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Exploring the Impact of Organizational Culture on Corporate Innovation: The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

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Abstract

Organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping employee behavior, particularly in fostering innovation. Psychological safety, reflecting employees' perceived interpersonal risk, is increasingly viewed as a key mediating mechanism linking culture to innovation. This study employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among organizational culture, psychological safety, and corporate innovation. Based on 367 valid survey responses, the analysis using SPSS and AMOS shows that organizational culture significantly predicts corporate innovation ($\beta = 0.384, p < 0.001$) and positively influences psychological safety ($\beta = 0.561, p < 0.001$). Psychological safety also significantly affects innovation ($\beta = 0.327, p < 0.001$). Bootstrap results confirm a significant partial mediation effect (indirect effect = 0.183, 95% CI [0.116, 0.267]). These findings clarify the "culture–psychology–innovation" pathway and offer practical guidance for enhancing innovation through cultural and psychological strategies.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Psychological Safety; Corporate Innovation; Structural Equation Modeling; Mediation Effect

1. Introduction

In the context of the digital economy and accelerating organizational transformation, competition among enterprises is shifting from resource-intensive development to a focus on innovation-driven soft power (Kostromskyi, 2024). Organizational culture construction, employee involvement, and a psychologically safe climate have become key drivers of innovation (Robinson et al., 2023). Against this backdrop, more and more enterprises are

recognizing that cultivating an innovation-supportive culture and encouraging employee voice behavior are essential to sustaining long-term competitiveness. However, a critical issue remains: even in organizations with a solid cultural foundation, employees' innovative behaviors may still be inhibited—particularly in environments lacking psychological safety for open expression. This suggests that the effectiveness of organizational innovation

depends not only on cultural construction but also on the moderating role of psychological safety as a crucial psychological variable. Therefore, clarifying the mechanism through which organizational culture influences employee innovative behavior—and uncovering the mediating path of psychological safety—is both practically urgent and theoretically valuable.

Previous studies have extensively examined the relationships among organizational culture, psychological safety, and innovation behavior (Imran et al., 2025). International scholars, drawing on organizational behavior and social exchange theories, have employed empirical methods such as structural equation modeling and hierarchical regression to explore the effects of perceived organizational support, leadership style, and cultural climate on innovation outcomes (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2023). Domestic research has more often focused on innovation behavior from the perspectives of leadership, incentive mechanisms, and psychological contracts (Yap & Hechanova, 2023). Findings generally indicate that a positive cultural atmosphere and strong psychological safety can enhance employees' willingness to offer suggestions and engage in improvement behaviors (Zainal et al., 2023). However, several research gaps remain. First, few studies have integrated these three constructs into a unified path model (Thomas et al., 2024); second, limited attention has been given to how specific dimensions of culture influence employees' psychological states (Mutonyi et al., 2021); third, measurements of innovation behavior still largely focus on output, lacking a behavioral process perspective (Park & Kim, 2022).

To address these gaps, this study investigates the internal mechanism linking organizational culture, psychological safety, and corporate innovation. Specifically, this research targets frontline employees in enterprises and adopts a quantitative approach using structural equation modeling (SEM) to construct and validate a mediation model involving three latent variables: Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation. The study aims to respond systematically to the above research gaps while addressing three key questions: Can organizational culture directly predict employee innovative behavior? Does psychological safety play a mediating role in this relationship? Are there significant path differences among the three variables? The value of this research lies in its integrated perspective on organizational culture and employee psychology, providing a novel explanatory framework for how “soft environments” can drive “hard innovation” and offering theoretical and practical guidance for stimulating employee innovation in organizational settings.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Organizational Culture and Corporate Innovation

Organizational culture refers to the shared values, behavioral norms, and environmental atmosphere developed by organizational members through long-term practice (Pineda-Celaya et al., 2022). It not only shapes employee behavior but also significantly influences an organization's strategic orientation and innovation propensity (Bahmanirad, 2024). According to the Organizational Culture and Innovation Performance Model, cultural orientation affects employees' cognition and behavioral tendencies, thereby stimulating their innovation potential (Deeb et al., 2023). An innovation-oriented culture emphasizes risk tolerance, continuous learning, and open communication—factors that collectively create a supportive environment for trial and error and provide access to diverse knowledge resources (Dellova & Tian, 2024). These

cultural attributes are conducive to fostering innovative thinking and facilitating innovation behavior. Prior studies have confirmed that supportive, learning-oriented, and participative cultures can significantly enhance organizational innovation performance (Felani et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Organizational culture has a significant positive effect on corporate innovation.

