

The Relationship Between Empathetic Leadership and Psychological Safety at a Hypermarket Company in Selangor

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500353>

Received: 06 May 2026; Accepted: 11 May 2026; Published: 01 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship of empathetic leadership and psychological safety in a hypermarket located in Selangor, Malaysia. Psychological safety is critical in the retail industry, where employees tend not to speak up and share ideas for fear of getting negative reactions from their supervisors. A quantitative method was conducted, and a sample of 120 non-managerial employees was taken by simple random sampling through a structured questionnaire. Empathetic leadership was assessed by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), and psychological safety was measured through the Psychological Safety Scale by Edmondson (1999). The results of descriptive and inferential analyses showed that employees perceived high levels of empathetic leadership and psychological safety at work. This indicated a strong positive correlation between these two variables. Those leaders who exhibit empathy by perceiving and responding to employees' emotions apparently contribute to promoting a psychologically safe atmosphere at work, which makes employees feel comfortable to share ideas, make open communication and collaborate. It emphasises the need for empathic leadership to improve employees' well-being and produce better communication and workplace climate and offers valuable information for retail organisations in Malaysia that wish to create a more supportive and psychologically safe workplace.

Keywords: Empathetic Leadership, Psychological Safety, Retail Sector, Well-being.

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and fast-moving retail industry, the role of effective leadership is crucial for keeping employees motivated and helping the business. Retail work can be performed under harsh and intense pressures. Employees often must follow long and exhausting hours, process customers consistently throughout the shift, and respond quickly to operational changes. In this extreme pressure, one would expect leaders to be strategic and direct rather than simply managing at the operational level; leaders need to value their workers as people, not only employees. In fact, studies found that the type of leadership style used increases employee's psychological wellbeing (Annuar, Yusof & Malek, 2023). One leadership style that appears to be on the rise is empathetic leadership.

Empathetic leadership refers to understanding employees on a peculiar level by understanding how they feel and what they require. These leaders are always a reliable grounding source, taking time to listen intently, be caring, and help support workers at work and outside of work. This type of leadership is different from more traditional styles that focus only on tasks and results, as it emphasises the importance of emotional intelligence and the development of trust within the team. Instead, it pays attention to establishing close relationships and demonstrating the ability to empathise. For instance, Jaaffar and Samy (2023) discovered that the leaders who demonstrate empathy establish better relationships with their staff, which in turn helps to relieve stress, enhance communication, and develop a further sense of teamwork. Siyal (2023) also revealed that when leaders are empathetic, workers feel relatively safe at work and are more involved in it.

One of the most significant outcomes of empathetic leadership is the promotion of psychological safety in the workplace. Psychological safety refers to a shared belief among team members that it is safe to take interpersonal risks such as sharing ideas, asking for help, admitting mistakes, or offering constructive criticism without fear of embarrassment, rejection, or punishment (Edmondson, 1999). In psychologically safe environments, employees are more likely to speak up, collaborate, and contribute innovative solutions. They feel valued as individuals and respected as professionals, which boosts engagement, reduces turnover, and enhances performance.

According to Kock et al. (2018), leaders who exhibit empathy create psychologically safe environments by treating employees with dignity and attentiveness. They encourage open dialogue, acknowledge diverse perspectives, and foster inclusivity. These leaders are approachable, receptive to feedback, and proactive in addressing concerns, which builds a culture of trust. By making their teams feel heard and appreciated, empathetic leaders lay the foundation for strong interpersonal connections and effective collaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empathetic Leadership

Being empathetic has turned out to be a major aspect of strong leadership in the workplace today. It mainly focuses on leaders who pay attention, understand, and help out their employees by listening to their needs. In busy and ever-changing jobs where leaders must handle much, this way of thinking strengthens their relationships with their teams (Kock et al., 2019). Carl Rogers' Empathy Theory (1950) supports this leadership style, forming the foundation of this study. Rogers (1951) explained that empathy allows a person to see things from another person's viewpoint. He said that empathy helps others feel appreciated and encouraged, making communication easier and strengthening trust between people. In this context, leaders should be aware of what their employees face and should show true care and motivation towards them. If empathy is a part of leadership, employees often feel psychologically safe, confident, and interested in what they do (Rogers, 1957).

