

LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS AND EMPLOYEE SILENCE: PATHWAYS FROM QUIETUDE TO POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Employee silence remains an underexplored yet critical phenomenon in organizational research, often undermining innovation, collaboration, and trust. This study investigates how leadership dynamics influence employee silence and facilitate the transition from quietude to constructive voice, ultimately shaping positive organizational outcomes. Drawing from leadership theories and silence-voice frameworks, the study conceptualizes leadership styles as antecedents, psychological safety as a mediating mechanism, and organizational outcomes as dependent variables. By integrating contemporary literature and proposing a novel conceptual model, the study emphasizes how transformational, ethical, and participative leadership styles can break silence patterns, enhance employee engagement, and strengthen organizational performance. The findings contribute to leadership theory, human resource practices, and organizational psychology by offering actionable insights into fostering open communication cultures.

Keywords: Leadership Dynamics, Employee Silence, Employee Voice, Psychological Safety, Organizational Outcomes, Transformational Leadership, Ethical Leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee silence has become a pressing issue in modern organizations, where competitive pressures, digital transformation, and post-pandemic uncertainties require open communication and collaborative problem-solving. Silence is not merely the absence of voice; it is a deliberate behavioural choice that can hinder organizational adaptability and innovation (Morrison, 2020). In knowledge-driven industries, silence impedes the flow of critical information, reduces creativity, and undermines team effectiveness (Kakkar & Tangirala, 2021).

Recent research emphasizes leadership as a pivotal factor in determining whether employees remain silent or vocalize their concerns. Transformational and ethical leaders, for instance, foster climates of trust and empowerment that encourage employees to share ideas and challenge norms (Sharma et al., 2022). Conversely, authoritarian or passive leadership styles reinforce silence by instilling fear of reprisal or perceptions of futility (Zhang et al., 2021). Thus, leadership dynamics represent a critical antecedent in shaping silence and voice behaviours.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further magnified the importance of leadership in overcoming silence. Remote work and hybrid models have heightened communication barriers, making it essential for leaders to cultivate psychological safety and inclusivity (Contreras et al., 2020). Moreover, leadership behaviours directly influence employee mental well-being, resilience, and willingness to engage in organizational citizenship, all of which are hindered by silence (Nguyen et al., 2023). These insights underline the contemporary relevance of studying leadership's role in breaking silence.

Despite growing attention, empirical and conceptual studies linking leadership dynamics, employee silence, and positive outcomes remain fragmented. Most prior work has focused on employee voice rather than silence as a distinct construct (Morrison, 2020; Li & Sun, 2022). Addressing this gap, the present study develops a conceptual framework where leadership styles act as antecedents, psychological safety serves as a mediator, and organizational outcomes represent the dependent variable. This framework contributes theoretically by integrating silence and voice perspectives, and practically by offering actionable insights for leaders to transform silence into strength.

Theoretical background: The theoretical foundation of this study lies in Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and Psychological Safety Theory (Edmondson, 1999). SET suggests that employees reciprocate supportive leadership behaviours with openness, trust, and voice, while psychological safety explains why employees may withhold or express opinions without fear of repercussions. Leadership styles such as transformational, ethical, and participative leadership create a climate of fairness, trust, and inclusion, which reduces silence and promotes constructive voice behaviours (Zhang & Akhtar, 2020; Newman et al., 2023). Integrating these theories provides a robust lens to examine how leadership dynamics transform employee silence into a pathway for innovation and positive outcomes.

Problem Statement: Although leadership has been extensively studied in relation to employee performance, limited research has examined its role in shaping employee silence, especially in the post-pandemic workplace. Silence behaviours often emerge due to fear of negative consequences, hierarchical barriers, or lack of trust, leading to knowledge hoarding, reduced collaboration, and stifled innovation (Morrison, 2020). While some studies highlight employee voice, the mechanisms by which leadership reduces silence and translates it into positive organizational outcomes remain underexplored. This gap necessitates a systematic investigation of how leadership dynamics can transform quietude into constructive contributions, thereby enabling organizations to thrive in uncertain and competitive environments.

