

Psychological Safety and Employee Performance of Non-Academic Staff in State-Owned Universities in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the relationship between psychological safety and employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. The dimensions of psychological safety were inclusion safety and contributor safety, while employee performance was measured in terms of task performance and contextual performance. The study adopted the cross-sectional research survey design. Primary data were generated through a structured questionnaire administered to non-academic staff of two Rivers State-owned universities. The population for the study was 1,470 non-academic staff, and a sample of 314 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. Of the 314 copies of the questionnaire administered, 288 were duly completed, returned and found usable, and these formed the basis of the data analysis. The reliability of the instrument was achieved through the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, with all items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation coefficient at a 0.05 level of significance and a 95% confidence interval, with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed a strong, positive and significant relationship between inclusion safety and employee performance, and between contributor safety and employee performance, of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. The study therefore concludes that psychological safety significantly enhances employee performance in state-owned universities in Rivers State. This implies that when non-academic staff feel safe to be included and to contribute their views without fear of negative consequences, they are more likely to perform effectively both in their formal task requirements and in the discretionary, extra-role activities that support the university's overall functioning. The study recommends that the management of state-owned universities in Rivers State should institutionalise practices that promote inclusion safety, such as ensuring that diverse voices are genuinely heard in departmental decision-making, and should actively encourage contributor safety by protecting staff from ridicule or retaliation when they raise concerns, ask questions or propose new ideas.

KEYWORDS: Psychological Safety, Employee Performance, Inclusion Safety, Contributor Safety, Task Performance, Contextual Performance

INTRODUCTION

Employees remain an organisation's most valuable asset, and non-academic staff are no exception: their day-to-day conduct in admissions, records, finance, facilities and student support functions has a direct bearing on how smoothly a university runs. Employee performance can be categorised into task performance, which relates directly to the responsibilities outlined in an employee's job description, and contextual performance, the discretionary, extra-role conduct that is not formally required but nonetheless supports the wider effectiveness of the organisation (Menezes, 2012; Werner, 2000). For state-owned universities in Nigeria, which frequently operate under significant funding and staffing constraints, the performance of non-academic staff is not a peripheral administrative concern; it directly shapes the quality of the environment in which teaching, learning and research take place.

A growing body of organisational research links employee performance to how safe staff feel in expressing themselves at work. Psychological safety refers to an employee's perception that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, such that they can speak up, propose new ideas, ask questions or admit mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retaliation (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990). In hierarchical, bureaucratic public-sector work environments, of the kind common in Nigerian state-owned universities, non-academic staff may be particularly reluctant to raise concerns or contribute ideas for fear of being seen as

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insubordinate or incompetent. Where this reluctance persists, the university loses access to frontline knowledge that could otherwise improve how it is run, and staff themselves may withdraw effort rather than engage fully with their roles.

Despite the volume of psychological safety research conducted in corporate, healthcare and manufacturing settings, comparatively little attention has been paid to non-academic staff in Nigerian state-owned universities, a workforce that is often overshadowed in the literature by a focus on academic staff. This is a notable gap, given that non-academic staff constitute a significant proportion of university personnel and are central to institutional functioning. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between two dimensions of psychological safety, namely inclusion safety and contributor safety, and employee performance, measured in terms of task performance and contextual performance, among non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the relationship between inclusion safety and employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.
- Examine the relationship between contributor safety and employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Research Conceptual Model