Previously, being empathetic was regarded as a person's own personality trait, but today it is known as a fundamental quality for leaders. The initial leadership theories, such as transactional and autocratic models, focused mainly on enhancing performance and productivity and controlling employees. Leaders were expected to give orders and ensure results, even though employees' feelings did not matter much. However, companies that focused more on diversity and valued their employees' well-being found that this way of managing employees was not effective in developing long-term employee engagement or trust (Northouse, 2021). This change led to the rise of leadership models such as transformational leadership and servant leadership that highlight emotional intelligence, support, and connecting with employees personally (Greenleaf, 1977 & Bass, 1985). New leadership theories today give strong importance to empathy. The staff were impressed to see that leaders cared about what their team members go through, both in the workplace and in their personal lives. These models showed that having emotional awareness as a leader makes employees more motivated, communicative, and helpful in teams (Goleman, 1998).

In summary, these studies reveal that people are paying more attention to empathetic leadership due to changes in the working world. It is proven that empathy is not only a helpful trait but also an important skill for leaders to create safe work environments where employees feel respected, productive, and motivated. The ability to lead with empathy will remain a key part of successful leadership.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety means members of a group or team believe it is safe to take interpersonal risks without worrying about embarrassment, rejection, or punishment (Edmondson, 1999). Employees can share their thoughts and even own up to their mistakes without getting criticised. The concept is important for fostering open communication and collaboration in the workplaces. Lack of psychological safety can stop employees from raising important matters, which might limit the company's ability to deal with challenges and innovation, ultimately hindering overall team performance and growth. According to Amy Edmondson (1999), having psychological safety makes it easier for teams to work and learn successfully in an organisation. According to

her, when employees inside a team feel secure mentally, they are expected to contribute to learning and innovation by exchanging fresh ideas and offering support. Psychological safety is the opposite of conditions that cause employees to remain silent due to fear of punishment, as such conditions can negatively impact both performance and morale. It makes sure people feel safe to be creative and fully involved in the organisation.

Ever since Edmondson introduced the concept in 1999, psychological safety is now understood to play a role in several parts of the workplace and corporate culture and not just in team-learning matters. With time, researchers have included the idea that leaders can make environments safe from psychological harm. Research now says that being open, helpful, and inclusive as a leader has a strong impact on psychological safety (Frazier et al., 2017). Employees feel free to share ideas if their leaders allow mistakes and motivate them to try new things. Besides, psychological safety is closely related to diversity and inclusion and well-being (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009). Such a workplace supports employees as they talk openly and encourages everyone to promote a more inclusive culture. Thus, the importance of psychological safety has increased in organisational development and in managing people. This idea has grown to affect the culture of whole organisations and has helped companies handle more diversity and complexity at work.

Lastly, it also seems that psychological safety acts as a mediator for leadership styles like transformational or inclusive and positive outcomes at work (Carmeli et al., 2014). This shows that employees' attitude and performance in the workplace are partly affected by a leadership style that makes them feel confident about expressing their ideas and facing difficulties. Because of this, leaders in training should be urged to foster psychological safety among their teammates to make the most of the team's abilities.

Relationship between Empathetic Leadership and Psychological Safety

Research done by Bani-Melhem et al. (2020) in the study interviewed over 250 employees in the hospitality industry to understand the connection between paranoia and proactive work. The study found that employees with paranoia are less likely to inform their managers about customer complaints and put in extra effort at work. Still, empathetic leaders help minimise these problems by promoting psychological safety. Despite its generalisability, the fact that it studied the hospitality industry could make it hard to apply its results to other areas. Kock et al. (2019) looked at the connection between empathetic leadership and psychological safety based on data from 301 employees across many firms and different industries in the United States. As a result, teams felt more comfortable taking risks, being creative, and working actively as leaders interacted and listened to what employees had to say. Employees in these types of workplaces reported a higher sense of trust and openness. Still, the study used a cross-sectional design, so it was not possible to determine which variables caused the other. Yet, the results confirm that to create a psychologically safe workplace, it is important to have caring and understanding leaders.