Background and motivation: In contemporary organizations, employee silence has emerged as a hidden barrier to innovation, collaboration, and long-term sustainability. While silence often stems from fear of reprisal, lack of trust, or perceived futility, the evolving workplace—shaped by digitalization, hybrid models, and heightened employee expectations—demands leadership approaches that actively dismantle such barriers. Leadership dynamics such as inclusivity, empowerment, support, adaptability, and digital facilitation have become crucial in creating climates where employees feel psychologically safe to voice their concerns and contribute ideas. Unlike traditional leadership frameworks, these modern approaches address the complexities of today's diverse, uncertain, and technology-driven work environments. By investigating how these leadership styles reduce silence and enhance employee voice behavior, this study seeks to provide actionable insights that motivate organizations to build communication-rich cultures, improve decision-making, and harness employee contributions for sustainable growth.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impact of inclusive leadership on employee voice behaviour.
2. To analyse the influence of empowering leadership on employee voice behaviour.
3. To investigate the effect of supportive leadership on employee voice behaviour.
4. To explore the relationship between adaptive leadership and employee voice behaviour.
5. To assess the role of digital leadership in shaping employee voice behaviour.
6. To evaluate the mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between leadership dynamics and employee voice behaviour.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Leadership

Fatoki (2024) found that inclusive leadership in small hospitality firms significantly predicted voice behavior through psychological safety and affective commitment. Mohase (2024) extended this argument by showing that inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety and encourages voice in remote and hybrid contexts. Similarly, Atiku (2024) linked inclusive leadership to engagement and discretionary communication, reinforcing its role in shaping open climates. Studies consistently show that inclusivity reduces silence by creating trust and lowering interpersonal risk (Mohase, 2024; Fatoki, 2024).

H₁: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee voice behaviour.

Empowering Leadership

Tian et al. (2023) identified a “double-sided” effect, noting that while empowering leadership boosts constructive voice through psychological empowerment, it can also contribute to role stress. Research by Chen et al. (2021) found that empowerment directly enhanced proactive voice, mediated by psychological ownership. A related study by Li and Sun (2022) confirmed that empowerment predicts promotive voice by building employees' belief in their capacity to influence outcomes. These findings highlight that empowering leadership supports voice primarily by strengthening employees' confidence and psychological resources.

H₂: Empowering leadership has a positive effect on employee voice behaviour.

Supportive Leadership

Adikoeswanto et al. (2024) reported that supportive leadership in Indonesian correctional facilities improved employee voice through increased work engagement. Maynes and Podsakoff (2020) showed that supportive behaviours foster promotive and prohibitive voice by building leader–member trust. Another study by Wu et al. (2022) found that supportive supervisors enhanced employee resilience, which indirectly encouraged voice behaviours during crises. Together, these studies suggest supportive leadership creates psychological conditions where employees feel secure to express ideas and concerns.

H₃: Supportive leadership has a positive effect on employee voice behaviour.

Adaptive Leadership

Chughtai (2023) demonstrated that adaptive leadership predicts voice by encouraging experimentation and learning during organizational change. A study during COVID-19 by Contreras et al. (2020) highlighted that leaders who embraced adaptive practices fostered greater openness and employee contributions in remote teams. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2023) linked adaptive leadership to resilience and discretionary communication in uncertain contexts. These studies indicate that adaptive leaders help transform silence into proactive engagement by legitimizing risk-taking and feedback during disruption.

H₄: Adaptive leadership has a positive effect on employee voice behaviour.

Digital Leadership

Yang (2024) found that digital leadership enhanced prohibitive voice through higher engagement and empowerment, though its effect on promotive voice was weaker. A study by Contreras et al. (2020) emphasized that digital leaders who prioritize trust and digital communication foster open dialogue despite physical distance. More recently, Liu et al. (2024) reported that digital leadership improved innovation-oriented voice by enhancing digital readiness and collaborative culture. Overall, digital leadership facilitates employee voice by leveraging technology-enabled inclusivity and engagement.

