

Predicting Employee Voice Behavior Based on Ethical Leadership and Organizational Justice: The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

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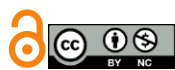
Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Sánchez Romero, L., Mohammed, A., & Karaca, S. (2026). Predicting Employee Voice Behavior Based on Ethical Leadership and Organizational Justice: The Mediating Role of Psychological Safety. *International Journal of Innovation Management and Organizational Behavior*, 6(4), 1-17.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijimob.5483>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to predict employee voice behavior based on ethical leadership and organizational justice and to examine the mediating role of psychological safety among employees working in Canada.

Methods and Materials: This cross-sectional correlational study was conducted in 2026 among employees working in public and private organizations in Canada. A total of 326 employees were included in the final analysis. Data were collected using the Ethical Leadership Scale, Colquitt's Organizational Justice Scale, Edmondson's Psychological Safety Scale, and the Employee Voice Behavior Scale. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS. Pearson correlation analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling were used to examine the proposed relationships. The mediating effects were tested using a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals.

Findings: Ethical leadership significantly predicted psychological safety ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and employee voice behavior ($\beta = .14, p = .013$). Organizational justice also significantly predicted psychological safety ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and employee voice behavior ($\beta = .17, p = .007$). Psychological safety significantly predicted employee voice behavior ($\beta = .50, p < .001$). The indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee voice behavior through psychological safety was significant ($\beta = .16, 95\% \text{ CI } [.10, .24], p < .001$), as was the indirect effect of organizational justice through psychological safety ($\beta = .23, 95\% \text{ CI } [.16, .34], p < .001$). The structural model showed acceptable fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.20$, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, IFI = .93, RMSEA = .061, and SRMR = .055.

Conclusion: Ethical leadership and organizational justice contribute to greater employee voice behavior both directly and indirectly by strengthening psychological safety, indicating that employees are more likely to speak up constructively when they experience ethical supervision, fair organizational treatment, and a safe interpersonal climate.

Keywords: Employee Voice Behavior; Ethical Leadership; Organizational Justice; Psychological Safety; Structural Equation Modeling; Canada

1 Introduction

Employee voice behavior has become an increasingly important topic in organizational research because contemporary organizations depend not only on employees' formal performance but also on their willingness to communicate concerns, propose improvements, question ineffective practices, and contribute information that may otherwise remain unavailable to decision makers. Voice behavior is generally understood as discretionary, constructive, and change-oriented communication through which employees express ideas, suggestions, concerns, or alternative perspectives with the intention of improving work processes, organizational functioning, or collective outcomes. Unlike routine communication, voice frequently involves interpersonal and professional risk because employees may be uncertain about how supervisors, colleagues, or organizational authorities will respond to disagreement, criticism, or the identification of problems. Consequently, the decision to speak up is shaped not only by employees' individual dispositions but also by the social, ethical, and relational characteristics of the work environment. Research on employee silence has similarly demonstrated that withholding relevant information can become embedded in organizational climates in which employees perceive speaking up as unsafe, futile, or potentially damaging to their standing (Kim, 2024; Montgomery et al., 2022). These considerations make the identification of organizational conditions that encourage constructive employee voice a significant issue for leadership and human resource management.

The importance of employee voice is particularly evident in settings where errors, ethical concerns, operational weaknesses, or emerging risks must be communicated before they escalate. Research in healthcare, public safety, and other high-responsibility contexts demonstrates that silence can have consequences extending beyond individual dissatisfaction to organizational learning, service quality, safety, and ethical accountability (Ip et al., 2025; Kumah, 2025). A just organizational environment in which mistakes and concerns can be discussed without disproportionate blame is especially important for creating conditions in which employees are willing to report problems and participate in corrective action (Kumah, 2025). Conversely, destructive or toxic leadership can discourage disclosure and reduce the willingness of employees to engage in internal reporting, thereby directing concerns outside normal organizational channels or suppressing them entirely

(Abdelrahman et al., 2025). Similar concerns have been raised regarding the moral and psychological consequences of workplace power structures that normalize silence, bullying, and vulnerability, suggesting that voice should be understood not simply as an individual communication preference but as a response to the ethical and relational conditions established within the organization (Ballout & Hamadeh, 2026; Walker, 2025).

Among the organizational antecedents of employee voice, leadership occupies a central position because supervisors exercise substantial influence over employees' perceptions of acceptable conduct, interpersonal risk, fairness, and the likely consequences of speaking up. Leadership behaviors communicate what is valued, which concerns will be heard, and whether dissent will be treated as a contribution or as a challenge to authority. Contemporary leadership scholarship increasingly emphasizes that leadership effects cannot be reduced to isolated leader traits; rather, leadership operates through interacting relational, motivational, and contextual processes that influence employee interpretation and behavior (Knippenberg & Dwertmann, 2022). Inclusive leadership research similarly indicates that employees are more likely to contribute and participate when leaders demonstrate accessibility, openness, respect, and a willingness to recognize diverse perspectives (Bhatnagar & Aggarwal, 2022; Budreikaitė et al., 2024). Such environments can foster meaningful work and stronger employee involvement by signaling that individual contributions are valued rather than merely tolerated (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). This broader leadership literature supports the proposition that employees' willingness to exercise voice depends heavily on the relational climate established by those in positions of authority.

Ethical leadership represents a particularly relevant leadership approach for explaining employee voice behavior. Ethical leadership involves the demonstration and promotion of normatively appropriate conduct through leaders' decisions, interpersonal behavior, communication, reinforcement practices, and role modeling. Ethical leaders are expected to act consistently with principles of fairness, integrity, responsibility, and respect while making ethical standards visible within everyday organizational processes. In periods of uncertainty, conflict, or institutional pressure, ethical leadership becomes especially consequential because leaders must translate abstract ethical principles into observable practices that employees can trust (Worthington et al., 2026). Ethical leadership may therefore encourage

employees to communicate concerns because it signals that decisions will be approached responsibly, that ethical issues are legitimate topics of discussion, and that employees are unlikely to be punished merely for identifying problems. Research has shown that ethical leadership can foster forms of ethical voice through relational identification, organizational identification, psychological ownership, and psychological safety, suggesting that its influence on speaking up operates through multiple psychological and relational pathways (Burhan et al., 2023).

Evidence from organizational and healthcare research further supports the association between ethical leadership and employees' willingness to communicate difficult information. Ethical leadership has been linked to stronger moral courage, psychological empowerment, and constructive reporting behavior, all of which are relevant to employees' ability to raise concerns despite potential interpersonal costs (Elhihi et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Research examining internal whistleblowing similarly suggests that ethical leadership may promote reporting partly because it strengthens psychological safety and employees' attitudes toward speaking up within formal organizational channels (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Conversely, organizational silence has been found to decline when employees perceive leadership as ethical, particularly when perceptions of organizational justice are strengthened (She et al., 2023). These findings suggest that ethical leadership may influence voice not merely through direct behavioral modeling but also by shaping employees' beliefs about fairness, interpersonal consequences, and whether the organization genuinely supports the expression of concerns.