2.2 Organizational Culture and Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to an individual's perception that they can freely express ideas and admit mistakes within an organization without fear of interpersonal punishment or negative consequences (Paulus, 2023). Edmondson (1999) first introduced the concept, emphasizing its importance in team learning and organizational adaptability. Subsequent studies have shown that organizational culture plays a foundational role in shaping psychological safety (Shahid & Din, 2021). On one hand, cultures that emphasize inclusiveness, learning, and employee participation tend to reduce power distance and foster expressive freedom. On the other hand, innovation-oriented cultures promote the notion that failure is acceptable, which increases employees' tolerance for risk and enhances trust within teams (Kharchenko et al., 2024). Meta-analyses by Newman et al. (2017) and Liang et al. (2021) have identified organizational climate as a critical external condition for cultivating psychological safety (Zhu et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Organizational culture has a significant positive effect on employees' psychological safety.

2.3 Psychological Safety and Corporate Innovation

Innovative behavior relies on a foundation of organizational trust and freedom of expression. Psychological safety enhances employees' identification with the organization and their sense of responsibility, thereby increasing their proactiveness and willingness to offer suggestions. It functions as an essential psychological antecedent of innovation (Miao et al., 2020). Specifically, when employees believe that expressing ideas and taking risks will not lead to negative evaluations, they are more likely to try new methods, propose creative solutions, and engage in process improvement. As such, psychological safety not only directly promotes voice behavior and knowledge sharing but also plays an indispensable role in enhancing organizational innovation performance.

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Psychological safety has a significant positive effect on corporate innovation.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

The relationship between organizational culture and employee innovation is not necessarily direct. A range of organizational and individual psychological mechanisms may serve as mediating variables. Psychological safety, as a key construct linking the organizational environment to employee behavior, is positioned to transmit the cultural influence to innovation outcomes (Xu, Wang, & Suntrayuth, 2022). On one hand, cultural climate determines whether expression is encouraged and failure is tolerated; on the other hand, employees' subjective perception of this culture influences their willingness to take initiative and speak up, which in turn affects their innovation behavior. Empirical studies have

supported the notion that cultural influence on behavior may operate indirectly through psychological mechanisms (Xu, Wang, & Suntrayuth, 2022).

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between organizational culture and corporate innovation.

2.5 Research Model

Based on the above theoretical framework, this study constructs a research model centered on the logic of “organizational culture → psychological safety → corporate innovation,” as shown in Figure 1. The model includes one independent variable (Organizational Culture), one mediating variable (Psychological Safety), and one dependent variable (Corporate Innovation). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is employed to empirically test the hypothesized path relationships.

