionnaire prepared in Polish and English. Questionnaire design and administration followed standard guidance for survey research, with attention to clarity, brevity, and usability in self-administered formats (Rowley, 2014).

Psychological safety was measured with Amy Edmondson's seven-item scale, adapted for respondent self-report (Edmondson, 1999). Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded before constructing the composite measure. The psychological safety score was calculated as the mean of the seven items.

Overall job satisfaction was the focal outcome. It was measured with a single global item included in an adapted work-environment block based on Gallup's Q12 framework (Harter et al., 2009). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. This choice reflects the study's focus on broad work appraisal rather than on a multidimensional decomposition of satisfaction. Prior research suggests that single-item overall job satisfaction measures can show acceptable convergence with longer scales when the goal is to capture general evaluation rather than separate components (Dolbier et al., 2005; Wanous et al., 1997).

The adjusted analyses also included selected individual and contextual characteristics available in the dataset: job level, total tenure, industry, organisation size, and gender. These variables were included to test whether the main relationship remained visible after basic adjustment, not to build a full explanatory model of job satisfaction.

3.4. Analytical strategy

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the focal variables. Second, the association between psychological safety and overall job satisfaction was examined with correlation analysis, using both parametric and non-parametric coefficients as a robustness check. Third, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to test whether the relationship remained visible after adjustment for selected respondent and work-context variables. The study also included an exploratory item-level analysis to identify which facets of psychological safety are most closely associated with overall job satisfaction. Supplementary subgroup analyses were used to examine differences across selected organisational categories.

3.5. Ethical and procedural considerations

The study followed standard expectations for anonymous survey research in the social sciences. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the anonymous treatment of responses. No personally identifying information was collected, and results are reported only in aggregate form.

Because the study relies on cross-sectional self-report data collected through a single instrument, the findings remain open to common method bias and related response effects, even though anonymity and relatively brief measures reduce part of that risk (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The analysed dataset comprised 129 observations retained after application of the inclusion criteria. In the final sample, the mean level of psychological safety (PS) was 3.98 with a standard deviation of 0.91. The mean level of overall job satisfaction (SAT) was 3.60 with a standard deviation of 1.15 (Figure 1). The psychological safety scale showed high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.90.

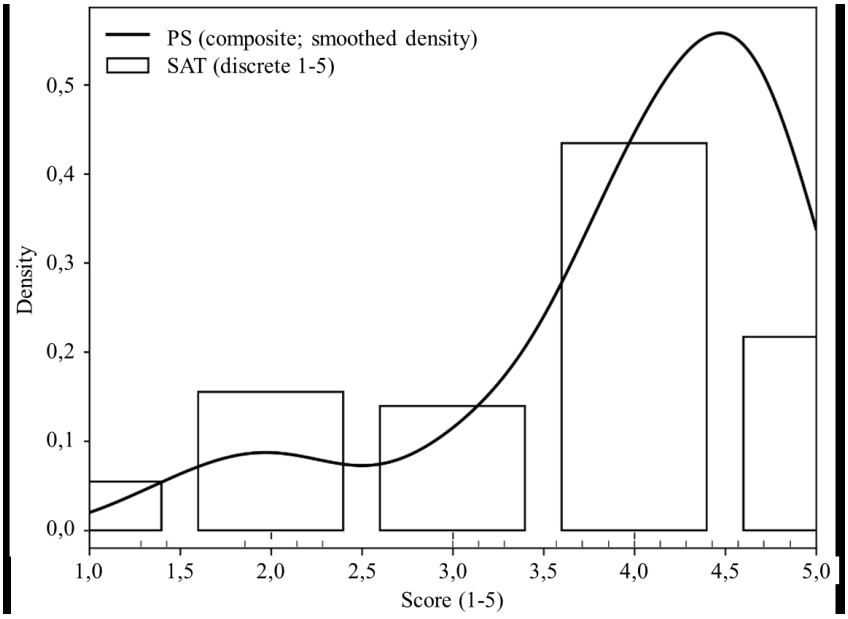


Figure 1. Distribution of psychological safety and overall job satisfaction.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

4.2. Tests of the analytical expectations

The first analytical expectation concerned the bivariate association between psychological safety and overall job satisfaction. The results show a strong positive correlation between the two variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was $r = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$, while the corresponding non-parametric estimate was Spearman's rho = 0.68, $p < 0.001$. The closeness of these coefficients suggests that the observed pattern does not depend on parametric assumptions alone. These results support Hypothesis 1.

