

Adaptive Communication, Ostracism, and Psychological Safety

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Abstract

Contemporary workplaces are increasingly characterized by complex interpersonal dynamics that expose employees to subtle forms of social risk in everyday interactions. Within human resource management research, psychological safety has been widely recognized as a critical condition for employee voice, learning, and performance. However, existing studies have largely emphasized leadership and structural determinants, with limited attention to how individual adaptive behavior operates within ongoing communication processes. This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing social chameleon behavior as an adaptive communication strategy used by employees to navigate workplace interactions, while positioning workplace ostracism as a mediating mechanism linking individual behavior to psychological safety. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a structured survey and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that adaptive behavior does not exert a direct effect on psychological safety. However, it significantly reduces workplace ostracism, which in turn has a strong negative impact on psychological safety. These results suggest that the influence of individual adaptability operates indirectly through informal dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. By integrating perspectives from organizational communication and human resource management, this study highlights the role of interaction processes in shaping psychological safety and offers practical insights for developing more inclusive and supportive workplace environments.

Keywords: *Adaptive Communication; Workplace Ostracism; Psychological Safety; Interpersonal Communication; Human Resource Management*

1. Introduction

The growing complexity of contemporary workplaces has placed increasing emphasis on the role of communication in shaping organizational outcomes, particularly in relation to non-technical risks that emerge through everyday interpersonal interactions (Di Tecco et al., 2023; Griep et al., 2025). Organizations are not merely structured systems of roles and responsibilities; they are also communicative environments in which patterns of interaction influence how individuals share ideas, raise concerns, and respond to uncertainty. Within such environments, psychological safety can be understood as a crucial communication climate that enables individuals to speak up and engage in learning-oriented exchanges without fear of negative interpersonal consequences (Nguyen, 2021; Zajac et al., 2025).

Contemporary organizational settings are marked by heightened social awareness, increasing performance demands, and often ambiguous behavioral expectations (Mañas et al., 2017; Akkerman et al., 2021). In such contexts, communication becomes a dynamic arena in which inclusion and exclusion are continuously negotiated, and individuals must manage potential interpersonal risks. To navigate these conditions, employees often rely on adaptive interpersonal strategies, one of which is social chameleon behavior, characterized by a heightened capacity for self-monitoring and behavioral adjustment across situations (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014).

From a communication risk perspective, organizational breakdowns are often preceded not by technical failures but by disruptions in communication processes, including silence and the suppression of dissenting views (Wen et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2022). When employees perceive their environment as socially threatening, they may withdraw from interaction or withhold critical information, thereby generating latent organizational risks (Saik et al., 2024). However, while such risks are widely acknowledged, the role of individual adaptive behavior in shaping communication-based social risk remains insufficiently examined.

Although psychological safety has received considerable attention, prior research has largely focused on structural antecedents such as leadership, team dynamics, and organizational culture (Ip et al., 2025; Newman et al., 2017). Similarly, workplace ostracism has typically been examined as either an outcome of negative experiences or a predictor of employee well-being (Li et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). From an organizational communication perspective, however, workplace ostracism may be more appropriately understood as a form of communicative exclusion. Despite this, limited research has positioned

workplace ostracism as a mediating communication mechanism linking individual behavior to psychological safety, thereby leaving a critical gap in understanding how social risks are reproduced through routine communication processes.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines social chameleon behavior as an individual-level communication strategy and investigates workplace ostracism as a mediating mechanism shaping psychological safety. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the relationships among social chameleon behavior, workplace ostracism, and psychological safety within a unified framework. By conceptualizing psychological safety as an outcome of communication processes rather than solely structural conditions, this study contributes by integrating self-monitoring behavior, social risk mechanisms, and psychological safety within a mediation model.