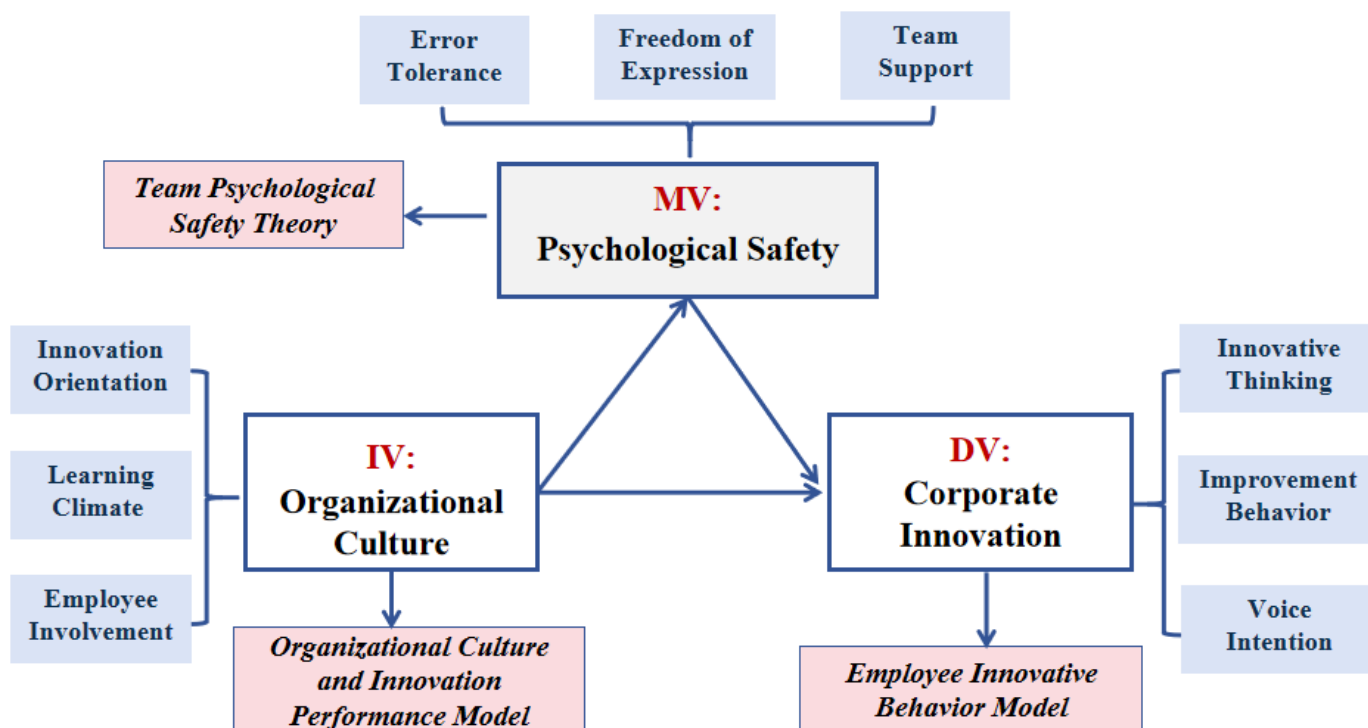


Figure 1: Research Model

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Method

This study adopts a quantitative research method and employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to empirically analyze the relationships among Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. SPSS was used for data preprocessing, reliability testing, and validity analysis, while AMOS was employed to conduct path analysis and assess the model fit for the mediation structure. SEM enables the simultaneous estimation of multiple causal relationships among latent variables and is particularly suitable for testing the mediating role of Psychological Safety.

3.2 Variable Measurement

This study involves three core latent variables: Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation. Organizational Culture, as the independent variable, consists of three dimensions: Innovation Orientation, Learning Climate, and Employee Involvement, which reflect the organization’s systematic support for an innovation-driven atmosphere and employee participation mechanisms. Psychological Safety, as the mediating variable, includes three dimensions: Error Tolerance, Freedom of Expression, and Team Support, representing the extent to which employees feel safe, respected, and heard within the organization. Corporate Innovation, as the dependent variable, is composed of Innovative Thinking, Improvement Behavior, and Voice Intention,

measuring the extent to which employees exhibit innovative tendencies and behaviors in their daily work.

All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Measurement items were adapted from well-established scales in existing literature, and were contextually adjusted to fit the reality of Chinese enterprises.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire consists of four main sections. The first section is an introduction that outlines the purpose of the study, ensures informed consent, and emphasizes data confidentiality and anonymity. The second section collects demographic information, including gender, age, educational level, job position, years of work experience, and type of enterprise. This section is used to describe the sample structure. The third section contains the main measurement items, covering nine dimensions across the three core variables. The total number of items is limited to approximately 30 to ensure measurement reliability while minimizing respondent fatigue. The fourth and final section includes a closing message thanking respondents for their participation, with an optional section for contact information for potential follow-up or inclusion in a prize draw.

