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Breaking the burnout cycle: How workplace communication predicts employee well-being

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Orientation: Burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance are essential to employee well-being and organisational success. Although workplace communication is often treated as secondary to leadership behaviour, its direct role in these outcomes remains underexplored, particularly in the high-pressure Indian information technology sector.

Research purpose: This study examined whether workplace communication independently predicts burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance, and compared its influence with supervisor and coworker support.

Motivation for the study: Prior research has largely treated communication as part of hierarchical support systems. This study instead models communication as a standalone variable in a demanding, innovation-driven work setting.

Research approach/design and method: A cross-sectional quantitative survey was conducted among 344 full-time Indian information technology professionals using a 21-item Likert-scale questionnaire. Multiple linear regression assessed the predictive strength of workplace communication while controlling for supervisor and coworker support.

Main findings: Workplace communication emerged as the strongest predictor across all three outcomes. It was negatively associated with burnout and positively associated with psychological safety and contextual performance. Coworker support was also significant across all three models, while supervisor support was positively associated with psychological safety and contextual performance, but not burnout.

Practical/managerial implications: These findings identify communication as an important organisational resource linked to employee well-being and performance.

Contribution/value-add: By modelling communication as an independent predictor, this study offers theoretical and practical insight into how everyday interactions shape workplace outcomes in high-demand sectors.

Keywords: contextual performance; psychological safety; burnout; workplace communication; employee well-being; information technology sector.

Introduction

Burnout has emerged as a pervasive occupational hazard in modern workplaces, marked by chronic emotional exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2023; Maslach et al., 2001). It is no longer limited to traditional high-stress professions such as healthcare or social work, but has become increasingly prevalent in cognitively demanding, performance-driven industries where intellectual labour and rapid adaptation are core expectations (Khammissa et al., 2022; Tamminga et al., 2023). Although burnout was once framed primarily as an individual issue, it is now widely understood as a systemic outcome of organisational design, leadership communication and work culture (Gaspar et al., 2024; Leiter & Maslach, 2003).

Among the many antecedents of burnout, workplace communication stands out as both a risk and remedy. Poor or inconsistent communication, characterised by ambiguity, lack of feedback or unresponsiveness, can heighten uncertainty, reduce trust and increase employee strain (Singh et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Frese, 2012).

Conversely, open, consistent and empathetic communication has been found to lower stress, strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster a sense of psychological safety

(Haribhai-Thompson et al., 2022; Safitri & Patrisia, 2019). This communicative climate plays a central role in how employees interpret their work demands, access support and build resilience.

Despite this, communication is often conceptualised as a mediating variable rather than a standalone predictor, particularly when compared to constructs like supervisor or coworker support (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

This framing obscures the autonomous value of communication in shaping workplace outcomes and limits our understanding of how day-to-day interactions not just hierarchical support buffer against burnout, foster psychological safety and promote contextual performance.

Psychological safety is closely linked to communication quality. It refers to the shared belief that one can speak up, admit mistakes or ask for help without fear of negative repercussions (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Ito et al., 2021). A psychologically safe environment empowers employees to navigate ambiguity, share concerns early and seek clarification, protective behaviours that directly buffer against burnout. While psychological safety has gained prominence as a predictor of team learning and innovation, it remains under-integrated into broader models of employee well-being that also consider stress-related outcomes and dimensions of job performance.

Moreover, communication has also been associated with positive performance outcomes, particularly contextual performance, employees' discretionary efforts that support team functioning, organisational citizenship and innovation beyond core job responsibilities (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Although contextual performance is vital to team cohesion and organisational agility, it has received relatively less attention in models focused on psychological strain, thereby limiting our understanding of how well-being factors translate into extra-role behaviours.

Although multiple workplace factors, including supervisor support, coworker support and organisational policies, contribute to employee well-being, recent empirical findings suggest that communication itself may exert a stronger and more consistent influence on burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance. However, few studies have systematically examined communication as an independent predictor of these outcomes, especially in industries characterised by dynamic workloads and rapid changes. In particular, the Indian IT sector presents a compelling case, given its demanding work culture, high attrition rates and growing concern about employees' mental health.