Beyond structural and behavioral explanations, this study adopts a communication-centered perspective by positioning workplace dynamics as fundamentally interactional. In this view, organizational life is continuously produced through everyday communication processes, where inclusion, exclusion, and social evaluation are negotiated in real time. Psychological safety is therefore not merely an organizational condition, but a communicative climate shaped by patterns of interaction. Within this framework, social chameleon behavior can be understood as a form of adaptive communication strategy, while workplace ostracism represents a subtle yet powerful form of communicative exclusion. By shifting the focus from static organizational factors to dynamic interaction processes, this study contributes to interdisciplinary communication research that examines how micro-level communicative behaviors shape broader organizational outcomes.

Grand Theory

Self-Monitoring Theory and Social Chameleon Behavior

Self-Monitoring Theory explains how individuals differ in their ability to observe, regulate, and adjust their behavior in response to social cues (Cui et al., 2021). Individuals with high self-monitoring tendencies are particularly attuned to social expectations, enabling them to modify their attitudes, expressions, and actions in ways that are appropriate to specific situations (Pillow et al., 2017). In organizational settings, this tendency is reflected in social chameleon behavior, which represents an adaptive response to social uncertainty and perceived interpersonal risk ((Ruiz-Palomino & Bañón-Gomis, 2017; Lei et al., 2025).

Social Risk Theory and Workplace Ostracism

Social Risk Theory highlights the uncertainty and potential negative consequences inherent in social interactions (Slavich, 2020; Slavich, 2022). Within organizational contexts, workplace ostracism represents a key manifestation of such risk, referring to situations in which individuals feel excluded from workplace interactions (Sharma & Dhar, 2024). From a communication perspective, ostracism operates as a form of exclusion from interactional processes, influencing both direct targets and observers (Brison et al., 2025).

Psychological Safety as a Communication Climate

Psychological Safety Theory refers to a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Nguyen, 2021). It enables employees to express ideas and challenge practices without fear of negative consequences (Zajac et al., 2025). Low levels of psychological safety indicate the presence of unaddressed social risk, which inhibits open communication (Slavich et al., 2023).

Integrating the Framework

Integrating these perspectives suggests that social chameleon behavior functions as an adaptive strategy for managing social risk, workplace ostracism operates as a communication-based exclusion mechanism, and psychological safety emerges as a collective outcome shaped by interaction dynamics. This integration provides a conceptual basis for examining how individual behavioral adaptation influences psychological safety through the mediating role of workplace ostracism.

From an organizational communication perspective, the relationships among social chameleon behavior, workplace ostracism, and psychological safety can be interpreted as part of a broader interactional system. Rather than viewing behavior solely as an individual trait, communication scholarship emphasizes how meaning is constructed through ongoing interaction, where signals of acceptance or exclusion are conveyed implicitly. Workplace ostracism, in this sense, operates not only as a social condition but as a communicative act that limits participation in interaction processes. Consequently, psychological safety emerges as a collective perception shaped by repeated communicative experiences rather than isolated behavioral events. This perspective reinforces the importance of examining how adaptive communication strategies influence inclusion and exclusion dynamics within organizational settings.

Hypothesis Development

Self-Monitoring Theory suggests that individuals continuously interpret social cues and adjust their behavior accordingly (Ickes et al., 2006). Employees who display high levels of social chameleon behavior are more capable of aligning their actions with situational expectations, thereby reducing interpersonal friction. Such alignment can create a more predictable and less threatening interaction environment, which enhances perceptions of psychological safety (C. Wang & Ning, 2024; Bujang et al., 2024).

H1: Social chameleon behavior is positively associated with psychological safety.

Individuals with strong self-monitoring tendencies are also less likely to deviate from social norms, reducing the likelihood of negative social evaluation (Snyder, 1979). As workplace ostracism often functions as an informal sanction for norm deviation, adaptive behavior can serve as a protective mechanism that lowers the risk of exclusion (Kennedy, 2024; Y. Wang & Lai, 2023).

H2: Social chameleon behavior is negatively associated with workplace ostracism.

Workplace ostracism signals uncertainty in social inclusion and increases perceived interpersonal risk (Z. Li & Li, 2025). As a result, individuals may become reluctant to express ideas or engage in open communication, leading to reduced psychological safety (Thau et al., 2015).

H3: Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with psychological safety.