Organizational justice constitutes another important antecedent of employee voice behavior. Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness in organizational outcomes, procedures, interpersonal treatment, and the explanations accompanying decisions. Employees continually evaluate whether rewards and responsibilities are distributed fairly, whether decision-making procedures are consistent and unbiased, whether they are treated with dignity, and whether organizational authorities communicate truthfully and adequately. These judgments can affect whether employees perceive the organization as deserving trust and whether participation in organizational processes is worthwhile. Research has specifically demonstrated that justice perceptions are relevant to employee voice and can alter the extent to which supportive leadership translates into speaking-up behavior (Qi et al., 2023). Interpersonal justice has also been

associated with voice behavior and employees' intentions to remain with their organizations, emphasizing that respectful treatment is not merely an affective benefit but a condition that can influence constructive participation (Aboobaker & Zakkariya, 2023).

The relationship between organizational justice and voice is theoretically plausible because speaking up requires employees to predict how their contributions will be received. When organizational procedures are perceived as arbitrary, interpersonal treatment as disrespectful, or outcomes as inequitable, employees may reasonably conclude that expressing concerns will have little effect or may expose them to additional disadvantage. By contrast, fair procedures and respectful interpersonal treatment signal that employees have legitimate standing within the organization and that their perspectives may be considered seriously. Studies of organizational silence reinforce this view by showing that organizational justice can mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' decisions not to remain silent (She et al., 2023). Research on inclusive organizational practices also emphasizes the importance of creating systems in which employees experience recognition, participation, and belonging rather than relying solely on symbolic commitments to inclusion (Boutwell & Smith, 2023). Thus, organizational justice can be understood as both an evaluative judgment about organizational practices and a social signal that affects employees' willingness to contribute potentially sensitive information.

Although ethical leadership and organizational justice may each directly promote voice, their effects are likely to depend on whether employees experience the workplace as psychologically safe. Psychological safety refers to a shared or individual perception that the work environment permits interpersonal risk taking without excessive fear of humiliation, punishment, rejection, or damage to professional standing. In psychologically safe environments, employees can ask questions, admit errors, express disagreement, seek help, and challenge established practices with less concern that such behavior will be interpreted as incompetence or disloyalty. Psychological safety has therefore become a central construct for explaining why employees speak up in some settings but remain silent in others. Empirical work has linked psychological safety with mental health and job performance, indicating that it is associated not only with communication but also with broader employee functioning (Sasaki et al., 2022). Research focused specifically on leaders and employee well-being

likewise suggests that leaders can improve employee outcomes by creating conditions in which individuals feel safe to speak up (Clarke et al., 2024).

Psychological safety is especially relevant to employee voice because voice inherently exposes employees to uncertainty about how others will react. Employees may possess useful information or improvement-oriented ideas but still withhold them if the anticipated social cost exceeds the perceived benefit of expression. Recent research on remote and hybrid employees demonstrates that inclusive leadership can strengthen psychological safety and, in turn, promote employee voice, showing that this mechanism remains important even when workplace interactions are technologically mediated and geographically dispersed (Mohase et al., 2025). Broader reviews of psychological safety in frontline and public safety settings similarly identify leadership and organizational climate as important antecedents of whether employees feel able to communicate concerns (Ip et al., 2025). Psychological safety can also be conceptualized as an emergent team state reflecting the fulfillment of important interpersonal and emotional needs, thereby linking group processes with employees' readiness to participate openly (Pincus, 2025). From this perspective, psychological safety is not simply an individual feeling but an organizationally consequential state through which leadership and fairness may influence communication behavior.

The ethical significance of psychological safety has also received growing attention. Leaders have a responsibility not only to pursue performance but also to create conditions in which employees can raise concerns without unreasonable interpersonal risk, particularly when silence can compromise safety, integrity, or organizational learning (Campbell, 2025). This responsibility becomes especially salient where employees are exposed to moral distress, conflicting obligations, or structural pressures that make speaking up difficult. Research on nurse leaders, for example, illustrates how moral distress can emerge when leaders recognize ethically problematic conditions but experience constraints on acting or communicating effectively (Beil-Hildebrand et al., 2024). Related scholarship on low-wage health workers emphasizes that organizations have ethical obligations to protect employees who are vulnerable to harm, highlighting the broader moral dimension of organizational climates that permit or discourage voice (George, 2022). These perspectives suggest that psychological safety should not be treated solely as an instrumental mechanism for increasing

performance but also as an ethical condition of responsible organizational management.

The negative consequences of unsafe leadership climates provide further support for examining psychological safety as a mediator. Abusive supervision and hostile work climates can undermine employee functioning by creating fear, uncertainty, and defensive behavior, with downstream effects on performance and communication (Daniel, 2023). Workplace bullying similarly operates through power imbalances that can damage mental health and erode employees' sense of safety, making open communication increasingly difficult (Walker, 2025). At a broader level, organizational systems that expect employees to remain resilient without addressing structural sources of distress may shift responsibility from institutions to individuals, obscuring the ethical importance of humane and supportive work conditions (Ballout & Hamadeh, 2026). Such findings imply that psychological safety is likely to capture an important portion of the mechanism through which employees interpret leadership conduct and organizational fairness before deciding whether speaking up is prudent.

The connection between ethical leadership, organizational justice, and psychological safety is therefore theoretically coherent. Ethical leaders communicate integrity, consistency, and respect, thereby reducing ambiguity regarding how employees will be treated when they raise difficult issues. Organizational justice reinforces these signals by demonstrating that procedures, outcomes, and interpersonal interactions are governed by standards that employees perceive as legitimate. Together, these conditions may reduce the interpersonal threat associated with voice and increase the expectation that expressing ideas will be treated constructively. Research on ethical leadership and ethical voice provides direct support for psychological safety as one pathway linking ethical leadership to voice-related outcomes (Burhan et al., 2023), while work on internal whistleblowing demonstrates that psychological safety can mediate the effect of ethical leadership on employees' willingness to report wrongdoing (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Similarly, research on error reporting indicates that ethically supportive leadership can promote behavior requiring moral and interpersonal risk taking, partly through psychological mechanisms such as moral courage (Elhihi et al., 2025). These findings collectively suggest that voice behavior is likely to emerge when employees simultaneously perceive ethical direction, fair treatment, and interpersonal safety.

Nevertheless, the existing literature remains fragmented in several respects. First, many studies focus on specialized

outcomes such as whistleblowing, error reporting, organizational silence, or moral courage rather than broader constructive employee voice (Abdelrahman et al., 2025; Elhihi et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Second, a considerable portion of the available evidence is concentrated in healthcare, nursing, public safety, or other high-risk occupational contexts, where speaking up may have distinctive consequences that differ from those in more heterogeneous organizational settings (Beil-Hildebrand et al., 2024; Kumah, 2025; Montgomery et al., 2022). Third, although justice, leadership, and psychological safety have each been associated with employee communication, fewer models simultaneously examine ethical leadership and organizational justice as parallel predictors of voice while testing psychological safety as a common explanatory mechanism. This gap is important because employees do not experience leadership, fairness, and safety in isolation; rather, these perceptions interact within an integrated social environment that shapes their expectations about whether voice will be welcomed, ignored, or punished.