This study therefore positions communication as an independent construct in its own right distinct from leadership or support systems and evaluates its direct predictive impact. It also offers a comparative model against supervisor and coworker support, contributing to both theoretical refinement and actionable insights for organisational practice.

More importantly, by integrating burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance into a single predictive model, this study brings together three strands of organisational research that are often examined in isolation. This convergence allows for a more holistic assessment of employee well-being and expands current models by highlighting how psychologically safe environments and discretionary behaviours may co-occur or diverge under different communication conditions.

Communication and burnout (mechanism)

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model distinguishes job demands (work aspects requiring sustained effort and associated with psychological costs) from job resources (aspects that facilitate goal achievement and can reduce demands and their associated costs) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job Demands–Resources evidence links job demands primarily to strain or exhaustion, while resources (e.g. feedback and social support) can buffer the relationship between demands and burnout outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Internal communication is conceptualised as a two-way exchange, and richer channels are described as better able to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty (Mishra et al., 2014). In change settings, transparent communication is positively associated with organisational trust, while withholding information can increase employee uncertainty and concern (Yue et al., 2019). Taken together, communication that enables dialogue and reduces uncertainty represents a plausible job resource and is therefore expected to be negatively associated with burnout.

Communication and psychological safety (mechanism)

Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). Edmondson argues that psychological safety reflects expectations about interpersonal norms and the consequences of speaking up (e.g. asking questions, reporting errors, proposing ideas) and is shaped by ongoing local interactions (Edmondson, 1999, 2002). When people anticipate interpersonal penalties (e.g. scolding or humiliation), they engage in self-protection, whereas psychological safety increases the likelihood of learning behaviours such as help-seeking and discussing errors (Edmondson, 2002). Because communication practices are central to how interaction norms are signalled and interpreted, stronger workplace communication is expected to be positively associated with psychological safety.

Communication and contextual performance (mechanism)

Contextual performance refers to behaviours that support organisational effectiveness by shaping the organisational, social and psychological context of work (e.g. volunteering

for non-required activities and helping/cooperating with others) (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). This overlaps with organisational citizenship behaviours, typically defined as discretionary behaviours that promote effective organisational functioning (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Job Demands–Resources research summarised by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) reports that job resources (e.g. autonomy and social support) are key predictors of extra-role performance, contrasted with job demands predicting exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). To the extent that workplace communication functions as a resource by supporting engagement and coordination through two-way exchange (Mishra et al., 2014), stronger workplace communication is expected to be positively associated with contextual performance.

Hypothesis

Based on these theoretical insights and the identified research gap, the present study formulates the following hypotheses:

H1: Workplace communication is negatively associated with burnout.

H2: Workplace communication is positively associated with psychological safety.

H3: Workplace communication is positively associated with contextual performance.

Research purpose and objectives

This study aims to investigate the predictors of key employee outcomes: burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance in the Indian IT sector, a high-pressure and innovation-driven environment. While burnout is a widely examined concern, psychological safety and contextual performance remain underexplored in non-Western and digitally intensive work contexts. These constructs are critical for fostering resilience, innovation and sustained engagement.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- *To examine whether workplace communication, supervisor support and coworker support predict burnout among Indian IT professionals.*
- *To examine whether workplace communication, supervisor support and coworker support predict psychological safety among Indian IT professionals.*
- *To examine whether workplace communication, supervisor support and coworker support predict contextual performance among Indian IT professionals.*

Literature review

Burnout is a chronic psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged workplace stress, characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001).

Traditionally associated with helping professions, burnout has now become increasingly prevalent across a range of cognitively demanding sectors, including information technology, finance and academia (Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2023). Prolonged exposure to heavy workloads, role ambiguity and inadequate support mechanisms are well-documented antecedents (Shirom, 2003). Burnout is no longer viewed as a purely individual concern but rather a systemic issue that reflects organisational culture, workload design and broader psychosocial risks (Leiter & Maslach, 2003). Meta-analytic evidence links burnout to a host of negative outcomes including job dissatisfaction, absenteeism and reduced performance (Maslach et al., 2001).