Taken together, prior research suggests that adaptive interpersonal behavior influences exposure to exclusionary dynamics, which in turn shapes psychological safety (Sacino et al., 2024; Mlika et al., 2017). This indicates that workplace ostracism functions as a key mediating mechanism linking individual behavior to collective psychological outcomes.

H4: Workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between social chameleon behavior and psychological safety.

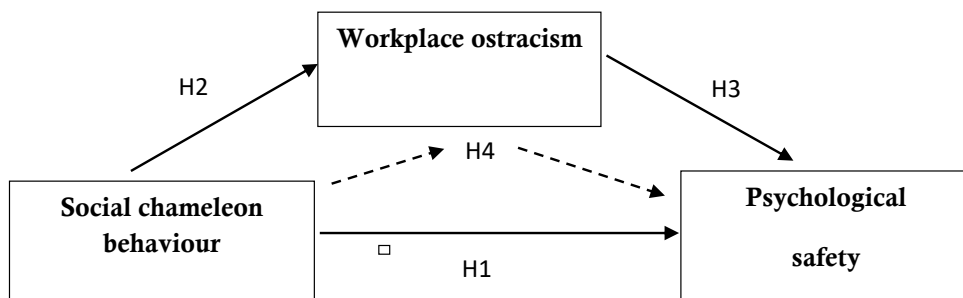


Figure 1. Hypothesis Structure

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework proposed in this study. The model positions social chameleon behavior as an individual-level adaptive strategy through which employees manage social risk within workplace interactions. This behavior is expected to influence psychological safety both directly and indirectly. The indirect pathway operates through workplace ostracism, which is conceptualized as a communication-based form of social risk reflecting informal exclusionary dynamics within organizational interactions. More specifically, social chameleon behavior is expected to reduce individuals' exposure to workplace ostracism, which in turn fosters psychological safety by lowering perceived interpersonal risk. By bringing together individual adaptive behavior, social risk mechanisms, and psychological safety outcomes, the framework illustrates how micro-level interaction strategies shape the broader communication climate within organizations.

2. Method

This study was conducted in Bali Province, Indonesia, involving employees working in organizational settings where interpersonal interaction, collaboration, and communication form an integral part of everyday work activities. Bali was selected due to its labor-intensive economic structure dominated by service-based sectors such as tourism, hospitality, education, and the creative industries, which require frequent interpersonal engagement. Rather than assuming inherent cultural characteristics, this study positions Bali as a context characterized by high interaction intensity, making it suitable for examining communication-related social risk, workplace ostracism, and psychological safety.

A quantitative research design was adopted using primary data collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire. This approach is appropriate for capturing employees' subjective perceptions of interpersonal behavior, experiences of exclusion, and psychological safety, which are inherently perceptual and socially constructed. The study employed purposive sampling, with respondents selected based on three criteria: (1) currently employed in an organization or institution, (2) having a minimum of one year of work experience, and (3) regularly engaging in workplace communication with supervisors, colleagues, or teams. Data were collected through online and offline distribution channels, including professional networks and workplace contacts. A total of 200 valid responses were obtained. The response rate and recruitment process were monitored to minimize sampling bias, although

the limitations of purposive sampling are acknowledged. To provide a clearer overview of the research procedure, the overall research flow, from problem identification to conclusion, is illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Research Flow Diagram

As shown in Figure 2, the study follows a systematic process beginning with problem identification, followed by theoretical development, data collection, and PLS-SEM analysis, leading to the final conclusions. To ensure an adequate sample size, this study complements the traditional PLS-SEM guideline with a more robust justification. While the minimum sample size exceeds the recommended threshold based on the maximum number of structural paths directed at a construct Hair (2021) A statistical power analysis approach was also considered to ensure sufficient explanatory power.

Measurement instruments were adapted from established empirical studies to ensure content validity. Social chameleon behavior was measured using items reflecting individuals' tendency to monitor and adjust behavior in response to social cues. Workplace ostracism was measured through items capturing perceived exclusion, being ignored, and marginalization. Psychological safety was measured using items assessing the extent to which employees feel safe to express ideas and take interpersonal risks. All items were adapted from validated scales, and the questionnaire was pre-tested through a pilot study involving a small group of respondents to ensure clarity and contextual relevance.