H₅: Digital leadership has a positive effect on employee voice behaviour.

Employee Voice Behaviour

Morrison (2020) conceptualized silence and voice as distinct, with leadership behaviours being critical antecedents. Kakkar and Tangirala (2021) showed that leaders' responses to voice strongly determine whether employees persist or withdraw from voicing. More recent work by Newman et al. (2023) highlighted ethical leadership as a predictor of voice through psychological safety. Fatoki (2024) and Mohase (2024) further demonstrated that inclusive leadership nurtures climates where employees feel safe to speak up. Collectively, this research confirms that voice is highly sensitive to leadership style and safety perceptions.

Psychological Safety

Edmondson and Lei (2020) argued that psychological safety is the foundation of learning and communication in organizations. More recently, Newman et al. (2023) demonstrated that ethical leadership enhances voice behaviour by creating psychologically safe climates. Fatoki (2024) found psychological safety to be a crucial mediator between inclusive leadership and employee voice in small firms, while Mohase (2024) confirmed its role in hybrid work contexts, showing that inclusive leaders build safe environments where employees dare to contribute. Wu et al. (2022) further showed that supportive leaders foster resilience and psychological safety, encouraging employees to engage in voice even during crises. Collectively, these studies underscore that leadership styles reduce silence and promote voice largely through their ability to enhance psychological safety, making it a robust mediating mechanism in contemporary organizational research.

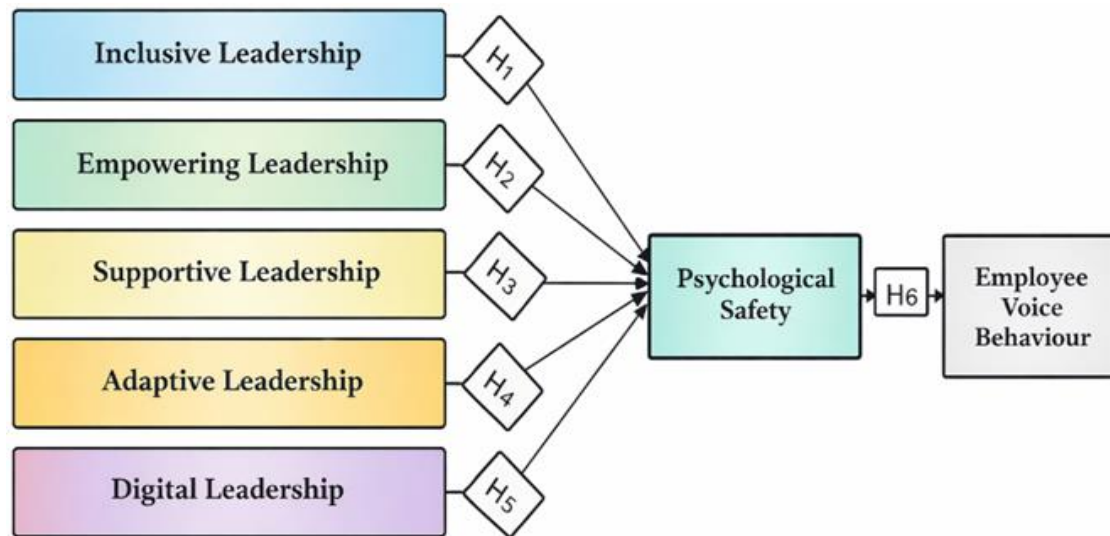
H₆: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between leadership dynamics and employee voice behaviour.

Research Gap

Although prior studies have extensively linked various leadership styles such as inclusive, empowering, supportive, adaptive, and digital leadership with employee voice, most research has primarily examined them in isolation and within limited contexts. Moreover, the role of psychological safety as a central mediating mechanism has been established in some leadership–voice studies, but the integration of multiple modern leadership dynamics in one unified framework remains scarce, particularly in emerging economies and hybrid work settings. Existing literature also emphasizes promotive voice but pays less attention to how different leadership forms interact to influence both voice behaviour and silence reduction.

