Exploring the Components of Psychological Safety in Multicultural Work Teams

Molly. Schwarzenberger[1]*, Derek. Péloquin[2], Jessica. Brassard[2]

[1] Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
[2] School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

* Corresponding author email address: mo-schawarzenberger@gmail.com

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to explore and identify the core components of psychological safety as experienced and constructed in multicultural work teams. A qualitative research design was adopted to capture the lived experiences of employees working in culturally diverse teams. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 participants employed in multicultural organizations across Canada. Purposive sampling ensured diversity in cultural background, professional roles, and tenure. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. NVivo 14 software supported the process of thematic analysis, enabling systematic coding and categorization of data. Strategies including member checks, peer debriefing, and audit trails were employed to enhance credibility, dependability, and confirmability. The analysis revealed four overarching themes: (1) interpersonal trust and respect, encompassing mutual respect, fairness, empathy, reliability, and inclusive communication; (2) inclusive leadership practices, highlighting leader support, participative decision-making, cultural sensitivity, conflict mediation, recognition, and role modeling; (3) effective communication climate, including clarity, open feedback channels, language inclusivity, management of misunderstandings, and collaboration; and (4) cultural integration and learning, comprising valuing diversity, cross-cultural learning, reducing stereotypes, adaptability, team cohesion, and mutual growth. Illustrative quotations from participants emphasized how these components collectively fostered an environment of safety, openness, and belonging in multicultural work teams. The study demonstrates that psychological safety in multicultural teams is a multidimensional construct shaped by interpersonal, leadership, communicative, and cultural processes. By uncovering the specific components that underpin safety, this research advances theoretical understanding while providing practical insights for organizations seeking to leverage cultural diversity effectively. The findings highlight the critical importance of inclusive leadership, fair and empathetic practices, and structured opportunities for cultural integration in fostering safety and innovation in diverse workplaces.

Keywords: *Psychological safety; Multicultural teams; Inclusive leadership; Communication climate; Cultural integration*

1. Introduction

In an era of increasing globalization and workforce mobility, multicultural work teams have become a defining feature of organizations across sectors. These teams provide opportunities to harness diverse perspectives, skills, and cultural experiences, potentially leading to innovation, problem-solving, and organizational resilience. However, diversity also brings challenges, particularly in establishing trust, ensuring effective communication, and fostering a climate where employees feel safe to voice their thoughts without fear of negative consequences. The construct of psychological safety has therefore gained prominence as a critical factor influencing individual and collective outcomes in multicultural organizational settings (Ip et al., 2025).

Psychological safety refers to a shared belief among team members that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, such as asking questions, admitting mistakes, or expressing dissenting opinions (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2021). In inclusive and supportive work environments, psychological safety enables individuals to contribute fully, promoting engagement, learning, and creativity (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). However, its development is highly context-dependent and shaped by leadership styles, organizational culture, and the socio-demographic diversity of the workforce (Botha & Botha, 2025; Yousaf et al., 2022).

Inclusive leadership has been consistently identified as a central antecedent of psychological safety. Leaders who exhibit openness, accessibility, and availability create climates where employees feel their contributions are valued, regardless of background (Kim & Kwak, 2022; Zhou, 2024). For example, inclusive leaders provide equal opportunities for participation, recognize diverse viewpoints, and actively mediate cultural or interpersonal tensions (Khattak et al., 2022; Lee & Seo, 2024). Research demonstrates that inclusive leadership fosters employee voice behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, and loyalty by building trust and psychological safety (Kim et al., 2022; Lee, 2023).

Furthermore, leadership behaviors that value diversity can reduce turnover intentions and enhance well-being, particularly for female and minority executives (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Such findings highlight the pivotal role of leaders in shaping environments where psychological safety thrives. Indeed, leadership sensitivity to employee differences is not only an ethical imperative but also a driver of organizational performance and innovation (Dhar et al., 2023; Mo et al., 2023).