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale was selected as it provides sufficient sensitivity while remaining cognitively manageable for respondents, particularly in survey-based organizational research involving perceptual constructs. To address potential common method bias (CMB), Harman's single-factor test was conducted, and the results indicated that no single factor accounted for the majority of variance, suggesting that CMB is not a serious concern. Procedural remedies, including anonymity assurance and careful item wording, were also applied to reduce bias.

Prior to analysis, data screening procedures were conducted, including checks for incomplete responses, outliers, and missing data. Cases with substantial missing values were excluded, and no significant outliers were detected. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4.0. This method was selected due to its suitability for analyzing complex models with mediation effects and its robustness in handling non-normal data. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated based on internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesized relationships.

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to assess the significance of path coefficients, ensuring stable parameter estimates. The analysis also considered relevant control variables, including demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and work experience, to account for potential confounding effects. Overall, the methodological approach integrates established practices in organizational behavior and communication research while incorporating additional procedures to enhance validity, reliability, and transparency. By combining individual behavioral constructs with a social risk mechanism within a PLS-SEM framework, this study provides a rigorous empirical basis for examining how communication dynamics shape psychological safety in organizational contexts.

3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	59
	Female	82	41
	Total	200	100
Age (years)	18–25	41	20.5
	26–35	78	39
	36–45	51	25.5
	>45	30	15
	Total	200	100
Education Level	High School	49	24.5
	Diploma	61	30.5
	Bachelor’s Degree	69	34.5
	Master’s Degree	21	10.5
	Total	200	100
Work Experience	1–3 years	46	23
	4–6 years	64	32
	7–10 years	51	25.5
	>10 years	39	19.5
	Total	200	100
Employment Sector	Hospitality & Tourism	74	37
	Education & Training	41	20.5

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Creative Industries	39	19.5
	Services & Others	46	23
	Total	200	100

The descriptive profile of respondents presented in Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the sample. Male respondents account for 59.0% of the sample, while female respondents represent 41.0%, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents falls within the 26–35 year group (39.0%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (25.5%), 18–25 years (20.5%), and over 45 years (15.0%). Regarding educational background, respondents are distributed across several levels, with bachelor’s degree holders comprising the largest group (34.5%), followed by diploma (30.5%), high school (24.5%), and master’s degree (10.5%).

With respect to work experience, 32.0% of respondents report having 4–6 years of experience, 25.5% have 7–10 years, 23.0% have 1–3 years, and 19.5% have more than 10 years of experience. In terms of the employment sector, the sample includes respondents from hospitality and tourism (37.0%), education and training (20.5%), creative industries (19.5%), and other service-related sectors (23.0%). Overall, the descriptive statistics provide an overview of the respondent characteristics without implying causal or inferential relationships, ensuring that interpretation is reserved for subsequent analytical sections.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Psychological safety	0.794	0.917	0.857	0.579
Social chameleon behavior	0.929	0.944	0.947	0.781
Workplace ostracism	0.797	0.859	0.821	0.535

The reliability and validity assessment presented in Table 2 indicates that all constructs meet the minimum recommended psychometric thresholds. Cronbach’s alpha values for psychological safety (0.794),

social chameleon behaviour (0.929), and workplace ostracism (0.797) all exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency among the measurement items. Composite reliability, assessed using both rho_a and rho_c, also exceeds the recommended cut-off value of 0.70 for all constructs, suggesting acceptable reliability. Social chameleon behaviour reports particularly high composite reliability (rho_c = 0.947), indicating strong internal consistency among its indicators. However, it is noted that for psychological safety, the rho_a value (0.917) exceeds rho_c (0.857), which is relatively uncommon and may reflect minor estimation differences in PLS-SEM calculations rather than a substantive measurement issue.