3.4 Data Source and Sample

Data were collected using a non-probability sampling strategy that combined convenience sampling with snowball sampling. The questionnaire was distributed online via the Wenjuanxing platform. To ensure sample diversity and representativeness, the research team leveraged enterprise partnerships and alumni networks to

distribute the questionnaire across multiple industries and geographic regions. The target was to collect at least 400 responses, and after removing invalid or incomplete submissions, retain over 350 valid responses to meet the sample size requirements of SEM analysis. IP restriction and logic-check functions were enabled to enhance data authenticity and quality control.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis proceeded in several steps. First, SPSS was used to clean the raw data and conduct descriptive statistical analysis, including mean values, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all variables. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and preliminary validity was tested via the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Next, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and structural model analysis were conducted using AMOS to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model, and to test the significance of all path coefficients. To examine the mediating effect of Psychological Safety, the Bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples was used to construct a 95% confidence interval. If the interval excluded zero, the mediation was considered statistically significant. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices such as CFI, TLI, and RMSEA to ensure the model's statistical adequacy and explanatory power.

4. Data Analysis and Results

To validate the mediation model proposed in this study—linking Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation—this chapter presents a systematic analysis of the collected survey data. First, SPSS was used to conduct descriptive statistical analysis of the sample structure and basic characteristics of the variables. Second, the reliability and validity of the measurement tools were evaluated. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural path analysis were performed using AMOS. Finally, the Bootstrap method was applied to examine the mediating role of Psychological Safety.

4.1 Sample Description

A total of 412 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 367 valid responses were collected, yielding a valid response rate of 89.1% (Table 1). The respondents were primarily employed in industries such as manufacturing, technology, finance, and education. Notably, the manufacturing and information technology sectors accounted for more than 60% of the total sample. In terms of gender, 54.2% of the participants were male and 45.8% were female. Regarding age, 41.7% were under the age of 30, 38.9% were between 30 and 40, and 19.4% were over 40 years old. As for job position, frontline employees accounted for 53.1%, middle managers 31.3%, and senior managers 15.6%. Overall, the distribution of respondents aligns reasonably well with typical organizational structures, providing a sample that is sufficiently diverse and representative for the purposes of this study.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	199	54.20%
	Female	168	45.80%
Age	Below 30	153	41.70%
	30–40	143	38.90%

	Above 40	71	19.40%
Position	Frontline Staff	195	53.10%
	Middle Manager	115	31.30%
	Senior Manager	57	15.60%
Industry	Manufacturing	134	36.50%
	Information Technology	88	24.00%
	Finance & Education	74	20.20%
	Others	71	19.30%

4.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

To assess the internal consistency of the measurement instruments, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each latent variable (Table 2). The results show that the overall Cronbach's alpha values for Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation were 0.893, 0.876, and 0.901, respectively. All dimension-level alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the scales used in this study demonstrated good internal consistency.

Further validity testing was conducted using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The overall KMO value was 0.925, and Bartlett's test was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test Results by Construct

Construct	KMO Value	Bartlett's Test (p-value)
Organizational Culture	0.917	$p < 0.001$
Psychological Safety	0.905	$p < 0.001$
Corporate Innovation	0.933	$p < 0.001$

Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model (see Table 3). The model fit indices were as follows: $\chi^2/df = 2.36$, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.057, and SRMR = 0.041, all of which meet the commonly accepted thresholds for good model fit. In addition, all standardized factor loadings for the latent variables were greater than 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct exceeded 0.50, and Composite Reliability (CR) values were all above 0.80, indicating strong convergent validity and construct reliability (see Table 4).

Furthermore, the square roots of the AVE values for each construct were greater than their corresponding inter-construct correlation coefficients, demonstrating that the measurement model exhibited good discriminant validity.

Table 3: Overall Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
Chi-square/df	2.36	< 3.00	Acceptable model fit
CFI	0.941	> 0.90	Good incremental fit
TLI	0.926	> 0.90	Good incremental fit

RMSEA	0.057	< 0.08	Good approximate fit
SRMR	0.041	< 0.08	Good residual fit

Table 4: CFA Results by Construct

Construct	Standardized Loadings	CR	AVE
Organizational Culture	> 0.70	0.911	0.637
Psychological Safety	> 0.70	0.894	0.609
Corporate Innovation	> 0.70	0.917	0.656