Yue et al. (2022) examined the effects of empathetic leaders on psychological safety among 417 employees who faced change due to COVID-19 in their organisations in Texas, United States. It became clear that, through empathy, leaders could lessen the temptation to look for a new job and build more trust by supporting everyone with clear communication and trust. Staff members seen as empathetic were likelier to bring up problems and collaborate with team members. Its findings might not be applicable to many places because it was done during the peak of the global pandemic. Still, studies show that empathy plays a key part in building psychological safety. Azeemi, Ashfaq, and Rana (2024) looked into how empathetic leadership influences the psychological safety of employees in the service sector in Pakistan. Researchers gathered information from 249 people and determined that when leaders practise empathy, psychological safety in the workplace improves a lot. Those with empathy shown in leadership helped employees openly raise issues, share their thoughts, and participate in the team. This set of conditions made me feel more satisfied with my work and myself. However, because the study is cross-sectional and looks at only one country's sector (Pakistan), it is unclear if the findings apply to other countries.

Lastly, research by Jia (2024) carried out a study to investigate by collecting samples from 350 employees on how the leadership style of a manager affects psychological safety in 15 large supermarkets in Shanghai, China. According to the study, when leaders use empathetic methods, they boost engagement from employees through

the creation of trust and motivating them. Looking closely at one retail sector can make it difficult to generalise the results to other industries.

This study aims to determine the relationship between empathetic leadership and psychological safety among employees at a hypermarket company. The research framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.0.

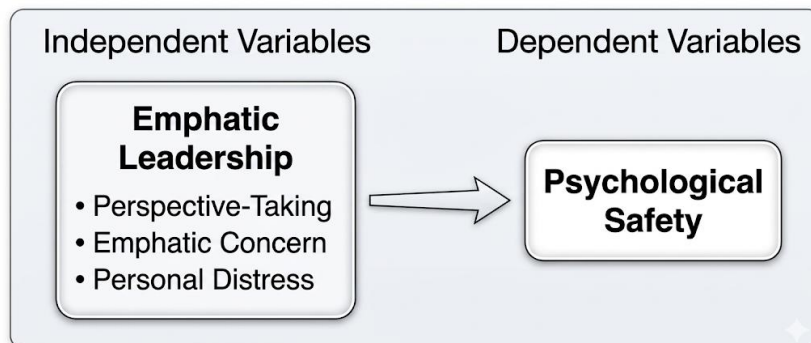


Figure 1.0 Research Framework

In this context, empathetic leadership is the independent variable, while psychological safety is the dependent variable. To determine these constructs, the study applies the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) by Davis (1980) as the main scale of measuring empathy and the Psychological Safety Scale by Edmondson (1999). A conceptual model is adopted to explain how empathetic leadership relates to psychological safety among employees. The conceptual framework is developed based on the two most important theoretical bases, which are empathy theory, developed by Carl Rogers (1950), in which empathetic people can actually understand and feel another person's emotion, thus developing closer relations and interpersonal trust. Psychological Safety Theory, developed by Edmondson (1999), jointly explains how empathetic leadership can provide a psychologically safe environment in the workplace. This theory explains a person's belief that it is safe for him or her to take interpersonal risks at work.

Hence, the objective of this study is the following:

1. To examine the level of empathetic leadership demonstrated by leaders at a hypermarket company in Selangor.
2. To examine the level of psychological safety among employees at a hypermarket company in Selangor.
3. To examine the relationship of empathetic leadership on employees' psychological safety at a hypermarket company in Selangor.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, data was gathered using a cross-sectional quantitative research design. It is required to know about the employees in the selected hypermarket company. The information covers age, gender, the employee's level of education, years of experience, and the department they are part of. For Section B, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) by Davis (1980) was being used to measure the empathetic leadership in this study. It consists of 21 items and is divided into three subscales, which are Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, and Personal Distress, and each subscale has 7 items. The Psychological Safety Scale, developed by Amy Edmondson (1999) and used to measure employees' psychological safety at work in Section C, consists of 7 items in a single dimension. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("does not describe me well") to 5 ("describes me very well"). Some items are phrased negatively and therefore require reverse scoring to ensure response accuracy and reduce bias.