Convergent validity is evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs report AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the indicators explain a sufficient proportion of variance in their respective constructs. Psychological safety (AVE = 0.579) and social chameleon behavior (AVE = 0.781) demonstrate satisfactory levels of convergent validity, while workplace ostracism (AVE = 0.535) is slightly above the threshold, suggesting acceptable but relatively modest convergent validity that should be interpreted with caution. Overall, the measurement model demonstrates acceptable levels of reliability and convergent validity, providing an adequate basis for further structural model analysis. Nevertheless, additional assessments such as discriminant validity are required to fully establish construct distinctiveness.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Construct	SCB	WO	PS
Social Chameleon Behavior (SCB)	-		
Workplace Ostracism (WO)	0.41	-	
Psychological Safety (PS)	0.38	0.72	-

The discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). As presented in Table X, all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the constructs. Specifically, the HTMT value between social chameleon behavior and workplace ostracism is 0.41, while the value between social chameleon behavior and psychological safety is 0.38, suggesting that these constructs are empirically distinct despite being conceptually related. The highest HTMT value is observed between workplace ostracism and psychological

safety (0.72), which remains within acceptable limits, indicating that although these constructs are closely related, they capture different underlying phenomena. Overall, these results confirm that each construct demonstrates adequate discriminant validity, supporting the distinctiveness of social chameleon behavior, workplace ostracism, and psychological safety within the structural model.

Table 4. Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Modeling

Parameter	Value	Description
SRMR (Saturated Model)	0.072	Good model fit (value < 0.08)
SRMR (Estimated Model)	0.076	Good model fit
f² (Social Chameleon Behaviour → Psychological Safety)	0.002	Negligible effect
f² (Social Chameleon Behaviour → Workplace Ostracism)	0.12	Small to medium effect
f² (Workplace Ostracism → Psychological Safety)	0.55	Large effect
Q² (Workplace Ostracism)	0.18	Predictive relevance (> 0)
Q² (Psychological Safety)	0.42	Strong predictive relevance (> 0)
R² (Workplace Ostracism)	0.089	Weak explanatory power
R² (Psychological Safety)	0.563	Moderate explanatory power

The structural model assessment from Table 4 indicates that the model demonstrates an acceptable level of fit and predictive capability. The SRMR values for both the saturated (0.072) and estimated model (0.076) fall below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good model fit. The coefficient of determination (R²) shows that social chameleon behavior explains a modest proportion of variance in workplace ostracism (R² = 0.089), while the combined effects of social chameleon behavior and workplace ostracism explain a substantial proportion of variance in psychological safety (R² = 0.563).

The effect size (f²) results further highlight that workplace ostracism has a strong effect on psychological safety (f² = 0.55), whereas the direct effect of social chameleon behavior on psychological safety is negligible (f² = 0.002). Social chameleon behavior exhibits a small to moderate

effect on workplace ostracism ($f^2 = 0.12$). In addition, the predictive relevance (Q^2) values for workplace ostracism (0.18) and psychological safety (0.42) are above zero, indicating that the model has satisfactory predictive capability.