A simple ordinary least squares regression was then estimated with overall job satisfaction as the dependent variable and psychological safety as the sole predictor. The model was statistically significant and explained 55% of the variance in job satisfaction, $R^2 = 0.55$, $F(1,127) = 153.86$, $p < 0.001$. The unstandardised regression coefficient for psychological safety was $b = 0.94$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.79, 1.09], which indicates that higher psychological safety scores were associated with higher job satisfaction in the sample (Figure 2).

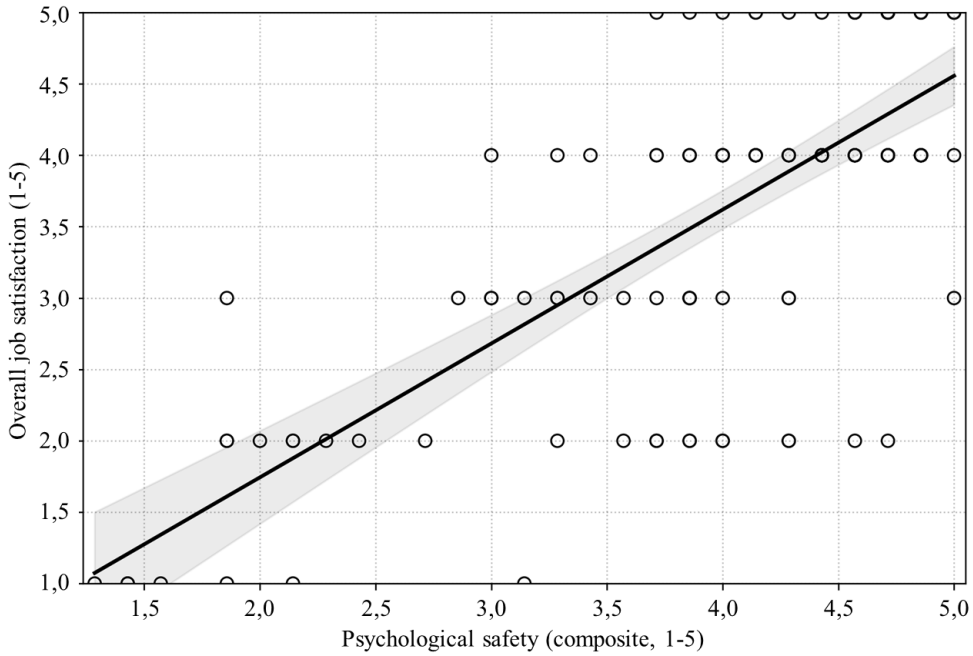


Figure 2. Psychological safety and overall job satisfaction correlation with fitted regression line.
Source: Author's own elaboration.

The second analytical expectation concerned whether the relationship remained visible after adjustment for selected respondent and work-context characteristics. To test this, overall job satisfaction was regressed on psychological safety while controlling for industry, organisation size, job level, total tenure, and gender. The adjusted model remained statistically significant, with $R^2 = 0.63$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.56$, $F(20,108) = 9.00$, $p < 0.001$. Within this model, psychological safety remained a strong positive predictor of overall job satisfaction, with $b = 0.92$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 10.18$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.74, 1.10]. These findings support Hypothesis 2.

4.3. Exploratory item-level findings

To extend the practical value of the construct-level results, the seven psychological safety items were examined separately in relation to overall job satisfaction – this part of the analysis was exploratory. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded so that higher scores always reflected more favourable psychological safety perceptions.