Recent research on leadership and organizational inclusion further reinforces the need for integrative models. Inclusive leadership has been associated with employee performance-related processes, psychological safety, and voice, suggesting that openness and participation are produced through combinations of leadership behavior and workplace climate rather than through a single antecedent (Bhatnagar & Aggarwal, 2022; Mohase et al., 2025). Studies of inclusive leadership implementation also indicate that organizational principles must be reflected in actual managerial practices if they are to influence employee experience (Budreikaitė et al., 2024). Likewise, research on meaningful work suggests that leadership contributes to employees' willingness to invest themselves in organizational roles when they experience recognition and inclusion (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). The importance of these relational processes is consistent with the view that organizations must move beyond formal structures toward climates that actively support learning, participation, and open communication (Boutwell & Smith, 2023). Accordingly, examining ethical leadership and organizational justice together offers a more comprehensive representation of the leadership and fairness signals that may establish psychological safety.

Some studies also indicate that voice behavior is affected by the extent to which employees perceive organizational systems as morally credible. Ethical leadership may lose influence if employees observe inconsistencies between

leaders' stated values and organizational procedures, while fair procedures may be insufficient if supervisory conduct communicates disrespect or retaliation. This suggests that ethical leadership and organizational justice may represent complementary sources of information through which employees assess whether voice is safe. Leadership research emphasizing the interaction of multiple leadership elements further supports this integrative perspective (Knippenberg & Dwertmann, 2022). Similarly, work on ethical leadership under conditions of institutional threat emphasizes the importance of translating values into credible practices rather than treating ethics as a purely declarative commitment (Worthington et al., 2026). When employees observe alignment between ethical leadership and organizational justice, psychological safety may be strengthened because the organization provides consistent evidence that voice will be treated fairly.

At the same time, the contemporary workplace increasingly includes remote, hybrid, culturally diverse, and professionally heterogeneous arrangements, making psychological safety particularly relevant to communication. Remote or digitally mediated work can reduce spontaneous interaction and make employees more dependent on leadership cues regarding accessibility, openness, and responsiveness (Mohase et al., 2025). In such environments, formal justice procedures may assume greater importance because employees have fewer informal opportunities to clarify decisions or repair relational misunderstandings. Furthermore, workforce diversity increases the importance of inclusive and equitable processes that ensure employees with different identities, occupational positions, and experiences perceive genuine opportunities to contribute (Boutwell & Smith, 2023; Budreikaitė et al., 2024). The broader literature on humane leadership and employee care similarly suggests that well-being, fairness, and participation should be treated as interconnected organizational responsibilities rather than independent management initiatives (Ballout & Hamadeh, 2026; Campbell, 2025).

The present study addresses these issues by examining employee voice behavior within a Canadian organizational context and by integrating ethical leadership, organizational justice, and psychological safety into a single explanatory model. A Canadian sample provides an opportunity to investigate these constructs across a heterogeneous employment environment characterized by diverse sectors, organizational forms, and occupational roles. Rather than limiting voice to whistleblowing or error reporting, the study conceptualizes employee voice more broadly as constructive

communication of ideas, concerns, and suggestions intended to improve organizational functioning. This perspective is consistent with research emphasizing that silence and voice are central to learning, adaptation, inclusion, and organizational responsibility (Kim, 2024; Montgomery et al., 2022). It also responds to calls for leadership approaches that recognize psychological safety and employee participation as integral to ethically responsible organizational practice (Campbell, 2025).

The proposed model assumes that ethical leadership and organizational justice have both direct and indirect associations with employee voice behavior. Ethical leadership is expected to encourage voice because ethical leaders model integrity, demonstrate receptiveness, and reduce uncertainty about the consequences of expressing disagreement. Organizational justice is expected to promote voice because fair procedures and respectful treatment increase employees' confidence that their contributions will be considered legitimately. Psychological safety is expected to serve as a mediating mechanism because these leadership and justice perceptions shape whether employees feel sufficiently secure to accept the interpersonal risks involved in speaking up. This framework integrates findings from ethical leadership, organizational justice, psychological safety, silence, whistleblowing, inclusive leadership, and employee well-being research into a coherent explanatory model (Aboobaker & Zakkariya, 2023; Qi et al., 2023; Sasaki et al., 2022; She et al., 2023). It also recognizes that employee voice is not merely a function of personal courage but a relational outcome influenced by the moral and structural conditions employees encounter in everyday organizational life (George, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to predict employee voice behavior from ethical leadership and organizational justice and to examine the mediating role of psychological safety in these relationships among employees working in Canada.

2 Methods and Materials

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationships among ethical leadership, organizational justice, psychological safety, and employee voice behavior, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of psychological safety in the associations of ethical leadership and organizational justice with employee voice behavior. The statistical population consisted of employees working in

public and private organizations in Canada during 2026. Participants were recruited from organizations operating in service, administrative, financial, educational, healthcare, technology, and commercial sectors in order to achieve adequate variability in organizational and occupational characteristics. Eligibility criteria included being at least 18 years of age, currently employed in a Canadian organization, having worked in the current organization for at least six months, working either full-time or part-time under the supervision of an identifiable manager or supervisor, and providing informed consent to participate in the study. Employees who had worked in their organization for less than six months, were self-employed without a direct supervisor, submitted substantially incomplete questionnaires, or demonstrated patterned or careless responding were excluded from the final analysis. A total of 347 employees initially accessed and completed the study questionnaire. Following data screening, 21 questionnaires were excluded because of substantial missing data or failure to meet the eligibility and response-quality criteria, resulting in a final analytic sample of exactly 326 employees. Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling through professional networks, organizational contacts, employee-oriented online platforms, and electronic invitations distributed to eligible Canadian employees. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their responses would remain confidential and would be used exclusively for research purposes. The online questionnaire did not request directly identifying information, and participants were informed that they could discontinue participation at any point before submitting the survey without penalty. Before beginning the questionnaire, all participants reviewed an electronic informed-consent statement describing the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and approximate requirements for completing the survey. The survey measures were presented using standardized instructions, and the order and wording of the items were kept consistent across participants. Because the study investigated employees' perceptions of their supervisors, workplace fairness, interpersonal climate, and discretionary expression of work-related ideas and concerns, participants were instructed to answer all questions with reference to their current organization and immediate supervisor.