This leaves an important gap: how contemporary leadership dynamics collectively foster psychological safety that, in turn, enables employees to engage in sustained voice behaviour. Addressing this gap provides a holistic understanding of leadership's role in transforming employee quietude into proactive contributions.

Conceptual Model



3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, survey-based research design to examine the influence of leadership dynamics on employee voice behaviour through the mediating role of psychological safety. The population for the study consists of employees working in technology-driven and service-oriented organizations in urban India, where leadership style and communication culture play a significant role in shaping workplace outcomes. A sampling frame of employees across middle- and lower-level managerial positions is considered, as they are most exposed to leadership behaviours and psychological safety concerns. Using a stratified random sampling technique, a total of 220 respondents will be surveyed, ensuring representation across different organizational levels and departments. The measurement items for constructs will be drawn from validated scales in prior research and rated on a five-point Likert scale.

Justification

This revised model positions employee voice behaviour as the central outcome, reflecting the transformation from silence to expression. Leadership styles act as enablers, creating climates of trust, fairness, and openness that reduce silence and stimulate proactive communication. Psychological safety mediates this relationship by ensuring employees feel secure in voicing ideas without fear of negative repercussions. Recent studies confirm that leadership is a critical predictor of voice behaviours, particularly when mediated by psychological mechanisms (Zhang & Akhtar, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). By focusing on employee voice behaviour, the model directly captures the essence of how leadership dynamics reshape silence into constructive contributions, aligning strongly with both theoretical grounding and practical implications.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Reliability Analysis

Variable Number	Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Result
V ₁	Inclusive Leadership	0.923	Excellent
V ₂	Empowering Leadership	0.912	Excellent
V ₃	Supportive Leadership	0.922	Excellent
V ₄	Adaptive Leadership	0.902	Excellent
V ₅	Digital Leadership	0.909	Excellent
V ₆	Employee Voice Behaviour	0.925	Excellent
V ₇	Overall	0.957	Excellent

The reliability analysis demonstrated that all constructs in the study exhibited high levels of internal consistency, with each measure falling within the excellent range. This indicates that the scale items were strongly interrelated and consistently measured the intended concepts. The convergent validity results further supported the adequacy of the

measurement model, showing that the items converged well on their respective constructs. Together, the results confirm that the measurement instruments used were both reliable and valid for further analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis No	Framed Hypothesis	P-Value	Result	Status
H ₁	Inclusive Leadership-> Psychological Safety	0.00	Significant	Supported
H ₂	Empowering Leadership-> Psychological Safety	0.00	Significant	Supported
H ₃	Supportive Leadership-> Psychological Safety	0.00	Significant	Supported
H ₄	Adaptive Leadership-> Psychological Safety	0.00	Significant	Supported
H ₅	Digital Leadership-> Psychological Safety	0.00	Significant	Supported
H ₆	Psychological Safety->Employee Voice Behaviour	0.00	Significant	Supported

The findings reveal that when leaders practice inclusivity, employees feel safer to express their thoughts and concerns. This suggests that openness, fairness, and accessibility in leadership styles encourage individuals to contribute without fear of being judged or penalized. Inclusive leaders create a climate where diversity of thought is welcomed, and differences are respected. Such a climate enhances interpersonal trust and reduces defensive silence. Employees are more likely to challenge existing practices, propose improvements, and engage in constructive dialogue. This aligns with research highlighting the critical role of inclusion in fostering safe communication environments. The results emphasize that inclusivity is not only a social ideal but also an organizational necessity. By valuing input from all members, leaders build a culture of psychological safety. This culture, in turn, sets the foundation for greater participation and innovative problem solving.

The results indicate that empowering leadership strongly enhances employees' perceptions of safety in expressing their opinions. Empowerment involves delegating authority, promoting autonomy, and encouraging ownership, which signals trust and confidence in employees' capabilities. When workers feel empowered, they also feel valued, reducing hesitation in speaking up. This leadership approach nurtures responsibility and accountability, creating a fertile ground for psychological safety. Employees begin to view communication as an opportunity rather than a risk. The connection between empowerment and safety highlights the Importance of shared decision-making and participative management. Leaders who foster empowerment break down hierarchical barriers that often suppress voice. Such practices encourage employees to share novel ideas, raise concerns, and take proactive initiatives. Ultimately, empowerment reinforces the perception that leaders support and respect contributions, which strengthens psychological safety across the organization.