At the bivariate level, three items showed the strongest relationships with overall job satisfaction. The clearest link was observed for PS7, which reflects the perception that one's unique skills and talents are valued and used, with $r = 0.68$. This was followed by PS4, which captures the sense that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, with $r = 0.64$, and PS5-rev, which indicates that it is easy to ask others for help, with $r = 0.63$.

Because the seven items reflect related aspects of the same broader construct, a simultaneous regression was estimated to examine their unique relationships with job satisfaction when overlap among items was considered. In this model, two items retained

statistically reliable coefficients: PS7, $\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.005$, and PS5-rev, $\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$. Expressed in the original response metric, a one-standard-deviation increase in the perception that one's unique skills are valued corresponded to about 0.32 points higher overall job satisfaction on the five-point scale. The remaining items, including PS4, showed smaller coefficients once shared variance with the other psychological safety items was controlled (Figure 4).

These exploratory results suggest that the relationship between psychological safety and job satisfaction is not spread evenly across all parts of the scale. In this sample, the strongest patterns concern whether employees feel that their contribution is recognised and whether asking for help carries low interpersonal cost.

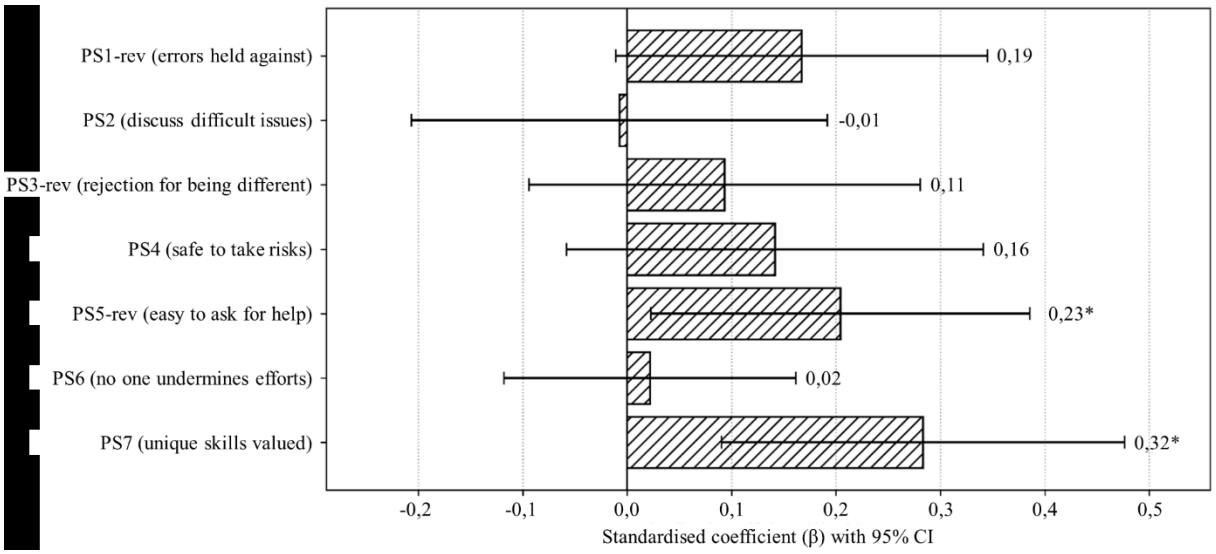


Figure 3. Standardized coefficients from the simultaneous regression of overall job satisfaction on Edmondson's 7-item scale.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

4.4. Supplementary subgroup differences

Additional analyses examined whether psychological safety and overall job satisfaction differed across selected respondent groups. These findings are supplementary to the main construct-level analysis and should be read with caution.

The clearest subgroup differences concerned job level. Mean values of both psychological safety and overall job satisfaction were highest among directors and lowest among junior-level staff. The strongest contrast was observed between directors and specialists. For psychological safety, the adjusted mean difference was 0.80 points, 95% CI [0.06, 1.53], $p_{adj} = 0.028$. For overall job satisfaction, the corresponding difference was 1.30 points, 95% CI [0.37, 2.23], $p_{adj} = 0.0017$.