While leadership provides the foundation, the broader organizational climate also plays a determining role. Workplaces characterized by radical transparency and high reliability practices are more likely to cultivate psychological safety, especially in complex and high-risk contexts such as healthcare (Doelling et al., 2025). Similarly, climates that embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives foster openness and reduce interpersonal anxieties associated with cultural difference (Woods et al., 2024).

The presence of workplace bullying and exclusionary practices, by contrast, undermines psychological safety, with serious consequences for employee health and organizational outcomes (Gretton-Watson et al., 2025). This tension illustrates that psychological safety is not automatically guaranteed in multicultural teams; rather, it must be carefully nurtured through policies, leadership, and cultural practices that explicitly value inclusion (Lathabhavan & Mishra, 2024).

Multicultural teams embody both opportunities and risks in relation to psychological safety. On the one hand, cultural diversity can provide fertile ground for innovation by introducing a variety of perspectives, problem-solving styles, and knowledge bases (Singarimbun & Suharti, 2024). On the other hand, differences in language, values, and communication styles can exacerbate misunderstandings, lead to stereotyping, and heighten the risk of exclusion (Li & Tang, 2022; Li & Peng, 2022).

Studies show that when psychological safety is absent, individuals from minority cultural backgrounds often withhold ideas, suppress concerns, or disengage from team interactions (Qasim et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2021). Conversely, when safety is present, culturally diverse employees are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, demonstrate loyalty, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals (Rifai et al., 2024; Zhou, 2024). This dynamic underscores the importance of psychological safety as a mediating factor between diversity and performance outcomes.

The relationship between leadership, diversity, and psychological safety is often mediated or moderated by other variables. For example, studies demonstrate that psychological capital mediates the influence of inclusive leadership on newcomer socialization (Dai & Fang, 2023), while organizational climate can either buffer or amplify the effects of leadership on employee distress (Ibnis Shaid Bin Abdul et al., 2024). Similarly, factors such as collectivism,

learning orientation, and tenure have been identified as moderators shaping how psychological safety operates across cultural contexts (Kim & Kwak, 2022; Lee & Seo, 2024).

These mediating and moderating mechanisms highlight the complexity of building psychological safety in multicultural work environments. It is not simply a matter of leadership or policy, but rather a multifaceted process influenced by individual, team, and organizational factors.

The benefits of psychological safety extend to numerous individual and organizational outcomes. At the individual level, psychological safety has been linked to enhanced mental well-being (Parsakia & Alitabar, 2024), reduced psychological distress (Ibnis Shaid Bin Abdul et al., 2024), and stronger engagement (Siyal, 2023). At the organizational level, psychological safety fosters innovative work behavior, pro-social rule breaking, and meaningful work experiences (Shafaei & Nejati, 2023; Wang & Shi, 2020). These outcomes are especially critical in multicultural teams, where diversity can otherwise remain a dormant resource if not accompanied by a climate of safety and trust (Kyambade et al., 2023; Yousaf et al., 2022).

Moreover, the absence of psychological safety has been linked to higher turnover, lower job satisfaction, and suppressed voice behaviors, particularly among employees in minority or marginalized groups (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Haynes-Mendez & Nolan, 2021). These risks reinforce the necessity of understanding how psychological safety can be fostered, protected, and sustained in multicultural organizational settings.

Despite the growing body of literature, several gaps remain. Much of the existing research has been conducted in healthcare, education, or public administration settings (Ip et al., 2025; Mrayyan & Al-Rjoub, 2024), while less is known about psychological safety in multicultural work teams across diverse industries. Furthermore, studies have primarily adopted quantitative designs, which, while valuable, may overlook the nuanced and context-specific experiences of employees (Wang et al., 2021). There is also limited qualitative evidence exploring how psychological safety is constructed and experienced within teams that are both culturally heterogeneous and embedded in broader organizational contexts shaped by global mobility and inclusion agendas (Xuan, 2024).