Employee voice behavior was assessed using the Employee Voice Behavior Scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine. The scale measures employees' discretionary

communication of constructive suggestions, ideas, concerns, and recommendations intended to improve organizational functioning rather than merely criticize existing practices. Items assess the extent to which employees actively speak up with suggestions for change, communicate ideas regarding issues that may affect the work unit, and express constructive opinions even when doing so may involve interpersonal or professional risk. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A total score was calculated by averaging responses across the items, with higher scores representing a greater tendency to engage in constructive employee voice behavior. The scale was selected because employee voice is conceptualized in the present study as proactive, change-oriented, and discretionary communication that may challenge the status quo while being intended to benefit the organization or work group. Internal consistency of the scale was assessed in the current sample using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, and its measurement properties were additionally examined as part of the confirmatory measurement model before testing the hypothesized structural relationships.

Ethical leadership was measured using the 10-item Ethical Leadership Scale developed by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison. This instrument evaluates employees' perceptions of the extent to which their immediate supervisor demonstrates normatively appropriate conduct through personal behavior, interpersonal relationships, communication, decision-making, reinforcement, and ethical role modeling. The items address leadership behaviors such as listening to employees, making fair and balanced decisions, discussing ethics and values, setting an example of appropriate conduct, disciplining employees who violate ethical standards, and considering the best interests of employees when making decisions. Participants indicated their agreement with each item using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Item responses were averaged to obtain an overall ethical leadership score, with higher scores indicating stronger perceptions of ethical behavior and ethical guidance by the immediate supervisor. The use of employee perceptions was consistent with the theoretical premise that ethical leadership influences employee behavior through observable managerial conduct, reinforcement practices, interpersonal treatment, and the interpretation employees assign to leadership behavior within their work environment. The reliability and construct

validity of the measure were evaluated within the study sample prior to testing the proposed mediation model.

Organizational justice was assessed using the Organizational Justice Scale developed by Colquitt. The measure provides a multidimensional assessment of employees' perceptions of fairness within organizational settings and encompasses distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice. Distributive justice reflects perceived fairness in the allocation of outcomes and rewards relative to employees' contributions and responsibilities. Procedural justice concerns the fairness, consistency, accuracy, and impartiality of procedures used to make organizational decisions. Interpersonal justice refers to the degree to which employees perceive that they are treated with dignity, politeness, and respect by organizational authorities. Informational justice concerns the adequacy, truthfulness, timeliness, and reasonableness of explanations provided regarding organizational procedures and decisions. Participants responded to the items using a five-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent), with wording adapted only where necessary to maintain consistency with the organizational context of the study. Scores were calculated for the overall construct, while the multidimensional structure was retained during assessment of the measurement model. Higher scores indicated stronger perceptions of organizational fairness. Because organizational justice is theoretically related to employees' willingness to accept interpersonal vulnerability and communicate openly within the workplace, it was treated as a principal exogenous predictor of psychological safety and employee voice behavior.

Psychological safety was measured using Edmondson's seven-item Team Psychological Safety Scale, adapted to refer to the participant's immediate work environment. The instrument assesses the extent to which employees perceive their workplace as safe for interpersonal risk taking, including asking questions, admitting mistakes, seeking assistance, expressing disagreement, and presenting ideas or concerns without fear of embarrassment, rejection, retaliation, or damage to professional standing. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Negatively worded items were reverse-scored before calculation of the total score, and the mean of the items was used as the overall psychological safety score. Higher scores represented a stronger perception that employees could express

themselves authentically and engage in interpersonal risk taking without anticipating adverse social consequences. Psychological safety was specified as the mediating variable because voicing suggestions or concerns may expose employees to interpersonal and organizational risks, and ethical treatment and perceptions of organizational fairness may encourage voice partly by reducing employees' expectations of punishment, humiliation, rejection, or other negative consequences associated with speaking up.

The questionnaire also contained a demographic and occupational information form developed for the present study. This form collected general characteristics relevant to interpretation of the sample, including age, gender, educational attainment, employment status, organizational sector, job tenure, organizational tenure, and managerial status. These variables were used primarily for descriptive purposes and for evaluating the characteristics and heterogeneity of the study sample. To minimize common-method response problems associated with collecting predictor, mediator, and outcome variables from a single respondent at one point in time, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and were encouraged to respond according to their actual workplace experiences rather than perceived organizational expectations. The survey instructions emphasized that responses would not be disclosed to employers, supervisors, or colleagues. Prior to the primary analyses, the internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the principal study constructs were examined to establish the adequacy of the measurement model.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS. Prior to hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened for completeness, coding errors, out-of-range responses, missing values, univariate and multivariate outliers, and violations of the assumptions required for multivariate statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the distributions of the principal study variables. Normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis coefficients together with inspection of variable distributions. Potential multicollinearity among the predictor variables was assessed through intercorrelations, tolerance statistics, and variance inflation factors. Values indicating excessive multicollinearity were considered evidence that model estimates might be unstable. The relationships among ethical leadership, organizational

justice, psychological safety, and employee voice behavior were initially examined using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of each construct, with coefficients of .70 or higher considered indicative of acceptable reliability. Convergent validity was examined using standardized factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted, whereas discriminant validity was evaluated by examining whether the constructs demonstrated adequate empirical distinctiveness from one another.

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted before structural hypothesis testing to determine whether ethical leadership, organizational justice, psychological safety, and employee voice behavior represented empirically distinguishable latent constructs. Model adequacy was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indicators rather than relying exclusively on the chi-square statistic because chi-square is sensitive to sample size. The principal fit indices included the chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio, Comparative Fit Index, Tucker–Lewis Index, Incremental Fit Index, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual. Values of χ^2/df below 3.00, CFI, TLI, and IFI values close to or above .90, and RMSEA and SRMR values below .08 were interpreted as indicating an acceptable fit of the hypothesized model to the observed data. Standardized factor loadings were also inspected to ensure that the individual indicators adequately represented their corresponding latent variables.

Structural equation modeling was subsequently used to test the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. Ethical leadership and organizational justice were specified as exogenous variables, psychological safety was specified as the mediator, and employee voice behavior was specified as the endogenous outcome variable. The model estimated the direct paths from ethical leadership and organizational justice to psychological safety, the path from psychological safety to employee voice behavior, and the direct paths from ethical leadership and organizational justice to employee voice behavior. This specification enabled simultaneous examination of whether ethical leadership and organizational justice predicted employee voice behavior directly and whether these relationships were transmitted indirectly through employees' perceptions of psychological safety. Standardized path coefficients, standard errors, critical ratios, and probability values were used to assess the magnitude and statistical significance of the direct effects.

The mediating role of psychological safety was examined using a nonparametric bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. Both the indirect effects and the remaining direct effects of ethical leadership and organizational justice on employee voice behavior were examined to determine whether the mediation pattern was consistent with partial or indirect-only mediation. The proportion of explained variance in psychological safety and employee voice behavior was assessed using squared multiple correlations. Statistical tests were two-tailed, and a significance level of $p < .05$ was adopted for hypothesis testing. The combination of confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and bootstrap estimation was considered appropriate for the proposed conceptual model because it permitted simultaneous assessment of measurement quality, direct predictive relationships, and the hypothesized mediating mechanism while accounting for measurement error in the latent constructs.