Differences also emerged by total professional experience, though more clearly for psychological safety than for job satisfaction. The strongest contrast in psychological safety was between respondents with 3 to 5 years of experience and those with more than 10 years, with a mean difference of 0.83 points, 95% CI [0.14, 1.51], p_adj = 0.0107.

Industry differentiated psychological safety more clearly than overall job satisfaction. Two contrasts were especially notable: training and development versus manufacturing, mean difference = 1.61, 95% CI [0.19, 3.04], p_adj = 0.014, and consulting versus manufacturing, mean difference = 1.49, 95% CI [0.07, 2.91], p_adj = 0.0304. For job satisfaction, industry-level differences were weaker and did not cross the adjusted significance threshold.

5. Discussion

This study examined whether self-reported psychological safety is related to overall job satisfaction among employees working in large enterprises, and which psychological safety experiences are most closely linked to favourable work evaluations. The results show a strong positive correlation between the two constructs in the analysed sample. That pattern remained visible after adjustment for selected individual and work-context characteristics. This result is consistent with earlier work that places psychological safety within a broader set of appreciative employee attitudes and work-related outcomes (Abror, Patrisia, 2020; Edmondson, Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017). It also fits more specific empirical findings linking psychological safety with job satisfaction in healthcare and change-related settings (Etti et al., 2025; Kim, Kim, 2020; Kuo et al., 2019; Stühlinger et al., 2019).

The contribution of the study is narrower than a broad claim that psychological safety improves positive employee outcomes in general. The value of the present analysis lies in showing that psychological safety is closely linked to overall job satisfaction in a purposive sample of employees from large enterprises, and that this link appears strongest where employees experience low interpersonal cost around seeking help and a clear sense that their distinctive qualities and contributions are recognised and used. Job satisfaction is not the same as engagement, however. It reflects a broader judgment about whether work feels supportive, workable, and worth doing (Brief, Weiss, 2002). This distinction is important because much of the psychological safety literature has focused more heavily on learning, employee voice, and speaking up than on broad evaluative judgments about work (Edmondson, Lei, 2014).

The item-level findings sharpen that finding. Among the Edmondson's seven items, the strongest bivariate links with overall job satisfaction concerned recognition of unique skills and talents, perceived safety in taking interpersonal risks, and ease of asking others for help. Once overlap among items was considered, recognition of one's distinctive contribution and ease of help-seeking remained the clearest unique correlates. This pattern fits prior work

suggesting that employees respond not only to broad climate perceptions, but also to concrete relational cues that shape whether work feels manageable and socially sustainable (Etti et al., 2025; Stühlinger et al., 2019). It also matches the view that psychological safety matters partly because it lowers the social cost of support seeking and supports more constructive everyday work coordination (Edmondson, Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017).

The subgroup analyses offer added context, though they should be interpreted with caution. Higher scores on both psychological safety and job satisfaction were observed among directors, while lower levels were found among more junior staff and specialists. Professional experience and industry profile also differentiated psychological safety more clearly than job satisfaction. These patterns may reflect differences in role discretion, access to support, accumulated organisational knowledge, or local work norms. That reading is in line with earlier studies showing that psychological safety is shaped by contextual conditions, including local leadership and work-group processes, rather than operating as a fixed individual disposition (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, Lei, 2014). Given the purposive sample and uneven subgroup sizes, these findings are best treated as descriptive rather than definitive.

The practical implications follow from this satisfaction-focused interpretation of the findings. First, managers should treat psychological safety not as a slogan, but as a pattern of repeated interpersonal experiences that shape how employees evaluate the quality of their work. In the present data, job satisfaction was most closely linked to whether asking for help was straightforward and whether employees felt that their strengths were genuinely recognised. This points attention to daily responses to questions, uncertainty, and requests for support, as well as to visible use of employees' contribution. Second, job satisfaction appears to depend not only on formal job features, but also on the social conditions under which work is carried out. This broader interpretation is consistent with studies showing that safety-related climates and relational coordination are associated with satisfaction-related outcomes, even where the organisational context differs from the one examined here (Kim, Kim, 2020; Lintanga, Rathakrishnan, 2024; Stühlinger et al., 2019). Third, organisations should be cautious when reading aggregate satisfaction scores without looking at the relational conditions beneath them.