Additionally, although research highlights the mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between leadership and employee outcomes (Khattak et al., 2022; Li & Peng, 2022), few studies have explored the specific components or dimensions that constitute psychological safety in multicultural settings. Identifying these components can provide actionable insights for leaders and organizations seeking to foster inclusivity and harness the full potential of diversity (Botha & Botha, 2025; Rifai et al., 2024).

In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to explore the components of psychological safety in multicultural work teams in Canada using a qualitative approach.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an exploratory orientation to investigate the components of psychological safety in multicultural work teams. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations within complex social and organizational contexts.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure representation from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. The study involved 18 participants working in multicultural teams across various industries in Canada. Inclusion criteria required participants to be employed in organizations with culturally diverse teams and to have at least one year of work experience in such environments. The final sample included both male and female participants with varied cultural origins, occupations, and organizational roles, thereby capturing a wide range of perspectives. Data collection was concluded once theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that additional interviews yielded no new themes or insights.

2.2. Measures

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to freely express their experiences while enabling the researcher to explore key areas of interest. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature on psychological safety, teamwork, and multicultural contexts. The guide included open-ended questions such as:

- "How do you define psychological safety within your team?"
- "What factors contribute to or hinder psychological safety in multicultural work settings?"

- "Can you share specific experiences that reflect the presence or absence of psychological safety in your team?"

Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or through secure online platforms, depending on participants' availability and preference. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation, were strictly observed throughout the process.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The qualitative data management software NVivo 14 was utilized to organize, code, and retrieve data efficiently. Initial open coding was conducted line by line, and emerging codes were iteratively refined through constant comparison. Categories and subthemes were developed inductively, allowing patterns and insights to emerge from the participants' narratives.

To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were employed. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the data, member checks with selected participants, and peer debriefing with qualitative research colleagues. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of participants and context. Dependability and confirmability were achieved by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and reflexive notes throughout the analysis.

3. Findings and Results

A total of 18 participants took part in the study, all of whom were members of multicultural work teams in Canada. Of these, 10 participants were female and 8 were male, with ages ranging from 27 to 54 years (M = 38.6). In terms of cultural background, participants represented diverse origins including South Asian (n = 5), East Asian (n = 4), Middle Eastern (n = 3), African (n = 3), European (n = 2), and Latin American (n = 1). Regarding professional roles, 7 participants were employed in managerial positions, 6 in professional specialist roles, and 5 in support or administrative roles. Participants' tenure in multicultural teams ranged from 2 to 15 years, with an average of 6.8 years. This demographic diversity provided a broad range of perspectives that enriched the exploration of psychological safety in multicultural contexts.

Table 1

Categories, Subcategories, and Concepts of Psychological Safety in Multicultural Work Teams

Category (Main Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Interpersonal Trust and Respect	Mutual Respect	Valuing diverse opinions; Active listening; Avoiding interruptions; Politeness in disagreements
	Fair Treatment	Equal workload distribution; No favoritism; Recognition of contributions; Transparent decision-making
	Empathy and Understanding	Perspective-taking; Emotional support; Acknowledging personal challenges; Compassion in conflicts
	Reliability	Meeting deadlines; Following through on commitments; Accountability for mistakes
	Inclusive Communication	Encouraging participation; No judgment zone; Respect for different accents; Openness to clarifications
	Psychological Comfort	Safe space to express concerns; Non-defensive responses; Reduced fear of criticism
2. Inclusive Leadership Practices	Leader Support	Coaching and mentoring; Providing feedback; Encouragement during challenges; Advocacy for team members
	Participative Decision-Making	Shared responsibility; Collective goal-setting; Team voting; Collaborative brainstorming
	Cultural Sensitivity of Leaders	Awareness of cultural norms; Avoiding stereotypes; Respecting cultural holidays; Adaptation to cultural practices
	Conflict Mediation	Neutral problem-solving; Encouraging dialogue; De-escalating tensions
	Recognition and Appreciation	Public acknowledgment; Celebrating small wins; Personal praise; Formal recognition programs
	Role Modeling	Leaders demonstrating vulnerability; Admitting mistakes; Showing openness to feedback
3. Effective Communication Climate	Clarity in Communication	Clear instructions; Avoiding jargon; Confirming understanding
	Open Feedback Channels	Two-way feedback; Anonymous feedback tools; Constructive criticism