3.1 Hypothesis Test

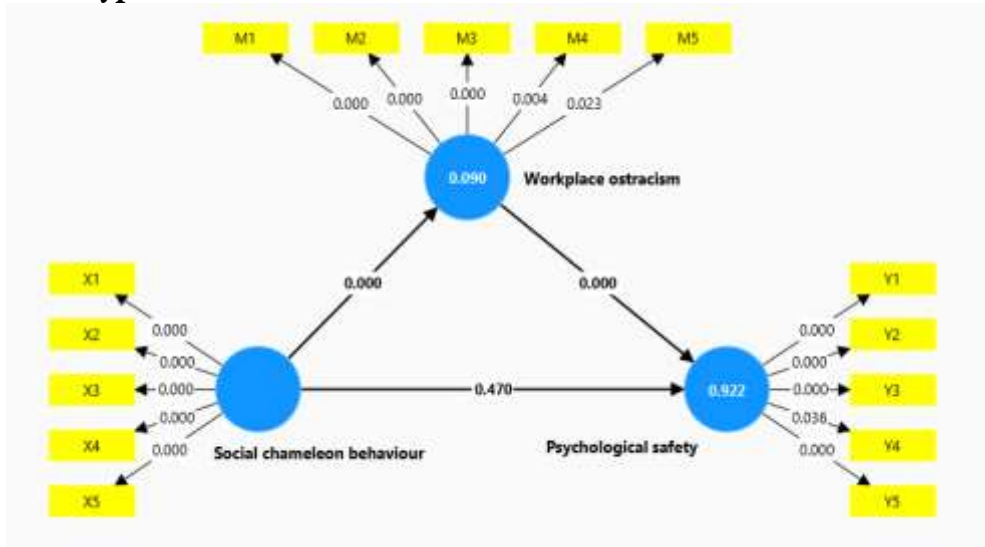


Figure 3. Hypothesis Structure

Table 5. Regression Weight Structural Equational Model

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Social chameleon behavior -> Psychological safety	0.031	0.033	0.044	0.705	0.470
Social chameleon behavior -> Workplace ostracism	-0.298	-0.304	0.091	3.274	0.000
Workplace ostracism -> Psychological safety	-0.742	-0.748	0.087	8.529	0.000

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
safety Social chameleon behavior -> Workplace ostracism -> Psychological safety	0.221	0.228	0.071	3.113	0.001

The structural model results, as presented in Figure 3 and Table 5, provide empirical evidence of the relationships among the study variables. The direct relationship between social chameleon behavior and psychological safety is positive but not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.031$; $p = 0.470$). This indicates that behavioral adaptation alone is not associated with a statistically meaningful increase in perceived psychological safety.

In contrast, social chameleon behavior exhibits a significant negative relationship with workplace ostracism ($\beta = -0.298$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that employees who align their behavior with social expectations are less likely to experience exclusion in workplace interactions. Workplace ostracism demonstrates a strong and negative association with psychological safety ($\beta = -0.742$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that higher levels of perceived exclusion are associated with lower levels of psychological safety.

The mediation analysis shows that the indirect effect of social chameleon behavior on psychological safety through workplace ostracism is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.221$; $p = 0.001$). This indicates the presence of a significant mediation effect. Overall, these results suggest that the relationship between social chameleon behavior and psychological safety operates indirectly through workplace ostracism. To enhance the clarity of the relationships among key constructs, the findings are visually summarised in Figure 4, illustrating both the direct and indirect pathways linking social chameleon behavior, workplace ostracism, and psychological safety.