A correlational design is used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them, which is suitable for studying the connection between empathetic leadership and

psychological safety. Besides, the cross-sectional design involves gathering data at a single time, providing a snapshot of the existing conditions among the selected respondents. The research design allows for researching the relationship between empathetic leadership and psychological safety in real companies.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consists of all employees working at selected hypermarket companies across various departments, including sales, customer service, store operations, marketing, and security. However, this research focuses only on non-managerial employees such as cashiers, floor staff, stock clerks, and support workers. This is because the study aims to explore the relationship between empathetic leadership and psychological safety from the perspective of employees who are directly affected by their supervisors' leadership style. Managerial staff are excluded, as their leadership roles may influence the results and are not the target of this research.

The population of employees at the selected hypermarket is 200 employees, of which 150 are non-managerial staff. To determine an appropriate sample size from the population, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used. According to the guidelines, 108 employees were the sample size and selected to ensure an appropriate accuracy and reliability at a 95% confidence level and with a 5% margin of error. For this research, simple random sampling was carried out. The technique ensures that all non-managerial people have the same likelihood of being selected, no matter what their job is. The list of all workers who are not managers, such as the cashiers and sales assistants, was reviewed and selected randomly with a random number generator. Because all the respondents have the same possibility of being part of the sample, the results were reliable.

Reliability Test

A pilot test was conducted with 20 non-managerial employees from the selected hypermarket to examine the reliability and clarity of the research instruments. Overall, the pilot test confirmed that the instrument was suitable to be used in the main data collection. Table 1.0 show the result of the reliability test.

Table 1.0: Reliability Test

	Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha for Pilot Test (n = 20)	Cronbach' Alpha for Actual Test (n = 120)
Empathetic Leadership	Emphatic Concern	0.715	0.976
	Perspective-Taking	0.708	0.988
	Personal Distress	0.732	0.955
Psychological Safety		0.954	0.939

The reliability analysis also indicated acceptable internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.70. Based on the feedback received, minor wording adjustments were made to improve clarity and ensure that the questions were simple and relevant.

RESULTS

Demographic Details

The majority of respondents were male (60%), and in terms of age, most respondents were between 31–40 years old (28.3%). For ethnicity, Malay respondents formed the majority (55%), and regarding educational level, most respondents held SPM qualifications (70.8%). For department distribution, the Cashiering department had the highest number of respondents (25.8%). Lastly, most respondents had worked in the organization for 1–3 years (35%)

Level of Empathetic Leadership

The results are based on respondents' perceptions collected through the survey. The analysis focuses on the overall mean and standard deviation for each dimension of empathetic leadership, including Emphatic Concern, Perspective Taking, and Personal Distress. These results provide an overview of how employees perceive their leaders' empathetic behaviour in the workplace. The summary of the findings is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2.0: Dimension of Empathetic Leadership

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Emphatic Concern	3.95	0.96	High
Perspective - Taking	3.96	1.03	High
Personal Distress	3.89	1.07	High
Total	3.93	1.02	High

The findings show that total mean score for empathetic leadership is 3.93, with a standard deviation of 1.02. This means that the leaders at the hypermarket company show a high level of empathetic leadership based on the responses from employees. Out of three dimensions, the Perspective Taking has the highest mean score of 3.96 with a standard deviation of 1.03. This shows that most leaders are able to understand and consider their employees' feelings and situations. The standard deviation value shows that the answers from respondents are quite consistent.

In addition, the Emphatic Concern has a mean score of 3.95 with a standard deviation of 0.96. This means that leaders often care about and pay attention to others, especially in situations that involve fairness or kindness. The small standard deviation shows that most respondents gave similar answers. Lastly, the Personal Distress has the lowest mean score of 3.89 with a standard deviation of 1.07. Although this is the lowest mean, it is still in the high category. This means that leaders sometimes feel more emotional or affected when facing other people's problems.