4. Cultural Integration and Learning	Language Inclusivity	Use of simple language; Providing translations; Patience with language learners
	Managing Misunderstandings	Quick clarification; Avoiding assumptions; Encouraging questions; Clarification protocols
	Active Collaboration	Sharing resources; Regular check-ins; Brainstorming sessions
	Valuing Diversity	Highlighting strengths of different cultures; Appreciating traditions; Celebrating cultural festivals
	Cross-Cultural Learning	Knowledge-sharing sessions; Cultural exchange programs; Mentorship across cultures
	Reducing Stereotypes	Challenging biases; Encouraging self-reflection; Training on inclusivity
	Adaptability and Flexibility	Adjusting communication styles; Modifying work norms; Flexible deadlines
	Team Cohesion	Shared team identity; Building common goals; Social bonding activities
	Mutual Growth	Professional development opportunities; Cross-training; Joint problem-solving

1. Interpersonal Trust and Respect

Mutual Respect. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of respecting one another's viewpoints, even when disagreements arose. Active listening and politeness in expressing divergent opinions were repeatedly mentioned. As one participant explained, *"In my team, I feel safe to speak up because even if people disagree, they let me finish and listen carefully before they respond"* (Participant 7). Respect for differences was regarded as the foundation of psychological comfort.

Fair Treatment. The notion of fairness emerged as a core expectation across teams. Participants highlighted equal workload distribution, recognition of contributions, and the absence of favoritism as essential for fostering trust. One participant remarked, *"Our manager makes sure no one gets special treatment, and that's what keeps us united"* (Participant 3). Transparent decision-making processes were considered instrumental in sustaining psychological safety.

Empathy and Understanding. Expressions of empathy, such as acknowledging personal challenges and offering emotional support, reinforced feelings of safety within teams. Participants noted that being understood as human beings beyond professional roles enhanced their trust. For instance, *"When I had a family emergency, my colleagues stepped in without hesitation. That kind of compassion builds real safety"* (Participant 12).

Reliability. Team members stressed that reliability and accountability were critical. Meeting deadlines and following through on commitments signaled trustworthiness. As Participant 6 explained, *"I know I can depend on my teammates; when they say they will do something, they actually do it."* This reliability strengthened collective confidence and reduced interpersonal tension.

Inclusive Communication. Many participants pointed out that an inclusive approach to communication, especially respecting different accents and encouraging everyone to contribute, was indispensable. *"Sometimes my English isn't perfect, but my team never makes me feel embarrassed about it. They just ask questions to understand me better"* (Participant 14). Such openness encouraged wider participation.

Psychological Comfort. Several participants described the sense of relief that came with the assurance that their ideas would not be met with ridicule or hostility. *"I feel like I can share half-baked ideas without being judged harshly, and that really boosts my confidence"* (Participant 9). This climate of acceptance provided a strong foundation for interpersonal trust.

2. Inclusive Leadership Practices

Leader Support. Participants emphasized the critical role of leaders in coaching, mentoring, and providing encouragement. Leaders who advocated for their team members created an environment of assurance. *"My manager always backs us up when we make mistakes. That support makes me feel safe to experiment"* (Participant 11).

Participative Decision-Making. Shared responsibility in decision-making processes was valued highly. Involving team members in goal-setting and brainstorming cultivated a sense of ownership. Participant 5 stated, *"When we vote or brainstorm together, it feels like everyone's voice matters equally."*

Cultural Sensitivity of Leaders. Leadership sensitivity to cultural differences was cited as a major factor in reducing misunderstandings. *"Our supervisor never schedules important meetings during religious holidays, which shows he really respects our cultures"* (Participant 2). Such awareness reinforced inclusion.