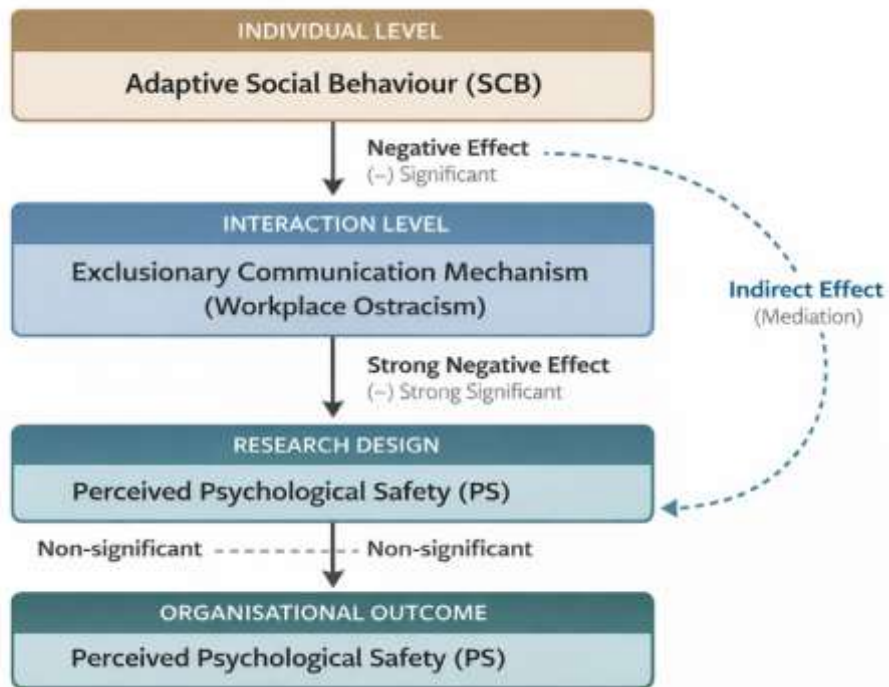


Figure 4. Conceptual Relationship Among Key Constructs and Mediation Mechanism

As illustrated in Figure 4, social chameleon behavior does not directly enhance psychological safety, but operates indirectly through workplace ostracism. This indicates that adaptive behavior primarily reduces exposure to exclusion, which in turn shapes perceptions of psychological safety. To further contextualize the findings, Table 6 presents a comparison between the results of this study and prior empirical research. This comparison highlights areas of consistency, conceptual differences, and theoretical contributions, particularly in explaining how social chameleon behavior relates to psychological safety through the mechanism of workplace ostracism.

Table 6. Comparison of Findings with Prior Studies

Relationship / Variable	This Study Finding	Prior Studies	Consistency	Explanation of Differences
Social Chameleon Behavior →	Positive but not significant	Generally positive for social integration	Conceptually different outcome	Prior studies focus on social acceptance and

Relationship / Variable	This Study Finding	Prior Studies	Consistency	Explanation of Differences
Psychological Safety		and interpersonal outcomes, but limited evidence specifically on psychological safety		performance rather than psychological safety, which involves a bigger interpersonal risk. Differences may also arise from cross-sectional design and cultural context (Bali).
Social Chameleon Behavior → Workplace Ostracism	Negative and significant	Negative relationship supported (self-monitoring reduces social rejection)	Consistent	Adaptive behavior aligns with social expectations, reducing perceived deviance and risk of exclusion. Strongly supported by social interaction literature.
Workplace Ostracism → Psychological Safety	Strongly negative and significant	Strong negative relationship widely supported (e.g., Edmondson, 2018; Henriksen &	Highly consistent	The effect of exclusion on psychological safety is robust across contexts due to its universal psychological impact.

Relationship / Variable	This Study Finding	Prior Studies	Consistency	Explanation of Differences
Indirect Effect (SCB → WO → PS)	Positive and significant (full mediation)	Dayton, 2006) Limited empirical evidence explicitly testing ostracism as a mediation mechanism	Novel contribution	This study extends the literature by identifying workplace ostracism as a key mediating communication mechanism linking adaptive behavior and psychological safety.

As shown in Table 6, several relationships are consistent with prior literature, particularly the strong negative effect of workplace ostracism on psychological safety. However, the non-significant direct relationship between social chameleon behavior and psychological safety reflects a conceptual distinction, as prior studies have predominantly focused on social acceptance and interpersonal outcomes rather than psychological safety as a deeper form of interpersonal risk perception. This suggests that the observed differences are not necessarily contradictory, but arise from variations in outcome conceptualization, research design, and cultural context. Importantly, the findings also highlight a key theoretical contribution by demonstrating that the influence of social chameleon behavior operates indirectly through workplace ostracism, a mediating mechanism that has received limited explicit attention in prior research.

4. Discussion

This study set out to examine how individual adaptive behavior operates as a strategy for managing social risk in contemporary organizations, and how this behavior relates to psychological safety through the mechanism of workplace ostracism. The findings offer several insights that extend existing literature in human resource management, organizational behavior, and organizational communication. First, the results indicate that the direct relationship

between social chameleon behavior and psychological safety is positive but not statistically significant. While employees who adapt their behavior to align with social expectations may report slightly higher levels of perceived safety, such adaptability alone does not appear sufficient to cultivate a genuinely open communication environment. In line with Self-Monitoring Theory (Snyder, 1979), individuals high in self-monitoring are adept at interpreting social cues and adjusting their behavior accordingly. However, the present findings suggest that these capabilities do not necessarily translate into greater openness, mutual trust, or a willingness to engage in interpersonal risk-taking.