Burnout is particularly pronounced in high-performance environments, such as the Indian IT sector, where long working hours, emotional labour and pressure to innovate increase vulnerability (Tamminga et al., 2023).

Emerging studies suggest that burnout may not only impact individual well-being but can have cascading effects on team dynamics, organisational citizenship behaviour and client satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2014). As industries shift towards more cognitively intensive roles, the need for proactive burnout mitigation strategies becomes essential not only for retaining talent, but also for maintaining sustainable organisational functioning.

Psychological safety, a separate but equally critical construct, refers to a shared belief among team members that it is safe to take interpersonal risks without fear of embarrassment, rejection or punishment (Edmondson, 1999).

This concept has gained substantial traction in recent years, particularly in literature addressing innovation, learning behaviours and employee engagement. Teams that exhibit high psychological safety are more likely to engage in open communication, share creative ideas and report errors, behaviours linked to better team performance and adaptive capacity (Frazier et al., 2016).

Research on psychological safety has extended into various domains including healthcare, education and corporate teams. In a meta-analysis by Frazier et al. (2017), psychological safety was positively associated with task performance, information sharing and organisational commitment. It also served as a mediator between leadership inclusiveness and team learning behaviour, suggesting its central role in shaping both individual and group outcomes. In high-stakes or uncertain environments such as IT and R&D teams, psychological safety can be particularly crucial, enabling workers to navigate ambiguity and experimentation without fear of repercussion (Detert & Burris, 2007; Frazier et al., 2016).

While several antecedents of psychological safety have been identified, including inclusive leadership, trust and team cohesion (Carmeli et al., 2008), there is growing interest in exploring how broader workplace structures and environments contribute to or detract from this sense of safety. Particularly in settings where formal hierarchies are less visible, such as remote or hybrid teams, fostering psychological safety may rely on distributed organisational

norms and cultural values rather than solely on individual leadership behaviours.

Taken together, burnout and psychological safety are increasingly viewed as complementary constructs in understanding employee well-being and performance. However, the mechanisms through which these outcomes are shaped remain underdeveloped particularly in relation to workplace communication.

While leadership and support systems are often emphasised as antecedents, there is limited empirical exploration of communication as an autonomous predictor that cuts across hierarchical levels. Communication not only shapes how employees interpret work-related stressors but also governs access to support, feedback and clarity factors crucial to mitigating burnout and fostering psychological safety.

This study addresses this gap by examining workplace communication as a direct and independent predictor of burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance, while considering supervisor and coworker support in the same model. In doing so, it advances a more communication-centred approach to understanding employee well-being in high-demand sectors like Indian IT.

The present study can also be interpreted through a JD-R lens, in which workplace communication functions as a psychosocial resource that may reduce strain and support adaptive functioning.

From this perspective, burnout reflects a strain-related outcome, whereas psychological safety and contextual performance represent positive relational and behavioural outcomes that may be strengthened when communication is clear, consistent and supportive.

Research design

Approach

This study used a cross-sectional, quantitative survey-based approach to examine the predictive relationships among communication, burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance.

Participants

Participants were full-time employees in the Indian IT sector with:

- At least 1 year of experience in the IT sector.
- Proficiency in English.
- Currently employed in a standard (non-contractual/ freelance) job role.

Eligibility was confirmed through a screening declaration at the beginning of the survey, where participants verified that they were currently employed as IT professionals and consented to participate voluntarily.

Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously to reduce evaluation apprehension and potential response bias.

A total of 344 valid responses were analysed. Respondents represented a range of technical and non-technical roles within the IT sector, including software development, testing, project delivery, human resource and related functions. The sample comprised 70.1% males and was skewed towards mid-career professionals. The demographic skew is elaborated in the limitations section.

Measuring instruments

The survey instrument included items assessing six constructs relevant to the present study related to workplace dynamics in Indian IT organisations: psychological safety, contextual performance, burnout, supervisor support, coworker support and communication. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

The items were developed based on established conceptual definitions from prior literature on psychological safety, contextual performance, workplace communication and social support, and were refined for clarity and contextual relevance to Indian IT workplaces. These items were drawn from a broader doctoral research instrument developed for Indian IT professionals, which was refined through pilot administrations and academic review to strengthen theoretical alignment and contextual fit. This article uses a focused subset of that broader item pool aligned to the current research questions (Kataria & Verma, 2026). Because several predictors were measured using brief two-item subscales, the use of shorter measures reflected a balance between construct coverage and respondent burden in a multi-construct questionnaire. Table 1 presents the constructs measured, number of items and reliability coefficients for each construct.