4.3 Structural Model Path Analysis

After confirming the validity of the measurement model, the structural model was constructed to examine the hypothesized path relationships among the core variables. The model demonstrated a good overall fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.51$, CFI = 0.934, TLI = 0.918, RMSEA = 0.061. These indices fall within acceptable thresholds for model adequacy. The path analysis results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Structural Model Path Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value
H1	Organizational Culture →	0.384	< 0.001

Table 6: Mediation Effect Analysis (Bootstrap)

Effect Type	Path	β	Bootstrapped 95% CI	p-value	Mediation Type
Direct Effect	Organizational Culture → Corporate Innovation	0.384	-	< 0.001	Partial Mediation
Indirect Effect	Organizational Culture → Psychological Safety → Corporate Innovation	0.183	[0.116, 0.267]	< 0.001	Partial Mediation

The indirect effect was 0.183, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.116, 0.267], which does not include zero, indicating that the mediating effect is statistically significant. The direct effect remained significant ($\beta = 0.384$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that Psychological Safety plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between Organizational Culture and Corporate Innovation.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that Psychological Safety serves as a key psychological transmission mechanism between Organizational Culture and innovation outcomes. On one hand, it conveys the influence of organizational values on employees' cognition and behavior; on the other hand, by enhancing employees' freedom of expression and tolerance for risk, it significantly facilitates the emergence of innovative behavior.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Major Findings and Discussion

This study developed and validated a mediation model linking Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), the study empirically tested the mechanisms through which these variables interact. The results indicate that Organizational Culture has a significant positive effect on Corporate Innovation, confirming previous research findings on the critical role of culture in driving innovation performance. In particular, cultures that emphasize Innovation Orientation, Learning Climate, and Employee

	Corporate Innovation		
H2	Organizational Culture → Psychological Safety	0.561	< 0.001
H3	Psychological Safety → Corporate Innovation	0.327	< 0.001

The direct path coefficient from Organizational Culture to Corporate Innovation was $\beta = 0.384$ ($p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H1. The path coefficient from Organizational Culture to Psychological Safety was $\beta = 0.561$ ($p < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis H2. The path from Psychological Safety to Corporate Innovation was also significant, with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.327$ ($p < 0.001$), providing support for Hypothesis H3.

These results suggest that Organizational Culture not only has a significant direct positive effect on Corporate Innovation, but also significantly enhances employees' Psychological Safety, thereby creating a psychological foundation that facilitates innovative behavior.

4.4 Mediation Effect Analysis

To examine the mediating role of Psychological Safety in the relationship between Organizational Culture and Corporate Innovation, the Bootstrap method was employed with 5,000 resamples to construct bias-corrected confidence intervals. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 6.

Involvement appear to foster behaviors such as proactive idea generation, process improvement, and innovation attempts—highlighting the role of culture as a core element of an organization's internal “soft power.”

Further analysis revealed that Organizational Culture also significantly enhances employees' Psychological Safety. Cultivating an open, inclusive culture that encourages expression and tolerates failure helps foster employees' sense of trust and emotional attachment to the organization, thereby increasing their willingness to share suggestions and attempt innovative actions. Moreover, Psychological Safety itself had a significant positive effect on Corporate Innovation, indicating that in environments where employees feel psychologically safe, they are more willing to take innovation-related risks and transform new ideas into actual outcomes.

Importantly, the study confirmed that Psychological Safety partially mediates the relationship between Organizational Culture and Corporate Innovation. This finding suggests that culture not only affects innovation behavior directly but also indirectly, by shaping employees' subjective perceptions of their work environment, which in turn influence their behavioral responses. The results further support the “environment–cognition–behavior” model in organizational behavior theory and highlight the importance of dual pathways—both structural and psychological—in fostering innovation.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study makes three major contributions to the existing body of theory. First, by integrating the Organizational Culture and Innovation Performance Model, Team Psychological Safety Theory, and Employee Innovative Behavior Model, it constructs a systematic framework for explaining how the organizational environment influences innovative behavior through psychological mechanisms. This extends the theoretical boundaries of research on innovation drivers. Second, by introducing Psychological Safety as a mediating variable, the study enriches our understanding of how culture influences innovation, and provides theoretical grounding for future research on the interplay between organizational climate and employee psychology. Third, the empirical investigation based on Chinese enterprise contexts offers new evidence for the localization and cross-cultural validation of Western theories.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

From a managerial perspective, this study provides three key recommendations for enhancing employee innovation performance:

First, organizations should invest in the systematic construction of innovation-oriented culture. At the strategic level, innovation should be positioned as a core organizational value. In daily management, companies should demonstrate tolerance for failure and support for novel ideas. Initiatives such as innovation rewards and internal creative workshops can be effective in encouraging employee participation in innovation.