Relationship Analysis

This part presents the analysis related to employees' psychological safety in selected hypermarket. The data were examined based on the overall mean and standard deviation to determine the level of psychological safety experienced by the respondents. The results provide a general understanding of how employees feel about expressing themselves and working comfortably within their teams. Table 3.0 shows the result of the finding.

Table 3.0 Psychological Safety

Psychological Safety	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
	4.0	0.98	High

Based on the findings, it revealed that the psychological safety variable obtained a mean score of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.98. This indicates that employees generally experience a high level of psychological safety in their workplace.

Objective 2: To examine the relationship between empathetic leadership and employees' psychological safety at a hypermarket company in Selangor.

For objective 3 which aim to examine the relationship between empathetic leadership and employees' psychological safety among employees at a hypermarket company in Selangor. Empathetic leadership in this study is measured through three dimensions which emphatic concern, perspective taking, and personal distress. The analysis was conducted using the Correlation test to identify the relationship between these dimensions of empathetic leadership and psychological safety. Table 4.4 below shows the spearman correlation results.

Table 4.0 The Correlation Analysis between Empathetic Leadership and Psychological Safety

	Psychological Safety		
Empathetic Leadership	r	P	N
	0.870	0.01	120

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

A Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between empathetic leadership and psychological safety among employees. The results showed that the mean score for empathetic leadership was 3.95 with a standard deviation of 0.96, while psychological safety recorded a mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.98. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between empathetic leadership and psychological safety ($r = 0.87$, $p = 0.01$, $N = 120$). This indicates that higher levels of empathetic leadership are associated with higher levels of psychological safety among employees. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), confirming that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Objective 1: To examine the level of empathetic leadership demonstrate by leader at a hypermarket company in Selangor

The findings indicate that high empathetic leadership can be observed among the leaders within the hypermarket. The supervisors are seen as caring, understanding, and concerned with the needs concerning work by employees, which directly responds to Objective 1 of the study. Empathy can be considered according to the Empathy Theory by Carl Rogers (1951) as the understanding of other feelings and perceiving situations through their perspectives. Empathic leaders can react constructively to the experiences of employees, build trust, a favourable working atmosphere, and a feeling of psychological safety. This makes employees feel appreciated as well as makes them freer to communicate and work better in a group. Such an initiative by the company like leadership training programs can justify the high level of empathetic leadership because the trainers need to give the supervisors the necessary skills, including active listening, emotional awareness, and supportive communications. Those programmes are used to guide leaders in a better position to realize the concerns of the employees and empathetically respond to them in their daily interaction. The company also holds frequent one-on-one meetings between supervisors and their employees where a forum is given to air out work-related challenges, performance related issues, and personal issues related to work. The meetings enable leaders to provide guidance, and realistic assistance thereby rendering emphatic actions more apparent to the subordinates.

These results are in line with previous studies of empathetic leadership. According to Kim et al. (2020), due to the fact that leaders empathetic tend to be more empathetic to the needs of employees and, therefore, can timely and effectively respond to its worries, enabling employees to feel acknowledged and accepted. Sparks and McCauley (2019) also highlighted that empathetic leadership has a more favourable and peaceful work environment since leaders put into consideration employees' feelings during decision making. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) pointed out that the leaders in high-pressure service environments can use empathy to deal with emotional strain, thus responding to employees in a calm and effective manner when they deal with any challenges. Verduyn (2023) then emphasized that leaders who are empathetic are needed in dynamic workplaces with high interaction with customers or high workloads to ensure that understanding and support remain. The current findings extend this knowledge by showing that even in environments where empathetic leadership is already strong, it remains very important in maintaining the positive and respectful workplace culture. That is, empathy is a working and needed skill, which helps the employees stay motivated, confident and prepared to give their best on day-to-day occasions. All in all, empathy is not only a personal trait but also a major skill of leadership that helps in enhancing relationships, foster trust and motivate employees to communicate freely with no fear. It illustrates that empathy does not only affect the well-being of individuals but also makes the place of employment more unified and cooperative.