The constructs were conceptually derived from prior literature on psychological safety, contextual performance, burnout, workplace communication and social support, and the final item set was refined for contextual relevance and brevity. Construct scores were computed as the mean of

TABLE 1: Summary of measurement constructs and reliability.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Representative item focus
Psychological safety	7	0.85	Voice, interpersonal risk-taking, constructive dissent and freedom to express concerns without penalty
Contextual performance	6	0.88	Helping behaviours and discretionary effort beyond formal role requirements
Burnout	2	0.94	Work-related energy depletion and need for recovery after work
Supervisor support	2	0.91	Constructive, actionable supervisory feedback
Coworker support	2	0.87	Coworker approachability, collaboration and support
Communication	2	0.83	Clarity of work-related updates and confusion arising from miscommunication

constituent items. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded prior to computing construct means. Measurement quality was assessed using internal consistency reliability estimates and examination of the expected pattern of correlations among the study variables.

Exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis was not performed because several constructs were measured using short two-item subscales, which limit stable factor extraction and interpretation.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling through professional networks within the Indian information technology sector. The anonymous online survey was disseminated electronically through professional networks, LinkedIn groups and industry mailing lists. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Geographic location and employing organisations were not collected in order to preserve participant anonymity. Information regarding remote or hybrid work arrangements was not captured in the survey instrument.

As a non-probability sampling approach was used, the findings should be interpreted with caution when being generalised to the broader Indian IT workforce.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS. No missing data were observed for the analysed variables because of survey response settings; therefore, the final analytic sample remained at $N = 344$. Composite scores for each construct were computed as the mean of their respective items for all descriptive, correlation and regression analyses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographics and scale distributions. Pearson's correlation was conducted to examine the relationships between communication and outcome variables. Multiple linear regression was used to assess the predictive power of communication relative to other workplace factors (supervisor and coworker support) on burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance. Assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity and normality of residuals were checked and met.

TABLE 2: Gender and experience distribution of participants in the study.

Demographic variable	Category	*n*	%
Gender	Male	241	70.1
	Female	103	29.9
Experience (years)	Less than 2	12	3.5
	2–5	45	13.1
	6–9	80	23.3
	10–14	92	26.7
	15–19	71	20.6
	20+	44	12.8

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the IEC (Institutional Ethics Committee) of Lovely Professional University (No. LPU/IEC-LPU/2025/2/13). This research comes under social behavioural research involving human participants and non-invasive and non-clinical in nature. This study was derived from the data collected as part of master study.

Results

Participant demographics

The final sample included 344 full-time IT professionals representing a range of job roles and experience levels. The distribution by gender and years of experience is presented in Table 2.

Observation: The sample is male-dominated and skewed towards mid-career professionals, with 70.6% having between 6 years and 19 years of experience.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the study variables.

Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine associations amongst the study variables. As shown in Table 3, workplace communication was positively correlated with psychological safety ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$) and contextual performance ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$), and negatively correlated with burnout ($r = -0.49$, $p < 0.01$). Supervisor support and coworker support were also positively associated with psychological safety and contextual performance, while burnout showed negative correlations with the other workplace variables.

TABLE 3: Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations amongst key study variables ($N = 344$).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Communication	3.81	0.69	1	-	-	-	-	-
2. Burnout	2.94	0.84	-0.49**	1	-	-	-	-
3. Supervisor support	3.52	0.72	0.31**	-0.31**	1	-	-	-
4. Coworker support	3.74	0.68	-0.13*	-0.12*	0.49**	1	-	-
5. Psychological safety	3.21	0.78	0.60**	-0.43**	0.39**	0.16**	1	-
6. Contextual performance	3.67	0.82	0.46**	-0.38**	0.40**	0.28**	0.53**	1

SD, standard deviation.