3 Findings and Results

A total of 326 employees were included in the final analysis. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 61 years, with a mean age of 38.47 years ($SD = 9.36$). Of the participants,

169 (51.84%) identified as women, 150 (46.01%) identified as men, and 7 (2.15%) identified as another gender or preferred not to specify. Regarding educational attainment, 38 participants (11.66%) had completed high school or an equivalent qualification, 79 (24.23%) held a college diploma or associate-level qualification, 128 (39.26%) held a bachelor's degree, and 81 (24.85%) held a master's degree or higher. In terms of employment status, 285 participants (87.42%) were employed full-time and 41 (12.58%) were employed part-time. Participants represented a range of organizational sectors, including service and commercial organizations ($n = 83$, 25.46%), healthcare and social services ($n = 61$, 18.71%), education ($n = 54$, 16.56%), finance and professional services ($n = 47$, 14.42%), technology and telecommunications ($n = 43$, 13.19%), and public administration or other organizational sectors ($n = 38$, 11.66%). Mean organizational tenure was 6.72 years ($SD = 5.14$), while mean tenure in the current position was 4.39 years ($SD = 3.71$). A total of 69 participants (21.17%) reported holding a supervisory or managerial position, whereas 257 participants (78.83%) occupied non-managerial positions. Overall, the demographic profile indicated that the sample included employees from diverse organizational settings and occupational backgrounds, providing sufficient variability for examining perceptions of leadership, justice, psychological safety, and voice behavior.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
1. Ethical Leadership	3.72	0.67	-0.34	-0.21	1.00			
2. Organizational Justice	3.58	0.63	-0.29	-0.18	.61**	1.00		
3. Psychological Safety	3.64	0.69	-0.31	-0.27	.58**	.63**	1.00	
4. Employee Voice Behavior	3.71	0.66	-0.25	-0.33	.49**	.52**	.61**	1.00

As shown in Table 1, all four study variables demonstrated mean scores above the theoretical midpoint of the five-point response scales. Ethical leadership had a mean of 3.72 ($SD = 0.67$), organizational justice had a mean of 3.58 ($SD = 0.63$), psychological safety had a mean of 3.64 ($SD = 0.69$), and employee voice behavior had a mean of 3.71 ($SD = 0.66$). Skewness values ranged from -0.34 to -0.25 and kurtosis values ranged from -0.33 to -0.18, indicating no substantial departures from univariate normality. The correlation analysis further demonstrated that all relationships among the principal variables were positive and statistically significant at the .01 level. Ethical leadership was positively associated with organizational

justice ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), psychological safety ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), and employee voice behavior ($r = .49$, $p < .01$). Organizational justice was also positively correlated with psychological safety ($r = .63$, $p < .01$) and employee voice behavior ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). The strongest bivariate relationship was observed between psychological safety and employee voice behavior ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), suggesting that employees who perceived their work environment as safer for interpersonal risk taking were more likely to express constructive ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Although several correlations were moderate to relatively strong, none approached levels typically associated with problematic multicollinearity. Examination of tolerance and variance

inflation factor statistics yielded tolerance values ranging from .51 to .67 and VIF values ranging from 1.49 to 1.96,

providing additional evidence that multicollinearity was not a significant concern in the subsequent structural analyses.

Table 2

Reliability, Factor Loadings, and Convergent Validity of the Measurement Model

Construct	Number of Items	Standardized Loading Range	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Ethical Leadership	10	.68–.84	.91	.92	.55
Organizational Justice	20	.64–.86	.94	.95	.58
Psychological Safety	7	.67–.85	.88	.89	.54
Employee Voice Behavior	6	.70–.87	.90	.91	.63

The measurement properties presented in Table 2 indicated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity for all constructs included in the proposed model. Standardized factor loadings for ethical leadership ranged from .68 to .84, while those for organizational justice ranged from .64 to .86. Psychological safety indicators demonstrated standardized loadings between .67 and .85, and employee voice behavior indicators ranged from .70 to .87. These values indicated that the observed items loaded meaningfully on their respective latent variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .88 for psychological safety to .94 for organizational justice, exceeding the conventional minimum criterion of .70 and demonstrating high internal consistency. Similarly, composite reliability coefficients ranged from .89 to .95, confirming that the indicators of each latent construct

consistently represented the underlying theoretical variable. Average variance extracted values were .55 for ethical leadership, .58 for organizational justice, .54 for psychological safety, and .63 for employee voice behavior. Because all AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of .50, the results supported adequate convergent validity. Examination of the relationships among the latent constructs also indicated satisfactory discriminant validity, as each construct retained sufficient empirical distinctiveness from the remaining constructs. Taken together, these results demonstrated that the measurement model possessed acceptable psychometric quality and supported proceeding to evaluation of the hypothesized structural relationships.

Table 3

Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Measurement and Structural Models

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	IFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Measurement Model	912.46	419	2.18	.94	.93	.94	.060	.052
Structural Model	934.81	425	2.20	.93	.92	.93	.061	.055

The goodness-of-fit indices reported in Table 3 demonstrated that both the measurement model and the hypothesized structural model provided an acceptable representation of the observed data. For the measurement model, the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was 2.18, which was below the criterion of 3.00. The Comparative Fit Index was .94, the Tucker–Lewis Index was .93, and the Incremental Fit Index was .94, all indicating satisfactory incremental fit. Moreover, the RMSEA value of .060 and SRMR value of .052 were below the commonly recommended upper threshold of .08, further supporting

model adequacy. The structural model similarly demonstrated an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(425) = 934.81$, $\chi^2/df = 2.20$, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, IFI = .93, RMSEA = .061, and SRMR = .055. The relatively small changes in fit indices between the measurement and structural models suggested that imposing the hypothesized directional relationships among the latent variables did not substantially reduce model fit. Consequently, the structural model was considered sufficiently consistent with the empirical data to permit interpretation of the direct and indirect path coefficients.