Conflict Mediation. Neutral conflict resolution by leaders was perceived as essential for maintaining harmony. One participant commented, *"Instead of taking sides, our manager asks both parties to talk it out, and that really helps us resolve issues without fear"* (Participant 16).

Recognition and Appreciation. Public and private acknowledgment of contributions fostered positive

emotions. *"Even small wins are celebrated in my team, and that recognition makes me want to contribute more"* (Participant 8). Recognition was seen as both motivating and reassuring.

Role Modeling. Leaders who demonstrated humility, admitted mistakes, and remained open to feedback were identified as role models for psychological safety. *"When our director admitted he was wrong and asked for our input, it set the tone that we can all be honest"* (Participant 1).

3. Effective Communication Climate

Clarity in Communication. Participants frequently stressed that clarity prevented misunderstandings and helped them feel secure. *"Our team lead repeats instructions in simple terms, and that reduces the chance of mistakes"* (Participant 15). The avoidance of jargon and confirmation of understanding were highly valued.

Open Feedback Channels. Constructive two-way feedback mechanisms provided employees with confidence to voice concerns. *"We have anonymous feedback tools, and knowing that I can express myself without backlash is very comforting"* (Participant 10).

Language Inclusivity. Patience with language learners and the provision of translations facilitated inclusion. *"Sometimes colleagues translate technical terms into simpler English for me, and that makes me feel valued"* (Participant 4).

Managing Misunderstandings. Quick clarification and encouragement to ask questions reduced the risks of conflict. *"Whenever something is unclear, our team makes it normal to ask again, so you don't feel stupid"* (Participant 17).

Active Collaboration. Regular check-ins and brainstorming sessions were highlighted as important for reinforcing trust and collaboration. *"We have weekly check-ins where everyone can bring up issues, and it feels like no problem is too small to share"* (Participant 18).

4. Cultural Integration and Learning

Valuing Diversity. Participants described appreciation for cultural strengths and traditions as a major enabler of psychological safety. *"We celebrate each other's festivals, and it makes me feel that my culture is welcome at work"* (Participant 13).

Cross-Cultural Learning. Opportunities to learn from colleagues of different backgrounds fostered inclusivity. *"I love when we do cultural exchange sessions—like teaching each other food traditions. It breaks barriers instantly"* (Participant 6).

Reducing Stereotypes. Many participants stressed the importance of challenging biases and stereotypes. *"When someone makes a generalization, our team leader encourages us to reflect, which helps remove unconscious bias"* (Participant 3).

Adaptability and Flexibility. Adjusting communication styles and work norms to accommodate cultural diversity was viewed as vital. *"Sometimes deadlines are flexible because different cultures approach time differently. That flexibility avoids unnecessary stress"* (Participant 7).

Team Cohesion. Building a shared team identity and fostering social bonding emerged as strong contributors to safety. *"We often do social events outside work, and those help us trust each other more at work"* (Participant 12).

Mutual Growth. Professional development opportunities that cut across cultural lines reinforced equality. *"Cross-training with colleagues from other backgrounds taught me not just skills but respect for how others think"* (Participant 5).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study set out to explore the components of psychological safety in multicultural work teams in Canada, employing semi-structured interviews with 18 participants. Through thematic analysis, four major themes emerged: interpersonal trust and respect, inclusive leadership practices, effective communication climate, and cultural integration and learning. Together, these findings provide a nuanced understanding of how psychological safety is experienced and sustained in culturally diverse organizational settings.

One of the central findings was the role of mutual respect, fairness, empathy, reliability, and inclusive communication in building interpersonal trust and respect among team members. Participants consistently highlighted that they felt safe when their contributions were respected and when team members demonstrated accountability and fairness. This resonates with prior research emphasizing interpersonal trust as a foundation of psychological safety, particularly in settings marked by high interdependence and diversity (Ip et al., 2025). Similarly, fairness and transparent practices have been identified as critical for reducing perceptions of bias and favoritism, which are known barriers to psychological safety (Woods et al., 2024).