Objective 2: To examine the level of psychological safety among employees at a hypermarket company in Selangor

The results show that the employees of the hypermarket feel that the company is highly psychologically safe, which are they feel comfortable in making their ideas, asking questions and admitting mistakes without worrying about punishment. This positive image is probably developed under the influence of organizational environment as well as personal experience of employees. In its turn, psychological safety supports open communication, problem-solving, and collaboration, which are especially crucial in service-based work environment where employees can often be subjected to unforeseen circumstances. According to the Psychological Safety Theory by Edmondson (1999), a worker gives his or her best when they are feels safe taking the interpersonal risk and the present research indicates how the potential theory can be implemented in a real-life retailing context. The level of psychological safety amongst employees was very high. This can be explained by the specific practices of the company which encourage open communication, and trust. Team briefs are organized on a regular basis where supervisors update the workers on the work, explain tasks to be performed in the job and establish proper expectations. At these meetings, employees can pose a query, express concerns, and share ideas and these bring about the uncertainty levels will be reduced and the confidence to raise his voice, which is created. Moreover, the company also applies open feedback channels where employees report about problems or recommend ways of improvement or heighten work-related issues without the risk of being punished or affected adversely. These practices create a safe environment where employees feel comfortable expressing themselves, making mistakes, and seeking support, which contributes to the high level of psychological safety observed in the organisation.

These results are in line with earlier studies that highlight the importance of psychological safety for employees. Edmondson and Lei (2014) have discovered that, in case the work environment is perceived to be safe psychologically by the employees, they are ready to take risks, share ideas, and confess mistakes, leading to better team learning and performance. Similarly, Frazier et al. (2017) have highlighted that such leaders should be supportive and inclusive, trying to make the employees feel free to voice their opinions as they make them feel important and honoured. Both research emphasize the fact that psychological safety fosters employee involvement and teamwork with no plans of adverse impacts. Other studies also reinforce this finding especially in stressful and customer-oriented workplaces. Carmeli, Brueller and Dutton (2009) noted that psychologically safe environments enable openness and inclusion where employees can exchange their ideas and collaboratively work effectively. O'Donovan, Whelan and Mulkerrin (2020) indicated that workers become more inclined to report their mistakes and acquire experience when they believe they are safe enough as it contributes to continued development and organizational growth. All these studies show that psychological safety is necessary to not only to secure the welfare of the employees but also to facilitate flawless performance and collaboration in high-stress, rapidly changing environments like hypermarkets.

Objective 3: To examine the relationship of empathetic leadership on employee's psychological safety at a hypermarket company in Selangor.

The results indicate that empathetic leadership and the psychological safety of employees have a positive strong correlation. This elevated correlation explained using both company initiatives and company-specific practices. Leaders in the hypermarket are perceived as consistently understanding, supportive, and attentive which reinforces a psychologically safe environment. These behaviours affect especially employees with less lasting experience (1-3 years, 35% of the respondents) because they tend to need more guidance and reassurance during the process of adjusting with their job. Thus, empathetic leadership directly and clearly affects their comfort towards the extent of sharing ideas, posing questions, and owning up and this describes the high correlation between both variables. In an environment where research has already shown that the level of scores is high, it is also worth exploring this relationship to confirm that the existing leadership practices are effective and therefore maintained. These results are well supported by past studies. Kock et al. (2019) discovered that workers of empathetic leaders were prepared to take risk and be active in carrying out a work-related activity. The same results were expressed by Yue et al. (2022) when they indicated that empathetic leadership in times of organizational changes led to building trust and promoting the employees to express their concerns and cooperate efficiently. The two studies focus on how empathy in leadership can make one less afraid of judgment, be more open and give employees the chance to fully focus on their work.

Other research attests to this relationship in other work environments. According to Jaafar and Samy (2023), staff in settings with compassionate leaders felt at ease nearing the leaders with ideas and participating in group

discussions. Che et al. (2023) discovered that within the Malaysian SMEs, leaders who embraced empathy had a big impact on the staff and the perception of psychological safety improved, leading to the improved engagement and commitment level. These results indicate that empathy is a major contributing factor behind a psychologically safe workplace since it enables employees to share freely and express themselves without fear. Furthermore, studies by Li and Tang (2022) and other researchers indicate that caring leadership promotes effective communication, less reluctance, and confidence in employees. When employees feel that their leaders are supportive and understanding, the chances that they will take the initiative and act on problems are high. Together, these investigations prove the idea that empathetic leadership is the key to a psychologically safe working environment, engagement, cooperation, and general performance, especially in high-pressure or service-oriented environments such as hypermarkets. All these findings have implications on organisations, employees and leadership studies. In the case of organisations, building empathetic leadership can empower the desire of employees to suggest ideas, report mistakes, and to participate in the process of collective problem-solving, which can positively affect the overall performance and innovation.