The study also has clear limits considering the design is cross-sectional, based on self-report data, and restricted to a purposive sample of employees in large enterprises. These features limit causal inference and narrow the scope of generalisation, a point already visible in broader review work on psychological safety (Abror, Patrisia, 2020; Edmondson, Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017). The use of a single global job satisfaction item also narrows measurement scope, even though prior evidence suggests that such measures can provide acceptable estimates of overall job appraisal in survey settings (Dolbier et al., 2005; Wanous et al., 1997). The self-report design also leaves open the possibility of common method bias and overlap with related constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

One further caution follows from the relationship between the present manuscript and the previously published engagement paper based on the same broader survey programme. That earlier article reported a strong positive correlation between psychological safety and overall job satisfaction, but also showed that the psychological safety and job satisfaction relationship did not remain significant after controlling for employee engagement, whereas the engagement-job satisfaction relationship remained significant after controlling for psychological safety (Plezia, Moczydłowska, 2025), which does not negate the present findings. It does suggest that part of the observed association between psychological safety and job satisfaction may overlap with broader motivational or engagement-related processes. That interpretation also fits the wider literature, where psychological safety is linked to adjacent attitudes and behaviours rather than to one isolated outcome alone (Edmondson and Bransby, 2023; Frazier et al., 2017).

Future research should address these limits directly. Longitudinal designs would help determine whether higher psychological safety precedes higher job satisfaction, whether the relationship is reciprocal, or whether both are shaped by broader organisational conditions. Studies using broader and more varied samples could test whether the present pattern holds outside large-enterprise settings. Multi-item satisfaction measures would allow a more detailed assessment of whether psychological safety is more strongly linked to relational, developmental, or overall evaluative parts of satisfaction (Dolbier et al., 2005; Wanous et al., 1997). Studies that model psychological safety, employee engagement, and job satisfaction together would also help separate overlap from distinction more clearly.

6. Summary

This article examined whether self-reported psychological safety is related to overall job satisfaction among employees working in large enterprises. In the analysed sample, the association was strong and consistently positive. Employees who reported higher psychological safety also tended to report higher overall job satisfaction, and this pattern remained visible after adjustment for selected respondent and work-context characteristics.

The study also showed that the psychological safety construct is not equally informative across all of its component experiences. The clearest patterns concerned whether employees felt that their distinctive contribution was genuinely recognised and whether help could be sought without interpersonal cost. This suggests that job satisfaction may depend less on broad declarations about openness and more on repeated experiences of support, recognition, and workable social interaction.

For management practice, the findings point to the interactional side of work, where leaders may shape this through their responses to questions, uncertainty, requests for help, and visible use of employees' strengths. A workplace in which asking for support is normal and individual contribution is clearly valued and recognised may be more likely to sustain favourable overall work evaluations than one that relies only on formal policies or broad cultural statements.

The results still need to be understood within the limits of the design. The study is based on a purposive sample, cross-sectional self-report data, and a large-enterprise setting, which restricts causal inference and broader generalisation. Overall job satisfaction was measured with a single global item, and the subgroup analyses relied on uneven category sizes. The wider analytical context is also relevant, because an earlier publication based on the same survey programme showed that psychological safety and job satisfaction were strongly correlated, but this association did not remain significant after controlling for employee engagement. The present article should therefore be treated as a focused analysis of the psychological safety and job satisfaction relationship, not as evidence of a fully independent causal path.

The study points to psychological safety as a practically relevant correlate of overall job satisfaction in large enterprises, especially where employees experience low social cost in seeking help and clear recognition of their distinctive value. For managers, the main implication is that job satisfaction may be strengthened not only through formal job design, but also through daily relational conditions that make work feel respectful, supported, and worth doing.

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