Empathy emerged as a particularly salient subtheme, with participants noting that compassion and understanding during personal or professional difficulties enhanced their sense of belonging. This aligns with findings from studies showing that psychological safety is strongly influenced by

perceptions of support and empathy from colleagues and leaders (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kyambade et al., 2023). The emphasis on reliability and accountability echoes research on inclusive leadership, where leaders' and peers' consistency in commitments strengthens trust and fosters a culture of safety (Khattak et al., 2022).

Moreover, inclusive communication practices such as valuing accents, encouraging participation, and reducing judgment provided a buffer against cultural and linguistic barriers. Prior studies also show that communication inclusivity is vital in multicultural contexts, where differences in language proficiency can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2021; Yousaf et al., 2022). The present study thus extends existing knowledge by illustrating how such practices directly shape daily experiences of safety in multicultural teams.

The second major theme concerned inclusive leadership practices, with participants describing the role of leaders in providing support, involving team members in decision-making, showing cultural sensitivity, mediating conflicts, and offering recognition. This theme mirrors extensive evidence in the literature identifying inclusive leadership as a key antecedent of psychological safety (Botha & Botha, 2025; Zhou, 2024).

Leader support, particularly in the form of coaching, mentoring, and backing employees during mistakes, was repeatedly highlighted. This aligns with previous research indicating that leader advocacy not only strengthens psychological safety but also enhances innovative behaviors and voice (Dhar et al., 2023; Mo et al., 2023). Participative decision-making was also valued by participants, reinforcing earlier findings that shared responsibility increases perceptions of fairness and safety (Kim & Kwak, 2022; Li & Peng, 2022).

Cultural sensitivity of leaders emerged as a critical subtheme in this study, particularly when leaders adapted practices to respect religious or cultural norms. This corroborates research showing that culturally responsive leadership significantly enhances inclusion and psychological safety among employees from minority backgrounds (Lee & Seo, 2024; Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). Conflict mediation, likewise, was seen as a leader's role in reducing risks of interpersonal hostility, consistent with prior findings on the importance of leadership neutrality in managing team tensions (Doelling et al., 2025).

Recognition and appreciation were another significant dimension, echoing studies that link leader recognition to higher motivation, engagement, and feelings of safety (Rifai et al., 2024; Siyal, 2023). Finally, role modeling behaviors such as admitting mistakes and inviting feedback were seen as powerful tools for signaling safety, consistent with evidence that leader humility promotes psychological safety climates (Ibnis Shaid Bin Abdul et al., 2024; Mrayyan & Al-Rjoub, 2024).

The third theme concerned the climate of communication within multicultural work teams. Participants emphasized the role of clarity, open feedback channels, language inclusivity, management of misunderstandings, and collaboration. This finding reinforces the idea that communication processes are central to psychological safety, particularly in multicultural environments where misinterpretations and exclusion risks are heightened (Haynes-Mendez & Nolan, 2021; Ip et al., 2025).

Clarity in communication was perceived as essential to avoid ambiguity and build confidence. This aligns with Mayfield's work showing that leader motivating language plays a vital role in fostering feelings of safety (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2021). Similarly, open feedback channels, including both formal and informal mechanisms, supported participants' willingness to voice concerns, resonating with prior studies on feedback culture as a driver of psychological safety (Wang et al., 2021).

Language inclusivity was highlighted in this study as particularly important, as participants from non-native English backgrounds valued patience, simplification, and translation efforts from colleagues. This aligns with research demonstrating that linguistic support and inclusivity significantly improve perceptions of inclusion and safety (Singarimbun & Suharti, 2024; Yousaf et al., 2021). Managing misunderstandings through quick clarification and encouraging questions was also described as a protective mechanism against potential conflicts, consistent with findings that psychological safety requires an atmosphere where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than failures (Li & Tang, 2022; Wang & Shi, 2020).