Second, managers should actively cultivate a psychologically safe team climate. This includes reducing employee concerns about expressing dissenting opinions or experiencing failure. Practical steps may include enhancing two-way communication, implementing anonymous feedback mechanisms, and conducting leadership training to improve emotional support and listening skills—ultimately strengthening employees' trust in the organization.

Third, companies should integrate innovation capability development into their talent development systems. Employee incentive strategies should be based on behavioral indicators such as proactivity, reflectiveness, and voice intention. By aligning cultural, psychological, and behavioral efforts, organizations can build a sustainable innovation-driving mechanism.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its theoretical and empirical contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the data were collected using a non-probability sampling method. Although the sample covered a variety of industries, its generalizability is still limited. Future research could include broader regional and industry samples to improve the external validity of findings. Second, this study employed cross-sectional data, which restricts causal inferences. Longitudinal designs could be adopted in future research to explore how changes in organizational culture and psychological states influence innovation behavior over time. Third, although this study focused on the mediating role of Psychological Safety, it did not account for other potential mediators or moderators, such as leadership style or perceived organizational support. Future studies may expand the model by incorporating additional variables to further enrich the explanatory framework.

6. Conclusion

Amid the ongoing transformation of organizations and the deepening of innovation-driven strategies, how enterprises can effectively stimulate employees' innovative potential and build people-centered cultural mechanisms has become a key focus for both management practice and academic research. This study investigates the path relationships among three core variables—Organizational Culture, Psychological Safety, and Corporate Innovation—by constructing and validating a mediation model based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). It systematically explores how Organizational Culture influences innovation behavior through the mediating role of Psychological Safety, aiming to reveal the key mechanisms by which cultural elements drive innovation from an organizational behavior perspective.

Using data from 367 employees across various industries, this study draws three main conclusions: First, Organizational Culture has a significant positive effect on Corporate Innovation, particularly through cultural dimensions such as Innovation Orientation, Learning Climate, and Employee Involvement, which play a critical role in fostering employee creativity and improvement-oriented behaviors. Second, Organizational Culture significantly predicts Psychological Safety, indicating that in environments characterized by openness, inclusiveness, and respect for employee voice, individuals are more likely to perceive freedom of expression and interpersonal trust. Third, Psychological Safety also exerts a significant positive influence on Corporate Innovation and partially mediates the relationship between Organizational Culture and innovative behavior. This demonstrates that Organizational Culture stimulates innovation not only directly, but also indirectly by enhancing employees' psychological conditions, which in turn promote innovation-related actions.

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating several classic models to construct a "culture–psychology–behavior" pathway, enriching the conceptual framework of employee innovation research. Practically, it offers actionable strategies for managers by highlighting the importance of combining cultural development with psychological empowerment to enhance intrinsic motivation and innovation willingness among employees. The findings further suggest that Psychological Safety, as an internal behavioral regulator, plays a vital "psychological transmission" role between cultural values and behavioral transformation.

Despite these contributions, the study has some limitations. The sample was primarily drawn from enterprises in mainland China, and the generalizability of the conclusions across cultures remains to be validated. In addition, the use of cross-sectional data limits the ability to capture the dynamic evolution of the variable relationships. Moreover, the current model considers only one mediating pathway—Psychological Safety—while future research may incorporate additional variables such as leadership style or perceived organizational support to extend the model. Follow-up studies may also employ longitudinal designs and multi-source data collection to further validate and deepen the proposed mechanisms.

In summary, this study reveals that Psychological Safety serves as a crucial bridge in the process through which Organizational Culture stimulates employee innovation. The findings offer theoretical and empirical support for developing an integrated innovation mechanism linking cultural reinforcement, psychological empowerment, and behavioral activation.

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