Table 4

Direct and Indirect Effects in the Structural Model

Hypothesized Relationship	B	SE	β	CR	p	95% Bootstrap CI
Ethical Leadership → Psychological Safety	0.34	0.06	.32	5.71	<.001	[.22, .45]
Organizational Justice → Psychological Safety	0.49	0.06	.45	7.68	<.001	[.37, .61]
Psychological Safety → Employee Voice Behavior	0.48	0.06	.50	8.06	<.001	[.37, .59]
Ethical Leadership → Employee Voice Behavior	0.15	0.06	.14	2.49	.013	[.03, .27]
Organizational Justice → Employee Voice Behavior	0.18	0.07	.17	2.72	.007	[.05, .31]
Ethical Leadership → Psychological Safety → Employee Voice Behavior	0.16	0.04	.16	—	<.001	[.10, .24]
Organizational Justice → Psychological Safety → Employee Voice Behavior	0.24	0.05	.23	—	<.001	[.16, .34]

As presented in Table 4, ethical leadership and organizational justice both significantly predicted psychological safety. Ethical leadership demonstrated a positive direct effect on psychological safety ($B = 0.34$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .32$, $CR = 5.71$, $p < .001$), indicating that employees who perceived their supervisors as more ethical, fair, communicative, and normatively appropriate were more likely to experience their workplace as psychologically safe. Organizational justice exerted an even stronger positive effect on psychological safety ($B = 0.49$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .45$, $CR = 7.68$, $p < .001$), suggesting that perceptions of fair outcomes, fair procedures, respectful treatment, and adequate organizational explanations contributed substantially to employees' sense that interpersonal risk taking was acceptable. Psychological safety, in turn, significantly and positively predicted employee voice behavior ($B = 0.48$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .50$, $CR = 8.06$, $p < .001$), representing the strongest direct path to the outcome variable in the model. Ethical leadership also retained a statistically

significant direct association with employee voice behavior after psychological safety was included in the model ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .14$, $p = .013$), as did organizational justice ($B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = .17$, $p = .007$). Bootstrap analyses confirmed that the indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee voice behavior through psychological safety was statistically significant ($B = 0.16$, $\beta = .16$, 95% CI [.10, .24], $p < .001$). Likewise, the indirect effect of organizational justice on employee voice behavior through psychological safety was significant ($B = 0.24$, $\beta = .23$, 95% CI [.16, .34], $p < .001$). Because neither bootstrap confidence interval contained zero and the corresponding direct paths remained statistically significant, the results supported a pattern of partial mediation for both predictor variables. Thus, ethical leadership and organizational justice were associated with greater employee voice behavior both directly and indirectly through the development of a psychologically safe work environment.

Figure 1

Structural Model of the Relationships Among Ethical Leadership, Organizational Justice, Psychological Safety, and Employee Voice Behavior

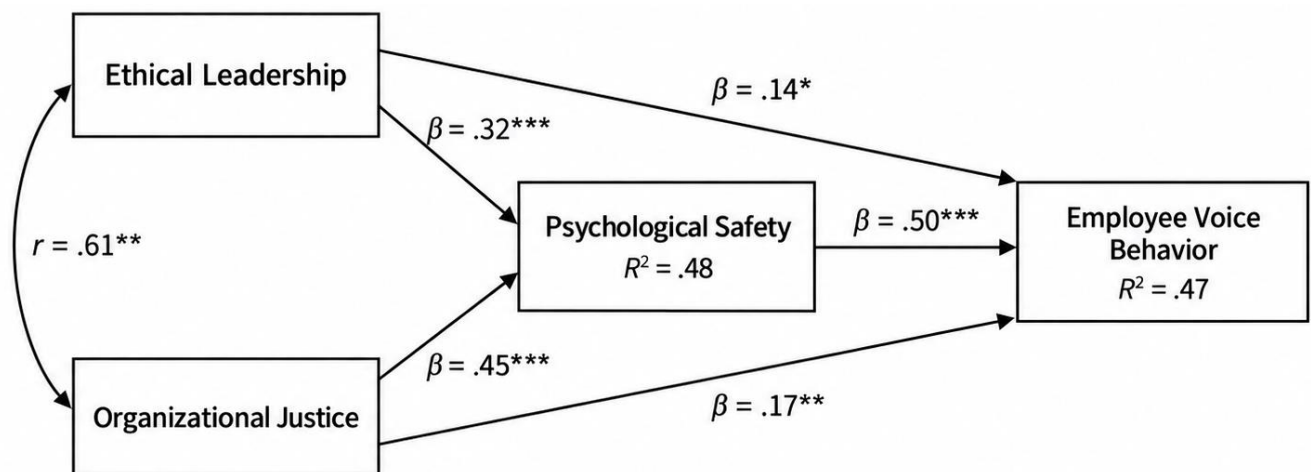


Figure 1 depicts the final structural model and the standardized relationships among the study constructs. Ethical leadership demonstrated a positive standardized path to psychological safety ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), while organizational justice showed a stronger positive path to psychological safety ($\beta = .45, p < .001$). Psychological safety was positively associated with employee voice behavior ($\beta = .50, p < .001$), demonstrating that employees' perceptions of interpersonal safety represented a central explanatory mechanism linking organizational conditions to constructive speaking-up behavior. In addition to these mediated pathways, ethical leadership retained a smaller but statistically significant direct effect on employee voice behavior ($\beta = .14, p = .013$), and organizational justice similarly retained a significant direct effect on employee voice behavior ($\beta = .17, p = .007$). The structural model accounted for 48% of the variance in psychological safety and 47% of the variance in employee voice behavior. These coefficients of determination indicated that ethical leadership and organizational justice jointly explained a substantial proportion of employees' perceptions of psychological safety, while the combination of ethical leadership, organizational justice, and psychological safety explained nearly half of the observed variability in employee voice behavior. Overall, the model supported the proposed theoretical mechanism in which ethical supervisory behavior and organizational fairness create conditions that reduce the interpersonal risks associated with expressing work-related concerns, suggestions, and alternative perspectives, thereby increasing employees' willingness to engage in voice behavior.

Taken together, the findings provided consistent support for the proposed conceptual model. Ethical leadership and organizational justice were both positively related to employee voice behavior at the bivariate level and continued to demonstrate significant direct effects within the structural model. More importantly, both predictors significantly enhanced psychological safety, which subsequently emerged as the strongest direct predictor of employee voice behavior. The significant bootstrap indirect effects demonstrated that psychological safety served as an important mediating mechanism through which ethical leadership and organizational justice were translated into greater willingness to speak up. The persistence of significant direct paths after inclusion of the mediator indicated that psychological safety did not entirely account for these relationships; instead, the results were consistent with partial mediation. Accordingly, the findings suggest

that employees are more likely to communicate ideas, recommendations, concerns, and constructive challenges when they perceive that their supervisors behave ethically, that organizational decisions and interpersonal treatment are fair, and that expressing themselves will not expose them to unacceptable interpersonal or professional consequences.

4 Discussion

The present study examined whether ethical leadership and organizational justice predicted employee voice behavior and whether psychological safety mediated these relationships among employees working in Canada. The findings supported the proposed conceptual model. Ethical leadership was positively associated with psychological safety and employee voice behavior, organizational justice was positively associated with psychological safety and employee voice behavior, and psychological safety emerged as the strongest direct predictor of employee voice behavior. In addition, the indirect effects of both ethical leadership and organizational justice on employee voice behavior through psychological safety were statistically significant. Because the direct effects of ethical leadership and organizational justice on employee voice behavior remained significant after psychological safety was entered into the structural model, the findings indicated partial mediation. Overall, the results suggest that employees are more willing to communicate constructive suggestions, concerns, and alternative viewpoints when they perceive their leaders as ethical, experience organizational procedures and interpersonal treatment as fair, and believe that speaking up will not expose them to unacceptable interpersonal or professional consequences.