*, $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); **, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Common method bias

To examine potential common method bias arising from self-reported survey data, Harman's single-factor test was conducted using an unrotated principal component factor analysis including all measurement items. The first factor accounted for 36.25% of the total variance, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50%, suggesting that common method variance is unlikely to pose a serious concern in this study.

Regression diagnostics

Prior to regression analysis, diagnostic tests were conducted to examine key statistical assumptions. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics. VIF values ranged from *1.25 to 1.61,* while tolerance values ranged from *0.62 to 0.80*, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. Examination of Cook's distance values showed a maximum value of **0.034**, suggesting that no influential observations were present in the dataset. Residual statistics were also inspected and indicated no serious violations of regression assumptions.

Multiple regression analyses

To assess the predictive impact of communication, three separate multiple linear regression models were developed, each targeting burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance. All models included communication, supervisor support and coworker support as predictor variables.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine whether workplace communication, supervisor support and coworker support predicted burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance.

As shown in Table 4, the regression model predicting burnout was significant, $F(3, 340) = 44.27$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 28% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = 0.28$). Communication emerged as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.48$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of communication were associated with lower burnout. Coworker support also showed a smaller but significant negative association ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.018$), whereas supervisor support was not statistically significant.

In the psychological safety model (Table 5), the overall regression was significant, $F(3, 340) = 85.35$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 43% of the variance in psychological safety ($R^2 = 0.43$). Communication was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$). Both supervisor support ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.018$) and coworker support ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = 0.001$) were also significant positive predictors.

In the contextual performance model (Table 6), the regression model was significant, $F(3, 340) = 58.08$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 34% of the variance in contextual performance ($R^2 = 0.34$). Communication again emerged as a strong positive predictor ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$), followed by coworker support ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Supervisor support showed a smaller but significant association with contextual performance ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.036$).

Summary of results

The key statistical findings are summarised below:

- Communication was significant across all three outcomes.
- Coworker support was significant across all three models, though weaker than communication.
- Supervisor support was significant for psychological safety and contextual performance, but not for burnout.

Discussion

This study examined how workplace communication is associated with three important aspects of employee experience: burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance within the Indian IT sector. The findings indicate that workplace communication showed the largest standardised associations in all three models. Higher levels of communication were associated with lower burnout and higher psychological safety and contextual performance. Although communication showed the strongest associations, both supervisor support and coworker support also demonstrated significant relationships with selected outcomes, highlighting the broader role of workplace support dynamics.

By integrating these diverse outcomes into a unified predictive model, the study advances a more comprehensive understanding of employee well-being in cognitively demanding, fast-paced environments.

TABLE 4: Model 1 – Predicting burnout.

Predictor	*B*	SE *B*	*β*	*t*	*p*-value
Constant	6.17	0.33	-	19.00	< 0.001
Communication	-0.58	0.06	-0.48	-9.33	< 0.001
Supervisor support	-0.11	0.07	-0.09	-1.60	0.111
Coworker support	-0.16	0.07	-0.13	-2.38	0.018

Note: $R^2 = 0.28$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.28$, $F(3, 340) = 44.27$, $p < 0.001$.
SE, standard error.

TABLE 5: Model 2 – Predicting psychological safety.

Predictor	*B*	SE *B*	*β*	*t*	*p*-value
Constant	-0.52	0.27	-	-1.94	0.053
Communication	0.66	0.05	.59	12.80	< 0.001
Supervisor support	0.13	0.06	0.12	2.39	0.018
Coworker support	0.20	0.06	0.17	3.42	0.001

Note: $R^2 = 0.43$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.43$, $F(3, 340) = 85.35$, $p < 0.001$.
SE, standard error.

TABLE 6: Model 3 – Predicting contextual performance.

Predictor	*B*	SE *B*	*β*	*t*	*p*-value
Constant	-0.16	0.30	-	-0.52	0.602
Communication	0.55	0.06	0.46	9.34	< 0.001
Supervisor support	0.13	0.06	0.12	2.10	0.036
Coworker support	0.34	0.07	0.28	5.25	< 0.001

Note: $R^2 = 0.34$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.33$, $F(3, 340) = 58.08$, $p < 0.001$.
SE, standard error.

