

Finnish Cultural Foundation  
South Karelia



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# INTERGROUP SAFETY CLIMATE

A MISSING CONSTRUCT FOR STUDYING DIGITALIZED WORK COMMUNITIES?

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# Psychosocial Safety

## PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY CLIMATE (Dollard & Bakker, 2010)

- A perceived organizational atmosphere where health and safety take precedence over results
- Organizational management perspective on well-being at work and social costs

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990)

- A shared team norm where you don't have to be afraid of bringing things up and being humiliated
- A group dynamic perspective on team performance and innovation

## SOCIAL SAFETY THEORY (Slavich, 2020; 2023)

- To build and maintain positive social bonds with others is a basic need
- Physiological, biological and evolutionary perspectives

# Digitalization & Psychosocial Safety

1. What are the threats & benefits of digital environments for psychosocial safety at work?
2. What factors influence psychosocial safety of digitalized workplaces?
3. How does the psychosocial safety differ within-between individuals and groups?

# Digitalization & Psychosocial Safety

## A Systematic Literature Review

### METHOD

- Pre-registration: Open Science Framework (OSF)
- Criteria formation: PICO & SPIDER frameworks
- Databases: Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO
- Time range: 2006–2024
- Number of records reviewed: 1,027
- Final sample of studies:  $N = 103$
- Final round inter-rater agreement : Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.85$
- Analysis: descriptive statistics, content analysis

# Digital Work Environments

- Can be harnessed to promote diversity, inclusion & belongingness.
- Feelings of distance in meetings and between onsite–remote workers.

→ **Digitalization: partly mixed effects on psychosocial safety**

- Negotiation of new rules, time, and effort invested in digital interaction norms.

→ **Safe digital work environments need active regulation**

# Digitalization: Individuals & Groups

- **Intrapersonal psychosocial safety.**  
More benefits: support for individual needs & vulnerabilities.      **↑ less exposure, more comfort**
- **Interpersonal psychosocial safety.**  
Vulnerable to changes in interaction: loss of nonverbal cues, mixed interpretations.      **↓ communication disruptions**
- **Intragroup psychosocial safety.**  
Limited interaction weakens group dynamics & relationships.      **↓ less interaction, slow trust-building**
- **Intergroup psychosocial safety.**  
Dispersion between workers erodes sense of safety and equality.      **↓ remote–onsite divides, mixed safety**

# Intergroup Dynamics in Digital Work

## A paradox: An insight from our review on digital environments

- Disadvantaged individuals can feel safer in digital settings
- Yet inequalities & intergroup tensions may persist while becoming less visible

→ Improved safety, or hidden problems in inequality and intergroup safety?

# Intergroup Dynamics in Digital Work

Digitalization & intergroup dynamics at work – Insights from our review:

1. **Unequal participation.** Some individuals speak more, but not all subgroups benefit equally.
2. **Misinterpretation.** Reduced cues: Finding a shared language across professions & status groups.
3. **Subgroup formation.** Core vs. peripheral division leads to multiple safety climates inside one team.
4. **Structural inequality.** Tech skills & access can impact who dominates and who withdraws.
5. **Relationship-building.** Trust forms within subgroups faster than between them.
6. **Climate Implications.** Shared safety can remain unchanged even when some individuals feel safer.

# Intergroup Dynamics in Digital Work

Can digitalization create uneven safety across subgroups?

- If communication and trust become stratified and not shared across groups
- If participation appears broader while selectively distributed
- If individual safety increases while collective inequality persists

**→ Digital environments redistribute safety across groups rather than uniformly increasing it.**

# Intergroup Dynamics in Digital Work

## Evidence & theorization for psychosocial safety: From digitalization lens

- Strongest for intragroup dynamics
- Understudied for intergroup dynamics – preliminary insights suggests mixed results

→ **Is Intergroup Safety Climate a missing construct for studying digitalized work communities?**

# Intergroup Psychosocial Safety?

Currently addressed well:

## SAFETY FRAMEWORKS

- Health & learning outcomes
- Detecting feelings of safety
- Intragroup aspect

## INTERGROUP THREAT

- Individual anxiety in intergroup relations  
(Stephan & Stephan, 2013)



More attention is needed:

## SAFETY FRAMEWORKS

- Social conflict outcomes (e.g., harassment)
- Detecting safety-enabling conditions
- Intergroup theorization & operationalization

## INTERGROUP SAFETY

- Conditions for collective intergroup safety

# Intergroup Psychosocial Safety?

## CONDITIONS

Enforced norms, policies,  
and structural support for  
*threatening-safe*  
**intergroup** relations



## PERCEPTIONS

*Threatening-safe* climate of  
shared beliefs & feelings on  
**intergroup** relations

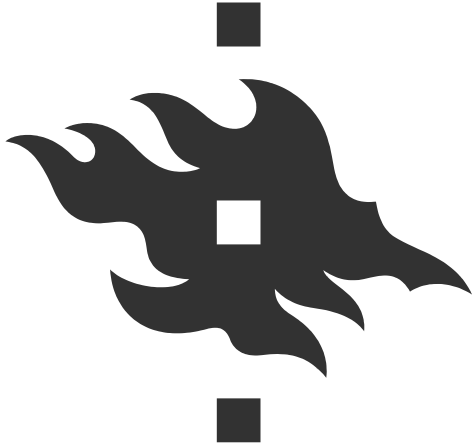


## OUTCOMES

Social conflict outcomes of  
*threatening-safe*  
**intergroup** relations (e.g.,  
harassment, bullying)

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# THANK YOU!

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