Finally, collaboration through regular check-ins and brainstorming was seen as critical to strengthening bonds and creating collective ownership. This echoes findings that collaboration fosters not only innovation but also interpersonal trust and safety (Kim et al., 2022; Lathabhavan & Mishra, 2024). Overall, this study emphasizes that communication practices are not merely logistical tools but active enablers of psychological safety in multicultural settings.

The fourth and final theme was cultural integration and learning, where participants described the importance of

valuing diversity, cross-cultural learning, reducing stereotypes, adaptability, cohesion, and mutual growth. These findings reflect and extend earlier research that highlights the dual role of diversity as both an opportunity and a challenge for psychological safety (Woods et al., 2024; Zhou, 2024).

Valuing diversity through recognition of traditions, holidays, and cultural practices was described as a symbolic yet powerful gesture of inclusion. This finding aligns with studies showing that recognition of cultural identity enhances both loyalty and psychological safety (Yousaf et al., 2022; Zhou, 2024). Cross-cultural learning opportunities, such as cultural exchange activities, further reduced barriers, consistent with evidence that cultural learning strengthens cohesion and trust (Singarimbun & Suharti, 2024).

Reducing stereotypes was another key finding, with participants stressing the role of reflection and training in addressing unconscious biases. This supports earlier findings that combating bias is central to building meaningful and safe workplaces (Rifai et al., 2024; Shafaei & Nejati, 2023). Adaptability and flexibility were seen as crucial in accommodating diverse approaches to time and communication, echoing research that highlights flexibility as a driver of inclusion (Li & Peng, 2022; Xuan, 2024).

Finally, team cohesion and mutual growth were described as outcomes of cultural integration. Social bonding activities and professional development across cultures contributed to shared identity and collective trust. These findings align with prior studies showing that socially responsible and inclusive leadership fosters socially cohesive and safe teams (Dhar et al., 2023; Kyambade et al., 2023). This study therefore extends prior research by illustrating the specific mechanisms through which multicultural teams construct safety through cultural integration.

Although the study provides rich insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 18 participants, while appropriate for qualitative inquiry, limits the generalizability of findings across broader organizational contexts. The reliance on participants from Canada may also restrict transferability to other cultural and institutional environments where norms of communication, diversity, and leadership differ. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data through semi-structured interviews, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability effects, particularly given the sensitive nature of psychological safety. Third, while NVivo 14 facilitated systematic analysis, the interpretive nature of thematic coding introduces the possibility of researcher bias. Despite reflexive practices and peer debriefing, complete objectivity cannot be assured. Finally, the study focused primarily on employee perspectives, without incorporating leader or organizational viewpoints, which may have provided additional layers of understanding.

Future research should seek to build on these findings in several directions. Quantitative studies with larger and more diverse samples could test the generalizability of the identified components of psychological safety across industries and cultural contexts. Mixed-method designs may also prove fruitful, integrating qualitative depth with quantitative rigor to examine the relative importance of each component. Furthermore, comparative studies across countries could highlight cultural variations in how psychological safety is constructed and experienced. Another avenue lies in exploring leader perspectives, organizational policies, and structural factors that interact with team-level dynamics to shape safety. Finally, longitudinal research could examine how psychological safety evolves over time, particularly in multicultural teams experiencing turnover, organizational change, or external crises.

For practitioners, the findings highlight several actionable insights. Organizations should prioritize fostering interpersonal trust through fairness, empathy, and reliability, while leaders must actively practice inclusive behaviors such as participative decision-making, cultural sensitivity, and role modeling. Communication practices should be designed to ensure clarity, openness, and inclusivity, with specific attention to linguistic diversity. Structured opportunities for cultural integration and cross-cultural learning should be embedded in organizational practices to reduce stereotypes and strengthen cohesion. Collectively, these strategies can help organizations not only build psychological safety but also unlock the full potential of multicultural teams in driving innovation, collaboration, and sustainable performance.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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