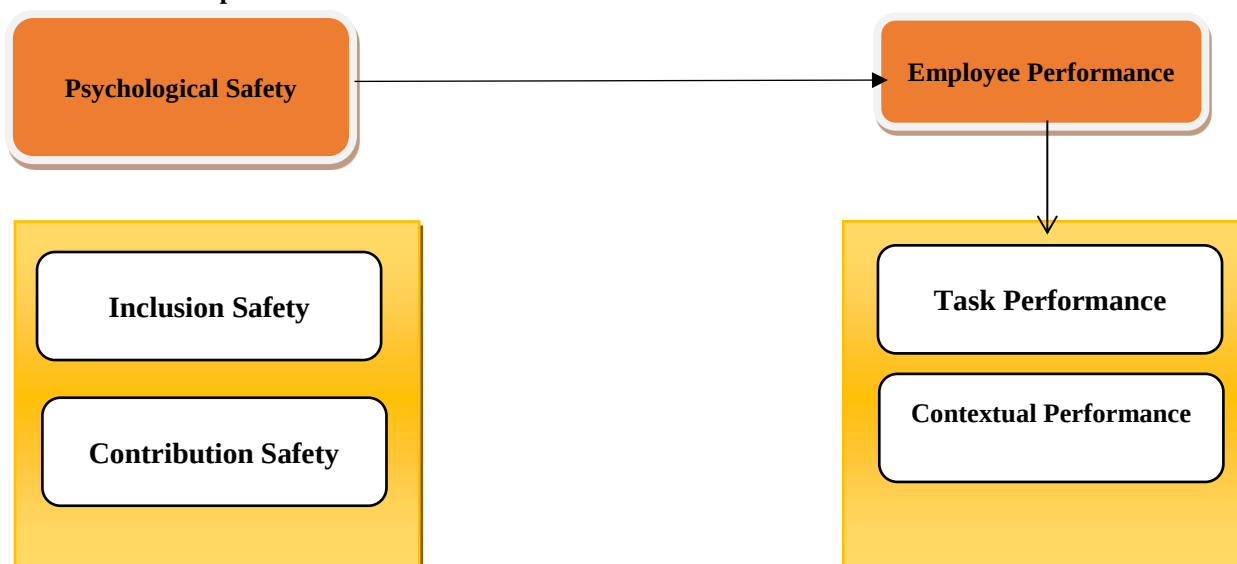


Figure 1: Conceptual model for compressed work week and employee engagement

Research Questions

The study raised the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between inclusion safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State?
- What is the relationship between inclusion safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State?
- What is the relationship between contributor safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State?
- What is the relationship between contributor safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Social Exchange Theory

Homans (1958) introduced social exchange theory and referred to "social behaviour" in his work as "exchange" (Mulkay, 2014). Homans defined social exchange as the exchange of tangible or intangible activity that is more or less rewarding between at least two parties. The sum of additions or withdrawals of bargainable instruments moderates social behaviour (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). Organisational citizenship behaviour is seen as one of the core outcomes of social exchanges in the employment relationship because of its discretionary nature (Bankins, 2015).

Social exchange theory (SET) is one of the most influential conceptual paradigms explaining workplace behaviour and social science phenomena more broadly (Rotich, 2022). It is one of the gold standards for understanding workplace behaviour, as it is deeply embedded in people's daily lives (Ahmad, Nawaz, Ishaq, Khan, & Ashraf, 2023). Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels and Hall (2017) define SET as a concept involving three aspects: an initiation by an actor toward the target; an attitudinal or behavioural response from the target in reciprocity; and the resulting relationship. In essence, social exchange theory refers to the ability of one party to influence another party to act in a certain way (Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2019).

Social exchange theory treats life as a series of sequential transactions between two or more parties, who exchange resources, with one party repaying another for its good or bad deeds, in a reciprocal way (Mitchell, Cropanzano, & Quisenberry, 2012). In these transactions, the quality of the exchange is influenced by the relationship between the actor and the target. According to Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage and Rohdieck (2004), the actor, who may be a supervisor or coworker, initiates the relationship by treating the target, say a subordinate, in a given way, either positively or negatively, and the target reciprocates accordingly. High-quality exchanges result in benefits to the provider, while low-quality exchanges result in harm to the provider. Applied to this study, when a university, through its supervisors and leadership, treats non-academic staff in a way that signals inclusion and safety to contribute, staff are theorised to reciprocate with higher levels of task and contextual performance.

Concept of Psychological Safety

The construct of psychological safety refers to the perception that the workplace is safe for taking interpersonal risks (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). This means that in a psychologically safe work environment, employees can speak up, propose new ideas or admit failure without fear of being criticised or seen negatively by others (Edmondson, 1999, 2004; Kahn, 1990). According to Kark and Carmeli (2009), psychological safety works as a safety net that mitigates risk-taking at work, such as developing innovative ideas, which can encourage employees to engage in creative activities.