Burnout, typically caused by prolonged job stress, often manifests as emotional exhaustion, detachment and a drop in one's sense of effectiveness (Maslach et al., 2001). Traditional approaches to mitigating burnout have largely focused on reducing workload, enhancing wellness offerings or improving manager–employee interactions (Khammissa et al., 2022; Leiter & Maslach, 2003). However, this study highlights psychosocial workplace dynamics particularly interpersonal interactions and environmental clarity as central to how employees interpret stressors, seek assistance and navigate complex work situations.

The significant negative association between communication and burnout ($\beta = -0.48$) reinforces prior research showing that unclear, inconsistent or feedback-poor communication can heighten stress and emotional fatigue (Sonnentag & Frese, 2012; Tourish & Robson, 2006). In contrast, clear, frequent and empathetic communication helps create predictability and emotional stability, thereby reducing workplace stress (Bakker et al., 2005; Heames & Harvey, 2006). These findings point to the importance of structural and relational aspects of the work environment not just managerial behaviour in moderating burnout outcomes. Coworker support also showed a smaller but significant protective association with burnout ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.018$), indicating that peer-level support may reduce strain alongside clearer communication.

One possible explanation for the smaller effect size of supervisor support in the present study is the nature of work in Indian IT environments, where employees often operate within matrixed structures, distributed teams and fast-moving delivery contexts. In such settings, everyday communication climate may be more proximal to employee experience than formal supervisory relationships alone. Employees may derive clarity, feedback and coordination from multiple channels rather than relying primarily on direct managerial support.

Interestingly, the data challenge a common assumption that supervisors are the key buffers against burnout.

In our regression model, supervisor support had no significant effect, while communication, regardless of authority or position, showed a strong negative association with burnout. This pattern suggests that, in this sample, day-to-day communication climate may be more proximal to burnout experiences than perceived supervisory support alone. This finding should be interpreted as a relative difference in association strength rather than as evidence that supervisory support is unimportant in general.

Psychological safety, defined as the belief that one can speak up without fear of judgement or retaliation (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), is essential for promoting innovation, learning and team collaboration especially in fast-paced organisations. In this study, communication showed the strongest positive associations with psychological safety. However, both supervisor support and coworker support also showed significant positive associations with psychological safety, indicating that supportive leadership and collaborative peer relationships may jointly contribute to environments where employees feel comfortable speaking up.

This finding supports Edmondson's foundational work, which emphasised that mutual respect and open dialogue are essential for fostering psychological safety. Further, Frazier et al. (2016) demonstrated that inclusive communication practices are central to cultivating this environment, and that team climate plays a moderating role. In our results, supervisor support had only a marginal effect, reinforcing the idea that psychological safety is more a function of environmental and team-level norms than of individual leadership characteristics.

Our findings also align with Men (2014), who showed that employee satisfaction and trust are higher in organisations that encourage transparency, feedback and employee voice through strong internal communication systems. Importantly, this study positions psychological safety not merely as an intermediate outcome but as a key enabler of both well-being and performance-related behaviours.

Contextual performance defined as discretionary behaviours that contribute to a positive work environment, such as helping colleagues or volunteering for projects is increasingly valued in dynamic, knowledge-driven industries (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). In our model, communication again emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.456$), followed by coworker support. Supervisor support also showed a smaller but significant association with contextual performance ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.036$), although its contribution was smaller than that of communication.

These results support prior research by Borman and Motowidlo (1997) and Halbesleben (2006), which found that contextual performance is more likely to thrive in environments that foster trust and psychological safety.

Our findings extend this literature by demonstrating that psychological well-being and contextual performance are not mutually exclusive domains – they are mutually reinforcing, and shaped by shared environmental cues such as clarity, responsiveness and team cohesion.

Coworker support had a smaller but still meaningful effect on contextual performance, suggesting that while peer relationships are important, they function best within a broader communication environment that supports collaboration and mutual respect.

Theoretical contribution

This study makes several key contributions to organisational behaviour literature:

- It integrates burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance, three often isolated constructs into a single predictive framework, offering a more holistic model of employee well-being.