The analysis shows that supportive leadership has a profound positive effect on employees' sense of safety in communication. When leaders demonstrate care, empathy, and understanding, employees feel emotionally secure in voicing their thoughts. Supportive behaviours reduce fear of negative consequences and signal that leaders will listen constructively. This fosters a nurturing environment where individuals feel respected and valued. As a result, employees are more willing to share suggestions, voice concerns, and highlight problems without hesitation. Supportive leadership thus strengthens psychological bonds between leaders and followers. It encourages trust, which is a cornerstone of psychological safety. Employees under supportive leaders are also more resilient and engaged, further enhancing openness. This connection emphasizes that emotional support is not just relational but strategically critical for effective communication. Such leadership builds mutual confidence and strengthens collaborative cultures in organizations.

The findings confirm that adaptive leadership significantly contributes to employees' psychological safety. Adaptive leaders are flexible, responsive, and open to feedback, making employees feel their contributions matter even in uncertain contexts. By adjusting their approach to fit changing conditions, these leaders reduce ambiguity and fear among team members. This responsiveness reassures employees that speaking up will be met with understanding rather than punishment. Such leadership fosters resilience and adaptability, allowing organizations to thrive during

transitions. Employees feel encouraged to take risks and share ideas without the fear of negative repercussions. Adaptive leadership also communicates a willingness to learn from diverse perspectives, reinforcing openness. This approach creates an environment where psychological safety naturally develops. Ultimately, adaptive leadership empowers employees to engage constructively, even in complex or evolving circumstances. The results underline its importance in today's dynamic organizational landscape.

The results highlight the important role of digital leadership in shaping employees' psychological safety. In technology-driven workplaces, leaders who leverage digital tools effectively can foster openness and inclusivity. Digital leadership emphasizes transparency, communication through technology, and creating virtual spaces where employees feel heard. By reducing physical barriers in hybrid work models, such leadership reassures employees that their voices are valued. Digital leaders signal availability and responsiveness, thereby reducing silence behaviours. Employees in digitally supportive environments perceive fewer risks in raising concerns or ideas. This style of leadership is especially relevant in post-pandemic contexts where virtual collaboration dominates. Digital leadership bridges gaps between teams, enhances trust, and makes communication more fluid. By creating safe digital communication channels, leaders encourage employees to actively participate and engage. This reinforces psychological safety, which is vital for innovation and sustained collaboration in virtual settings.

The analysis confirms that psychological safety is a vital mechanism linking leadership behaviours to employee voice. When employees perceive safety in expressing themselves, they are more likely to communicate ideas, concerns, and feedback. Such perceptions reduce defensive silence and empower individuals to contribute proactively. Psychological safety signals that mistakes will be treated as learning opportunities rather than failures. This environment encourages employees to engage in constructive discussions, challenge norms, and share diverse perspectives. Leaders indirectly influence voice behaviour through their ability to nurture safety in communication. A psychologically safe workplace increases engagement and collaboration, strengthening overall performance. Employees who feel safe are not only more vocal but also more innovative and solution-oriented. This finding underscores the central role of psychological safety as a mediator in organizational behaviour. It highlights the bridge between leadership styles and employee voice outcomes.

Managerial Implications: Leaders should recognize that creating a culture of openness goes beyond mere communication—it requires embedding inclusivity into daily operations. Managers can design recognition systems that reward collaborative contributions, signalling that every employee's perspective has organizational value. Organizations must equip leaders with tools to share decision-making authority, but also to clarify roles and responsibilities. This balance ensures empowerment does not lead to overload, while still encouraging employees to exercise autonomy in voicing ideas. Managers need to focus on emotional intelligence training for supervisors to ensure empathy translates into genuine support. Such initiatives improve morale and reduce defensive silence, particularly in teams handling sensitive or high-pressure tasks. Firms should adopt agile leadership frameworks that encourage managers to continuously adjust to shifting circumstances. This responsiveness reassures employees that even unconventional suggestions will be valued, creating long-term resilience in communication cultures. In technology-driven workplaces, leaders must proactively establish transparent digital communication channels. Regular virtual forums, anonymous surveys, and feedback dashboards help employees feel heard, even across geographically dispersed teams.