According to Edmondson and Lei (2014) and Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan and Vracheva (2016), the notion of psychological safety can be traced back to organisational scholars in the 1960s, more specifically to the work of Schein and Bennis (1965) on organisational change. Schein and Bennis (1965) noted that it is crucial for employees to feel psychologically safe in their work environments in order to alter their behaviours and overcome the challenges facing organisations. Decades later, Kahn (1990) revived the construct of psychological safety in his influential studies of psychological conditions at work. According to Kahn (1990, p. 705), psychological safety is a "sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career." Kahn (1990) introduced the construct as a vital element in encouraging personal engagement at work, explaining that people engage in their tasks when they feel there are no negative consequences to employing themselves fully. Since then, psychological safety has gained substantial attention from scholars and practitioners.

Edmondson (2003) noted that individual behaviours in the workplace are shaped by the potential consequences of employees' actions. This means that employees cognitively weigh the possible interpersonal consequences of a particular behaviour before acting on it. If they believe a specific action could cause them embarrassment, they are less likely to act. In a psychologically safe work climate, employees feel safe expressing themselves by voicing their opinions, admitting failure or challenging the status quo. However, Edmondson (1999, p. 354) emphasised that psychological safety does not mean "a careless sense of permissiveness nor an unrelentingly positive effect." Rather, it is when individuals are comfortable being themselves and perceive that they will not be punished for behaviours that involve uncertainty and risk, such as asking questions, seeking feedback or proposing new ideas (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Edmondson, 1999, 2003).

The construct of psychological safety has been conceptualised differently across three levels of analysis: individual, group and organisational (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Whereas Kahn (1990) and Schein and Bennis (1965) focused on the individual level, Edmondson (1999) introduced the concept of team psychological safety, defined as a shared belief among a group of people that the team or department environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Baer and Frese (2003) extended psychological safety to the organisational level by aggregating respondents' answers within their respective organisations. These levels are not competing approaches; all converge on a single theme, feeling safe to speak up and minimising interpersonal risk in the workplace. Following Edmondson (1999, 2004) and Kahn (1990), this study defines psychological safety as an employee's perception that the workplace

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is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, such that the employee can speak up, propose novel ideas, try new work methods or develop innovative solutions without fear of negative repercussions.

Psychological safety is related to, but distinct from, trust. Trust is the confidence among parties that no party will be harmed by another party's actions (Jones & George, 1998). Both constructs focus on risk minimisation and positive consequences of action, but Edmondson (1999) argued that trust is one component of psychological safety, which goes beyond trust. Edmondson (2004, p. 9) later clarified the distinction: trust is a "dyadic relationship" focused on others' actions and their short- and long-term consequences, whereas psychological safety focuses on the individual's own actions and the short-term consequences of those actions. A climate of mutual trust and respect is one of the characteristics of a psychologically safe work environment (Edmondson, 1999, 2004), and trust is one of the essential elements required to encourage psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999).

Dimensions of Psychological Safety

Inclusion Safety

Inclusion safety refers to the assurance that individuals feel respected, valued and accepted for their unique identities within an organisation or group. It is crucial in promoting a culture in which everyone can express themselves without fear of being marginalised or excluded. Edmondson (2019) defines inclusion safety as a state in which diverse individuals feel empowered to contribute their perspectives. Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart and Singh (2011) explain that inclusion safety involves actively fostering an environment where everyone, regardless of background, feels included, engaged and respected in the decision-making process, and that it ensures individuals from diverse backgrounds feel engaged, heard and recognised for their contributions without fear of exclusion. Nishii (2013) further expands on this, stating that inclusion safety allows employees to feel secure in sharing their unique perspectives, knowing that their contributions are essential and valued by the team. Roberson (2006) explains inclusion safety as a critical component of diversity management, enabling individuals to feel psychologically safe while contributing to discussions or decision-making processes, which involves creating policies and practices that promote equitable treatment and ensure that diverse voices are included in organisational conversations.

Inclusion safety revolves around fostering an environment where individuals feel not just safe but actively embraced for their diverse identities and contributions. While psychological safety is primarily concerned with ensuring that individuals can express ideas without fear of judgement or retribution, inclusion safety goes a step further by focusing on the active creation of a culture that values and amplifies these diverse voices (Edmondson, 2019). This deeper sense of belonging is critical for employees to engage authentically, which in turn leads to better communication, collaboration and innovation. Research has shown that when employees experience inclusion safety, they are more likely to share their perspectives and contribute to problem-solving, leading to higher levels of creativity, team cohesion and innovation (Shore et al., 2011).