- It empirically demonstrates that communication quality significantly predicts these outcomes, even when accounting for other interpersonal support factors.
- It positions communication not as a proxy for managerial behaviour or support systems, but as a standalone psychosocial resource that is significantly associated with key workplace outcomes. This reframing enables researchers and practitioners to view communication as a first-order variable deserving of direct attention, rather than a secondary or embedded process.
- It suggests the value of complementing supervisor-led interventions with a more distributed, environment-centred view of workplace resilience.
- The findings are broadly consistent with a JD-R interpretation in which communication operates as a psychosocial resource linked to lower strain and stronger positive workplace outcomes.

These insights extend existing theory by placing communication at the heart of models for workplace resilience and engagement, particularly in high-pressure, cognitively intensive industries such as information technology.

Practical implications

The findings offer actionable strategies for human resource (HR) professionals, team leaders and organisational decision-makers:

- Establish short-cycle communication pulse checks.
- Define feedback-loop closure norms.
- Build team-level communication routines for hybrid/project work.

Examples include setting expectations for response turnaround, explicitly closing feedback loops on raised concerns and creating regular project-level check-ins for clarification and issue escalation.

By strengthening these practices, organisations can not only reduce burnout, but also foster greater engagement, innovation and discretionary effort across teams. More broadly, the results highlight how workplace design both structural and social can shape employee behaviour and health in lasting ways.

Future research

Firstly, longitudinal designs are needed to test temporal ordering amongst communication, burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance. Secondly, multi-source data, including supervisor or peer ratings, would help reduce single-source bias. Thirdly, intervention-based studies could examine whether communication-focused practices improve employee well-being and extra-role performance over time. Fourthly, replication across industries and cultural contexts would clarify the boundary conditions of the present findings.

Limitations

Despite its strengths, this study has a few limitations:

- *Sampling method:* Purposive and snowball sampling was used; therefore, the findings may not generalise to the broader Indian IT workforce.
- *Unmeasured context variables:* Work arrangement (remote/hybrid/on-site) and geographic region were not captured, which limits interpretation of how context may shape communication and support dynamics.
- *Sample bias:* The sample was male-dominated and skewed towards mid-career professionals, with 70.6% having between 6 years and 19 years of experience. Future studies should include more balanced samples to explore gender and experience-based differences in communication perceptions.
- *Cross-sectional design:* The study's design prevents causal inference. Longitudinal or experimental designs could better capture dynamic changes in burnout and psychological safety over time.
- *Self-report and common method bias:* All variables were measured using self-reported survey responses, which may introduce common method variance and social desirability bias. Although anonymity was maintained and Harman's single-factor test suggested that common method variance was unlikely to be a serious concern, such bias cannot be ruled out completely.
- *Measurement comparability:* The measures were drawn from a thesis-based, pilot-refined instrument tailored to Indian IT contexts; therefore, direct comparability with studies using standardised international scale batteries may be limited.
- *Sector specificity:* Because the study focused on the Indian IT sector, the findings may not generalise to industries with different job structures or organisational cultures.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence of strong associations between workplace communication and burnout, psychological safety and contextual performance in the Indian IT sector. Across the three models, communication showed the strongest statistical associations, although supervisor and coworker support also contributed to selected outcomes.

By treating communication as an independent predictor rather than a derivative of leadership or formal support structures, this study contributes to a conceptual shift in how organisations and researchers approach employee well-being. Communication emerges not only as a medium of support, but also as a distinct workplace condition that structures how employees interpret their environment, access help and engage with their work.

For organisations aiming to foster sustainable performance and healthy work environments, the findings suggest that employee well-being should be treated as a strategic priority embedded within day-to-day processes, norms and culture

not merely as an outcome of leadership style or policy directives.

Recognising communication as a core, standalone predictor allows for more targeted interventions that enhance clarity, openness and trust factors that are especially vital in fast-paced, cognitively demanding sectors like Indian IT.

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Competing interests

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CRediT authorship contribution

Anand Kataria: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualisation and Writing – original draft. Manish K. Verma: Methodology, Resources, Supervision and Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Anand Kataria.

Disclaimer

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