The positive relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice behavior is consistent with the theoretical assumption that employees evaluate leadership behavior when deciding whether speaking up is appropriate and safe. Ethical leaders provide behavioral cues concerning integrity, fairness, openness, and responsible decision making, thereby reducing uncertainty about how dissent or constructive criticism will be received. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that ethical leadership facilitates ethical voice through relational and psychological mechanisms, including psychological safety, organizational identification, and psychological ownership (Burhan et al., 2023). It is also consistent with evidence showing that ethical leadership can promote internal whistleblowing and reporting-related behavior by shaping employees'

confidence in organizational processes and their willingness to communicate difficult information (Elhihi et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025). In this sense, ethical leadership appears to function not only as a moral standard but also as a relational signal that informs employees that communication of concerns is legitimate and potentially valued.

The significant direct effect of ethical leadership on employee voice behavior also indicates that ethical leadership may influence speaking up through mechanisms beyond psychological safety. Ethical leaders can encourage voice through role modeling, reinforcement of ethical norms, interpersonal respect, and explicit communication about appropriate conduct. Employees may therefore interpret ethical leadership as evidence that constructive participation is expected and that voicing concerns is part of responsible organizational membership. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing that ethical leadership must be translated from abstract principles into concrete organizational practices that employees can observe and trust (Worthington et al., 2026). Similarly, findings showing that ethical leadership is associated with moral courage and psychological empowerment suggest that employees may become more willing to act on concerns when leaders create a sense of moral legitimacy and personal agency (Wang et al., 2024). Thus, although psychological safety accounted for an important portion of the relationship, the remaining direct effect indicates that ethical leadership may independently reinforce voice through normative, motivational, and identification-based pathways.

The finding that organizational justice positively predicted employee voice behavior also supports previous empirical and theoretical work. Employees are more likely to invest effort in constructive communication when they believe that organizational outcomes, procedures, interpersonal interactions, and explanations are fair. Justice perceptions communicate that the organization recognizes employees as legitimate participants whose views deserve consideration. This finding is consistent with evidence that organizational justice plays an important role in employee voice and can shape how leadership behavior translates into speaking-up behavior (Qi et al., 2023). It also aligns with research demonstrating that interpersonal justice is associated with voice behavior and employees' intention to remain with the organization (Aboobaker & Zakkariya, 2023). When employees experience respect, procedural consistency, and transparent communication, they are likely to perceive voice as more worthwhile and less likely to result in arbitrary or punitive reactions.

The observed relationship between organizational justice and voice can also be interpreted through employees' expectations regarding the consequences of participation. Voice often involves challenging existing practices or drawing attention to deficiencies, and employees may refrain from doing so when they believe that decisions are biased or that interpersonal treatment is disrespectful. In contrast, perceptions of justice may increase employees' confidence that concerns will be evaluated according to fair standards. The present findings are therefore consistent with research indicating that organizational justice can reduce silence and explain part of the relationship between ethical leadership and employees' willingness to express concerns (She et al., 2023). They also correspond with broader work on inclusive organizational practices showing that employees are more likely to participate when systems convey belonging, recognition, and equitable treatment (Boutwell & Smith, 2023; Budreikaitė et al., 2024). Organizational justice therefore appears to provide a structural foundation for voice by establishing whether employees believe the organization is procedurally and relationally trustworthy.

A particularly important finding of the present study was the strong positive effect of psychological safety on employee voice behavior. Psychological safety had the largest standardized direct effect on employee voice, indicating that perceptions of interpersonal safety are central to the decision to speak up. This result is consistent with the conceptual nature of voice behavior, which often involves interpersonal risk. Employees may possess valuable information but still remain silent if they anticipate embarrassment, rejection, retaliation, or damage to their professional relationships. Prior research has demonstrated that psychological safety is associated with more favorable mental health and job performance outcomes (Sasaki et al., 2022), while leadership-focused studies have shown that psychologically safe environments facilitate employee expression and improve well-being (Clarke et al., 2024). The present findings extend this body of evidence by showing that psychological safety is not merely correlated with positive work experiences but serves as a major proximal predictor of constructive employee voice.

This result is also compatible with research conducted in contemporary work arrangements. Mohase and colleagues found that inclusive leadership promoted employee voice among remote and hybrid workers through psychological safety, reinforcing the proposition that employees need confidence in the interpersonal consequences of expression even when communication occurs through digitally

mediated channels (Mohase et al., 2025). Similarly, a review of public safety and frontline healthcare contexts identified leadership and organizational climate as important antecedents of psychological safety (Ip et al., 2025). These findings suggest that psychological safety has broad relevance across occupations and work arrangements. The present study further supports the idea that speaking up is not determined solely by whether employees have something useful to say; rather, it depends on whether the environment permits them to say it without unreasonable social risk.

The significant indirect effect of ethical leadership on employee voice behavior through psychological safety is one of the central contributions of the study. This finding indicates that ethical leadership promotes voice partly because it creates a climate in which employees feel safer engaging in interpersonal risk taking. Ethical leaders may reduce uncertainty by behaving consistently, treating employees respectfully, explaining decisions, and demonstrating that ethical concerns are legitimate. Such behaviors can reduce the perceived threat associated with disagreement or critical input. This result directly supports prior work demonstrating that psychological safety is one of the mechanisms through which ethical leadership fosters ethical voice (Burhan et al., 2023). It also aligns with evidence from nursing research showing that psychological safety mediates the association between ethical leadership and internal whistleblowing (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Although whistleblowing is more specific and potentially more consequential than general employee voice, both behaviors require employees to communicate information that may challenge existing practices or authority structures. Accordingly, psychological safety appears to represent a common explanatory mechanism across different forms of speaking up.

The mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between organizational justice and employee voice behavior is similarly important. Perceptions of fair procedures and respectful treatment may promote voice because they reduce the likelihood that employees will expect punishment, humiliation, or biased reactions when raising concerns. Justice can therefore contribute to voice indirectly by shaping the interpersonal climate in which communication occurs. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that justice perceptions influence voice-related outcomes and moderate or mediate the consequences of leadership behavior (Qi et al., 2023; She et al., 2023). A just workplace may communicate that employees will be

heard according to consistent standards, while interpersonal justice signals that employees will be treated with dignity even when they express disagreement. Such conditions are highly compatible with psychological safety because they reduce uncertainty about relational consequences and strengthen confidence in fair treatment.

The finding of partial rather than full mediation is also theoretically meaningful. Psychological safety explained substantial portions of the effects of ethical leadership and organizational justice on employee voice behavior, but both predictors retained significant direct effects. This suggests that employees' decisions to speak up are shaped by multiple simultaneous processes. Ethical leadership may encourage voice not only because employees feel safe but also because leaders model responsibility, strengthen identification, legitimize ethical communication, and increase employees' sense of moral agency (Burhan et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Organizational justice may similarly influence voice by fostering trust, reciprocity, organizational commitment, and expectations that participation will be meaningful. The persistence of direct effects is therefore consistent with contemporary leadership theory, which emphasizes that leadership operates through interacting mechanisms rather than a single explanatory route (Knippenberg & Dwertmann, 2022). Employee voice should consequently be understood as a multidetermined behavior arising from ethical, relational, procedural, and psychological conditions.