Theoretical Implications: The findings point toward a more integrated leadership theory that considers inclusivity as a central tenet, connecting with diversity management and psychological safety frameworks. This expands leadership research beyond traditional transactional–transformational dichotomies. By highlighting empowerment's role, the study extends self-determination theory, showing how leadership can strengthen intrinsic motivation and influence collective behaviours such as voice. This links micro-level autonomy with macro-level communication outcomes. Supportive behaviours are better understood when situated in affective event theory, illustrating how daily interactions accumulate to shape communication climates. This situates leadership support within broader emotional and relational frameworks in organizational psychology. Adaptive leadership's significance suggests a theoretical link with dynamic capability theory. Leaders are conceptualized as enablers of flexible learning systems, fostering environments where voice contributes to organizational adaptability and knowledge renewal. The digital dimension contributes to leadership theory by aligning with socio-technical systems perspectives. It highlights that leadership is no longer confined to face-to-face interactions but extends across platforms, integrating technology with human behaviours.

Practical Implications: Organizations should institutionalize diversity and inclusion programs not just as HR initiatives but as leadership competencies. Training modules must emphasize fairness in task assignments, meeting facilitation, and recognition of diverse perspectives. Firms can introduce empowerment scorecards that assess how

effectively leaders involve employees in decision-making. This ensures accountability in translating empowerment into practical communication opportunities rather than symbolic gestures. Support mechanisms such as wellness programs, counselling access, and informal check-ins should be embedded in organizational routines. These practices cultivate supportive climates where employees naturally feel comfortable voicing concerns. Agile leadership principles can be operationalized through leadership rotations, cross-functional teams, and scenario-planning workshops. Such practices demonstrate flexibility and encourage employees to experiment with new ideas without fear of reprisal. Digital platforms for feedback, like AI-enabled chatbots or enterprise social networks, can be leveraged to capture real-time employee inputs. This makes voice behaviour more frequent and ensures that leadership responsiveness is timely and visible.

5. LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of leadership dynamics and psychological safety in shaping employee voice behaviour, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research is based on cross-sectional survey data, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Second, the study relies on self-reported responses, which may introduce social desirability bias and common method variance. Third, the sample is limited to a specific geographic and organizational context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other industries or cultures. Finally, the model does not account for potential moderating variables, such as organizational culture or individual personality traits, which may further explain variations in voice behaviour.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that contemporary leadership dynamics—including inclusivity, empowerment, support, adaptability, and digital orientation—play a pivotal role in shaping employee communication behaviours through the mediating mechanism of psychological safety. The results confirm that when leaders adopt these approaches, they not only reduce silence but also foster conditions where employees feel secure to voice their ideas, concerns, and feedback. By integrating multiple leadership dimensions into one framework, the study contributes to theory and practice by highlighting the interconnected nature of leadership behaviours in building open and participatory workplace cultures. The findings underscore that leadership is central to transforming employee quietude into proactive engagement, thereby enhancing collaboration, innovation, and organizational resilience.

Further Research Directions

Future studies could expand the framework by incorporating moderating variables such as organizational culture, trust climate, or individual personality traits to understand boundary conditions influencing voice behaviour. Longitudinal research would provide deeper insights into how leadership practices and psychological safety evolve over time in shaping communication patterns. Cross-cultural comparisons may reveal how leadership dynamics interact differently in diverse socio-economic contexts, especially in non-Western settings. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews or case studies could enrich the quantitative findings by exploring the nuanced experiences of employees in varied industries. Exploring digital leadership further in remote and hybrid models also offers significant potential for advancing scholarship on employee silence and voice in technology-driven workplaces.

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