Contributor Safety

Contributor safety is a concept focused on creating an environment in which individuals feel protected and secure in offering their input without fear of exploitation, retaliation or harm. Edmondson (2019) defines it as the assurance that employees can voice opinions, share ideas and challenge assumptions without fearing negative consequences. Nemphard and Edmondson (2006) emphasise that contributor safety promotes trust within teams, where members are free to contribute and suggest ideas without the threat of being silenced or marginalised. Shore et al. (2011) further highlight that contributor safety ensures equal participation, especially for underrepresented groups, by protecting individuals from harm and exclusion. In essence, contributor safety is about fostering a climate in which contributors can participate actively in organisational activities, confident that their involvement will not result in personal harm or loss of credibility (Edmondson, 2019). Contributor safety directly influences both inclusion and psychological safety more broadly. It ensures that individuals, particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented groups, are protected from harm, exploitation and retaliation while sharing their insights or opinions. This type of safety is crucial for fostering an environment where all employees feel comfortable contributing diverse perspectives without fear of negative consequences, such as being dismissed or punished for speaking out. Contributor safety also helps counter the negative effects of power imbalances within an organisation: in hierarchical settings, lower-level employees may hesitate to share ideas for fear of being overruled or dismissed by more powerful colleagues or leaders. By ensuring contributor safety, organisations can mitigate these power dynamics and promote a more egalitarian atmosphere in which every voice is heard and respected, regardless of status (Nemphard & Edmondson, 2006).

Concept of Employee Performance

Employee performance is the measure of how an employee behaves and works in fulfilment of the obligations enshrined in the employment contract, and has also been defined as the measure of production from process per unit of input to output (Singh & Cooper, 2011; Rasch, 2018). Performance is therefore the behaviour and outcome exhibited by an individual, which affects the overall positioning of a team and the organisation (Shields, 2011; Shahzad, Luqman, Khan & Shabbir, 2012). The measure of

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employee performance is key in determining the growth and profitability attributed to a firm, reflected in revenue generation and return on investment as contributed by employees.

Employee performance has also been defined as an evaluation of how an employee behaves in a workplace environment and how well he or she performs the duties assigned by the employer; it is a measure of how well or poorly an employee performs those duties in the attainment of organisational goals. Employee performance has important implications for the performance of a firm in any industry (Lussier, 2005), and it remains key in determining the growth and profitability attributed to a firm (Rasch, 2018). Some of the metrics commonly applied in measuring employee performance include quality of work, quantity of work, absenteeism rate, meeting deadlines and completing work within agreed timeframes, and the number of product or service defects, among others (Sabri, Ilyas, & Amjad, 2019).

Measures of Employee Performance

Task Performance

Employee task performance is a crucial aspect of organisational success. It determines how well employees are meeting their job requirements and contributing to the overall productivity and profitability of the organisation. The importance of task performance cannot be overstated, as it affects not only the individual employee but also the team, department and organisation as a whole. Several factors can affect an employee's task performance, including job satisfaction, motivation, work environment and training. Task performance describes how efficiently and effectively an employee performs their tasks, and ultimately how this impacts the organisation's objectives (Pradhan & Jena, 2017). It is measured in terms of how well an employee accomplishes their tasks with the least time and effort (efficiency), the extent to which the intended result is achieved (effectiveness), and how desirable the timeliness of task completion is in relation to the achievement of institutional objectives.

Contextual Performance

Employee contextual performance is a crucial aspect of organisational success, referring to behaviours that go beyond formal job requirements and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the workplace. This is often described as citizenship behaviour, exhibited by an employee's willingness to go the extra mile to ensure the organisation operates effectively, even where this does not directly affect their own productivity (Menezes, 2012). It is measured in terms of creativity, contribution and participation in allocated work assignments. Contextual performance refers to the voluntary and discretionary actions employees take to support the organisation and promote its effective functioning (Werner, 2000), including helping colleagues with their work, attending meetings outside regular working hours, and engaging in activities that go beyond formal job requirements. Research has found that employees who engage in contextual performance are more likely to receive promotions and higher rewards (Werner, 2000), though the motivation behind such behaviour is not solely extrinsic; intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment also play a role. Job satisfaction, in particular, is an important factor influencing contextual performance, since employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to engage in behaviours that benefit the organisation as a whole (Peleaşă, 2018).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Pelho (2024) examined the impact of psychological safety on employee work engagement and work withdrawal, focusing on the mediating role of affective organisational commitment, using an online questionnaire with a sample of 124 respondents. The findings revealed that psychological safety is significantly positively related to work engagement and negatively related to work withdrawal. Mediation analyses showed that affective organisational commitment fully mediates the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement, and partially mediates the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal. These results extend the Job Demands-Resources model by identifying psychological safety as an additional job resource, and support social exchange theory by demonstrating how psychological safety fosters reciprocal positive behaviours in organisations.