The present findings also reinforce the broader literature on employee silence. Silence does not necessarily indicate the absence of ideas or concerns; it can represent a calculated response to a work environment in which employees believe expression is unsafe or ineffective. Research has shown that workplace silence is shaped by leadership, organizational climate, and anticipated consequences (Kim, 2024; Montgomery et al., 2022). The current results provide the complementary perspective: when ethical leadership and organizational justice are present, and when these conditions generate psychological safety, employees are more likely to move from withholding information toward constructive expression. This distinction is important because organizations cannot assume that employees who remain silent have nothing to contribute. Silence may instead indicate a deficiency in leadership credibility, fairness, or interpersonal safety.

The findings also have significance for organizational ethics. Psychological safety should not be viewed only as a mechanism for maximizing employee contribution; it can also be considered part of an organization's ethical

responsibility toward its workforce. Campbell argued that leadership responsibility includes creating psychologically safe environments in which employees can raise concerns without unreasonable fear (Campbell, 2025). This perspective is particularly important in contexts where silence may allow errors, misconduct, or harmful practices to persist. Research on just culture similarly demonstrates that non-punitive and learning-oriented responses to errors support reporting and organizational safety (Kumah, 2025). Conversely, toxic leadership can alter employees' willingness to disclose problems and may increase the likelihood that concerns are withheld or redirected outside the organization (Abdelrahman et al., 2025). The present results therefore suggest that organizations seeking stronger voice behavior should treat ethical leadership, justice, and psychological safety as interconnected components of responsible governance.

The results are also compatible with research on adverse leadership climates. Abusive supervision can create psychological threat and undermine employee functioning (Daniel, 2023), while workplace bullying may erode psychological safety through fear, power imbalance, and anticipation of further harm (Walker, 2025). These negative leadership conditions illustrate the inverse of the pattern observed in the present study. When employees experience respectful and ethical leadership, fair procedures, and interpersonal safety, constructive voice becomes more likely; when these conditions are absent, defensive silence may become a rational response. This interpretation also aligns with scholarship emphasizing that organizations should not place the burden of adaptation exclusively on employees while leaving harmful structural conditions unchanged (Ballout & Hamadeh, 2026). Sustainable voice climates require organizational systems that make speaking up genuinely safe rather than simply encouraging employees to be more courageous.

The findings further converge with inclusive leadership research. Inclusive leadership emphasizes openness, accessibility, recognition, and respect for employee contributions, all of which overlap with the relational conditions that support psychological safety (Bhatnagar & Aggarwal, 2022). Inclusive practices have also been linked to meaningful work and employee participation (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023), while implementation research suggests that inclusion must be reflected in actual managerial and organizational practices rather than symbolic commitments (Budreikaitė et al., 2024). The present model similarly indicates that employees respond not merely to stated

organizational values but to their lived experience of leadership ethics, justice, and interpersonal safety. These converging lines of evidence imply that voice is most likely where employees see consistency between what organizations claim to value and how employees are actually treated.

5 Conclusion

Finally, the explained variance in psychological safety and employee voice behavior indicates that the model captured a substantial portion of the processes underlying these outcomes. Ethical leadership and organizational justice jointly explained nearly half of the variance in psychological safety, while ethical leadership, organizational justice, and psychological safety together explained almost half of the variance in employee voice behavior. These results support an integrative perspective in which voice emerges from the interaction of ethical leadership, fair organizational systems, and employees' perceptions of interpersonal risk. At the same time, the unexplained variance indicates that other factors, such as personality, job autonomy, leader-member exchange, team norms, organizational identification, perceived efficacy of voice, power distance, or previous experiences of speaking up, are also likely to contribute. Nevertheless, the present findings demonstrate that ethical leadership and organizational justice represent meaningful organizational antecedents and that psychological safety serves as an important mechanism through which these conditions are translated into employee voice.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit definitive causal conclusions regarding the direction of relationships among ethical leadership, organizational justice, psychological safety, and employee voice behavior. Although the proposed model was theoretically grounded and demonstrated acceptable statistical fit, reciprocal relationships are possible; for example, employees who frequently engage in voice may subsequently develop more favorable perceptions of their supervisors or workplace climate. Second, all variables were assessed using self-report measures collected from the same respondents, creating the possibility of common-method variance, social desirability, and perceptual consistency effects. Third, although the sample included employees from multiple organizational sectors in Canada, the use of non-probability recruitment limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the entire

Canadian workforce. Fourth, the study examined broad perceptions of ethical leadership, organizational justice, and psychological safety and did not distinguish whether specific dimensions of justice or different forms of employee voice might operate differently. Finally, organizational and team-level characteristics were not explicitly modeled, and employees were treated as individual units of analysis even though psychological safety and voice can also be shaped by shared team climates.

Future research should employ longitudinal, multi-wave, or experimental designs to examine the temporal ordering of the proposed relationships and provide stronger evidence regarding causality. Collecting predictor, mediator, and outcome variables at separate time points would also help reduce common-method concerns. Future studies could incorporate supervisor-rated or peer-rated voice behavior and combine subjective perceptions with objective indicators of participation, reporting, or suggestion behavior. Researchers should also test the model across different industries, provinces, occupational groups, and cultural contexts to determine the generalizability and boundary conditions of the findings. Multilevel designs would be especially valuable for distinguishing individual psychological safety from shared team-level safety climate and for examining whether leadership and justice operate differently across organizational levels. Additional mediators and moderators, such as trust in management, organizational identification, voice efficacy, moral courage, leader-member exchange, job autonomy, power distance, and previous experiences of retaliation, could also be incorporated to provide a more complete explanation of why employees choose to speak up or remain silent.

From a practical perspective, organizations should strengthen employee voice by addressing leadership conduct, organizational fairness, and psychological safety simultaneously rather than treating them as separate initiatives. Leadership development programs should emphasize ethical decision making, consistency, transparency, respectful communication, receptiveness to dissent, and non-retaliatory responses to criticism. Human resource systems should ensure that procedures for performance evaluation, promotion, workload allocation, grievance handling, and decision communication are transparent and perceived as equitable. Managers should actively invite employee input, acknowledge concerns, explain how suggestions are considered, and respond constructively even when they disagree. Organizations should also establish confidential and accessible voice

channels, protect employees from retaliation, and train supervisors to recognize defensive silence as a potential signal of interpersonal risk rather than employee disengagement. Creating psychologically safe climates requires repeated evidence that speaking up leads to respectful consideration rather than punishment; therefore, managerial behavior following employee voice may be as important as formal policies encouraging it.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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