RECOMMENDATION

Because the empathy of leaders are already high, the organisation must aim to maintain and enhance these behaviours and entrench empathy in leadership norms and performance measurement paradigms. The process means that leaders must always demonstrate supportive and understanding behaviours towards employees. Formalising the concept of empathy as a leadership expectation helps the organisation to affirm the concept of empathy in its day-to-day management activities and overall organisational culture. Clear standards of leadership in the long run assist in coming up with consistency in the leadership behaviour across the departments. This consistency gives the employees a stronger trust towards their managers. Although the psychological safety among the employees already is high, it should not be taken for granted. This good environment can be maintained and improved by the organisation through the introduction of recognition programmes that emphasize on empathetic leadership behaviour and recognition of the contribution of the employees. This kind of initiative facilitates a culture of trust, openness and appreciation that helps employees feel safe enough to status their ideas and concerns. Rewarding leadership and workers assists in enhancing good working relations between the leaders and the workers, as well as in promoting respectful and supportive relationships. Employees when they feel appreciated tend more to be engaged and committed to their work. Positive behaviour is also important because the organisation is appreciating positive behaviour. This can encourage leaders and employees to keep adding value at the workplace. Furthermore, future research should consider employing mixed-method or longitudinal research designs to provide more comprehensive insights into the development and impact of empathetic leadership over time and across different organisational contexts.

Given the strong positive relationship between empathetic leadership and psychological safety, the organisation should also introduce wellness and support initiatives, like stress-management workshops and other team-building activities, these efforts have the ability to improve the employees' sense of safety, engagement and their emotional status as well. maintain the high levels of the healthy and supportive work environment, which positively affect both the staff and the overall performance of the organisation. The stress associated with work levels in employees can be better handled through wellness programmes. Communication and cooperation between staff can also be enhanced through team-building activities. These initiatives can eventuate in a more robust and healthy work environment. As future research, the impact of empathetic leadership and psychological safety on valuable workplace outcomes, including employee engagement, performance, creativity, and intention to leave are worth investigating. The knowledge of whether employees who feel safe and supported are more motivational, willing to share ideas, and work better may provide useful tips to managers, particularly in busy retail environments.

CONCLUSION

This research paper was an analysis of the degree of empathetic leadership, psychological safety and the association between the two among the employees of one of the hypermarket firms in Selangor. This article incorporated the problem identification, literature review, development of research objectives, data collection and analysis, interpretation process of the findings. The research met all the research objectives: First, it is found

that leaders of the hypermarket are highly empathetic leaders that are caring, understanding, and supportive of their employees. Second, it also indicated that staff feel a great degree of psychological security, as they are not afraid to generate ideas, voice their concerns, and indulge in interpersonal risks without being subject to adverse outcomes. Three, the research established the existence of a strong positive association between empathetic leadership and psychological safety, which implies that workers feel safer and more comfortable when leaders are empathetic.

The results indicate the significance of empathetic leadership in the encouragement of open and a supportive working environment. This study adds to the knowledge on the direct influence of the behaviour of leaders and the reasons why employees feel good and are willing to work. Another peculiar feature of the current study is that it targets a hypermarket scenario in Malaysia where the close contact with the customer and collaboration are essential such that empathetic leadership and psychological safety are particularly pertinent. In general, the research report has shown that empathetic leaders do not only enhance the experience that employees have at the workplace but also lead to organisational success through engagement, communication and collaboration. The findings have had applied implications to managers and organisations to bolster leadership actions, improve employee health and make the workplace more productive and supportive. This study has established that empathy in leadership is not a personal attribute but one of the key elements required in the creation of a safe and sound work environment.

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