Li, Li, Jing, Bai, Zhang and Liang (2022) conducted a study on psychological safety and affective commitment among Chinese hospital staff, examining the mediating roles of job satisfaction and job burnout. A battery of surveys was administered to all medical staff ($n = 267$) in a local second-grade comprehensive hospital. Job satisfaction and job burnout fully mediated the relationship between psychological safety and affective commitment among hospital staff, and perceived organisational support moderated the mediating path through job burnout. The study concluded that psychological safety may enhance affective commitment through improving job satisfaction or reducing job burnout.

Ogbo, Obiekwe and Okorji (2023) examined principals' optimism, teachers' psychological safety and job performance in secondary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. Three null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance using a correlational research design and a sample of 250 teachers drawn through simple random sampling. The data, analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, revealed a moderate negative relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety, and a positive relationship between teachers' psychological safety and their job performance. The findings imply that the display of

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optimism by school principals in the context of the prevailing state of insecurity in the country can dampen teachers' sense of psychological safety, thereby impeding the performance of their teaching responsibilities.

Mahmoud, Ahmad and Poespowidjojo (2022) examined the validation of psychological safety, psychological empowerment, intrapreneurial behaviour and individual performance measurements originally developed in Western individualistic cultures. Using proportionate stratified systematic sampling among production/operations middle managers in Nigerian medium enterprises, the study obtained 355 valid responses. The measurements were analysed through internal consistency, content, convergent and discriminant validity analysis. The results showed that all four construct measurements, including psychological safety, are suitable and appropriate for gauging the respective constructs in collectivistic cultures such as Nigeria, lending support to the cross-cultural applicability of the psychological safety construct used in the present study.

The study thus hypothesised that:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between inclusion safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between inclusion safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between contributor safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between contributor safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

METHODS

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design in its investigation of the variables. Primary data were generated through a structured questionnaire. The population for the study was 1,470 non-academic staff in the two Rivers State-owned universities. A sample of 314 respondents was calculated using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. Of the 314 copies of the questionnaire administered, 288 were duly completed, correctly filled and returned, and these formed the basis of the data analysis reported in this study. The research instrument was validated through the supervisor's vetting and approval, while the reliability of the instrument was achieved through the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, with all items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation coefficient. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Correlations for Inclusion Safety and Employee Performance Measures

			Inclusion safety	Task Performance	Contextual Performance
Spearman's rho	Inclusion safety	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.848**	.870**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	288	288	288
	Task Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.848**	1.000	.928**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	288	288	288
	Contextual Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.870**	.928**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	288	288	288

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output version 25.0

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between inclusion safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 1 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.848 on the relationship between inclusion safety and task performance. This value imply that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of both relationships indicates that the correlation is positive, implying that an increase in task performance was associated with an increase in inclusion safety. Therefore, there is a very strong positive correlation between inclusion safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. The statistical test of significance (p-value) makes possible the generalisation of these findings to the study population. From the results obtained, the sig-calculated is less than the significance level in both cases ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus,

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there is a significant relationship between inclusion safety and task performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between inclusion safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 1 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.870 on the relationship between inclusion safety and contextual performance. This value imply that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of both relationships indicates that the correlation is positive, implying that an increase in contextual performance was associated with an increase in inclusion safety. Therefore, there is a very strong positive correlation between inclusion safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. The statistical test of significance (p-value) makes possible the generalisation of these findings to the study population. From the results obtained, the sig-calculated is less than the significance level in both cases ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between inclusion safety and contextual performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 2: Correlations for Contributor Safety and Employee Performance Measures

			Contributor Safety	Task Performance	Contextual Performance
Spearman's rho	Contributor Safety	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.868**	.846**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	107	107	107
	Task Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.868**	1.000	.928**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	107	107	107
	Contextual Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.846**	.928**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	107	107	107

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output version 25.0

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between contributor safety and employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 2 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.868 on the relationship between contributor safety and task performance, and 0.846 on the relationship between contributor safety and contextual performance. These values imply that a very strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of both relationships indicates that the correlation is positive, implying that an increase in task performance and contextual performance was associated with an increase in contributor safety. Therefore, there is a very strong positive correlation between contributor safety and employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. Similarly, the statistical test of significance (p-value) shows that the sig-calculated is less than the significance level in both cases ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Therefore, based on this finding, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between contributor safety and employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a very strong, positive and significant relationship between psychological safety, in its two dimensions of inclusion safety and contributor safety, and employee performance, measured through task performance and contextual performance, among non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. These findings align with the theoretical position of social exchange theory (Homans, 1958; Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels & Hall, 2017), which suggests that when an organisation treats its employees favourably, such as by making them feel included and safe to contribute, employees are likely to reciprocate with positive work behaviours, including higher task and contextual performance. In this study, non-academic

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staff who perceive their university environment as one where they are respected, included and free to voice ideas without fear of retaliation appear to reciprocate through stronger job performance.

The finding on inclusion safety is consistent with Shore et al. (2011), who argue that when employees experience inclusion safety, they are more likely to share their perspectives and contribute to problem-solving, leading to higher levels of creativity, cohesion and, by extension, performance. It is similarly consistent with Nishii (2013) and Roberson (2006), who note that inclusion safety allows employees to feel secure in sharing their unique perspectives, knowing that their contributions are valued rather than dismissed. For non-academic staff in a hierarchical public university setting, where formal status differences between academic and non-academic staff, and between junior and senior non-academic staff, can be pronounced, this sense of being genuinely included appears to translate into a stronger willingness to perform both formally assigned tasks and discretionary, extra-role activities.

The finding on contributor safety corroborates Nemphard and Edmondson (2006), who found that contributor safety promotes trust within teams by protecting members from being silenced or marginalised when they contribute ideas or raise concerns. It also supports Edmondson's (2019) position that contributor safety is central to sustaining employee engagement and, by extension, performance, since employees who trust that their contributions will not result in personal harm or loss of credibility are more willing to invest discretionary effort. This is consistent with the broader empirical evidence reviewed in this study: Pelho (2024) found that psychological safety is positively related to work engagement, itself a precursor to strong task and contextual performance, while Li et al. (2022) found that psychological safety enhances affective commitment among hospital staff by improving job satisfaction and reducing burnout, both of which are conditions conducive to strong performance.

The Nigerian evidence reviewed in this study lends further support to these findings. Ogbo, Obiekwe and Okorji (2023) found a positive relationship between teachers' psychological safety and their job performance in Nigerian secondary schools, while cautioning that certain leadership behaviours, such as unwarranted optimism during periods of institutional insecurity, can undermine staff's sense of psychological safety and thereby impede performance; this is a caution equally relevant to university management in the current Nigerian higher education climate, marked by industrial disputes and resource constraints. Mahmoud, Ahmad and Poespowidjojo (2022) further validated the psychological safety construct within the Nigerian and broader collectivistic cultural context, supporting the appropriateness of applying the construct to a Nigerian university workforce, as done in the present study. Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that psychological safety is not simply a Western organisational-behaviour concept transplanted into a Nigerian setting, but a construct with clear practical relevance for how Nigerian state-owned universities manage and support their non-academic staff.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that psychological safety significantly enhances employee performance of non-academic staff in state-owned universities in Rivers State. Specifically, both inclusion safety and contributor safety show a very strong, positive and significant relationship with task performance and contextual performance. This implies that when non-academic staff feel genuinely included and safe to voice their opinions, ask questions or challenge existing ways of doing things without fear of negative consequences, they are more likely to perform their formally assigned duties effectively and to engage voluntarily in the kind of discretionary, extra-role behaviour that keeps a university running smoothly beyond what any job description can specify.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that:

1. Management of state-owned universities in Rivers State should institutionalise inclusion safety by ensuring that non-academic staff, across departments and levels of seniority, are genuinely consulted and heard in decisions that affect their work, rather than treated as passive implementers of decisions made elsewhere in the university hierarchy.
2. Management should actively cultivate contributor safety by protecting non-academic staff from ridicule, dismissal or retaliation when they raise concerns, ask questions or propose new ways of working, for instance through clear, enforced anti-retaliation policies and visible support from supervisors when staff speak up.

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