Interpreting these findings through a communication lens provides deeper insight into how organizational dynamics unfold in practice. The results suggest that communication processes, rather than formal structures alone, play a central role in shaping psychological safety. In particular, the absence of a direct effect of social chameleon behavior highlights that adaptive communication does not automatically foster openness, but instead operates by managing exposure to communicative exclusion. This indicates that organizational communication is not about the presence of interaction, but about the quality and inclusiveness of those interactions. As such, workplace ostracism can be understood as a form of communicative disruption that constrains participation, limits voice, and ultimately weakens the communication climate within organizations.

This finding partially contrasts with prior studies that suggest adaptive or socially attuned behavior tends to enhance interpersonal trust and team integration (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014). One possible reason for this divergence lies in the outcome variable examined. While previous studies often focus on social acceptance or performance outcomes, this study specifically examines psychological safety, which involves a deeper level of perceived interpersonal risk. Additionally, differences in research design, particularly the use of cross-sectional survey data and a culturally homogeneous sample, may limit the detection of more nuanced behavioral effects that could emerge in longitudinal or experimental settings.

Importantly, this non-significant relationship warrants deeper consideration. One possible explanation is that social chameleon behavior primarily operates as a risk-avoidance mechanism rather than a trust-building mechanism. Employees may successfully conform to social expectations to avoid negative evaluation, yet still refrain from engaging in open dialogue that involves interpersonal risk. This suggests that

behavioral alignment may create perceived stability without fostering authentic communicative openness, a distinction that has not been sufficiently addressed in prior research. Another possibility is the presence of an indirect-only (full mediation) effect, where the influence of social chameleon behavior on psychological safety is fully transmitted through workplace ostracism. In this case, behavioral adaptability does not directly enhance psychological safety, but only contributes to it when it effectively reduces exposure to exclusionary communication dynamics. Additionally, the absence of a direct effect may reflect contextual or measurement-related factors, suggesting that psychological safety is more strongly shaped by collective communication norms than by individual behavioral strategies alone.

From a communication-based perspective on social risk, these findings suggest that employees may successfully avoid overt conflict while still operating within environments that are not experienced as psychologically safe. In contexts where social sensitivity is high, norm-congruent behavior may reduce visible tension without addressing deeper communicative barriers. As noted by Di Tecco et al. (2023), many organizational risks remain latent because they are managed informally rather than openly articulated. This aligns with studies on organizational silence, which indicate that the absence of conflict does not necessarily imply the presence of psychological safety, but may instead signal suppressed communication (Henriksen & Dayton, 2006). In this sense, social chameleon behavior may contribute to surface-level communicative harmony while leaving underlying vulnerabilities unaddressed.

Second, the significant negative relationship between social chameleon behavior and workplace ostracism suggests that behavioral adaptability functions as a protective communicative strategy against exclusion. Employees who are attentive to social cues and able to align their behavior with prevailing expectations are less likely to be perceived as disruptive or socially risky. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that self-monitoring supports social acceptance and reduces interpersonal uncertainty (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014; Lei et al., 2025). From the perspective of Social Risk Theory, it confirms that adaptive behavior can reduce exposure to informal sanctions by minimizing visible deviations from group norms and reducing interpersonal tension.

Unlike studies that frame social chameleon behavior as potentially inauthentic or manipulative, the present findings indicate that, within this organizational context, such behavior is interpreted functionally and

positively. This difference may be explained by cultural and contextual factors, particularly in environments where conformity and harmony are valued over individual expressiveness. Thus, rather than being perceived as deceptive, behavioral adaptability may be viewed as a form of social competence. Third, the strong negative relationship between workplace ostracism and psychological safety highlights the central role of exclusion as a communication-based risk mechanism. Consistent with Psychological Safety Theory, experiences of being ignored or excluded reduce employees' willingness to speak up, acknowledge mistakes, or challenge established practices (Edmondson, 2018). When inclusion is perceived as uncertain or conditional, individuals are more likely to engage in self-censorship and withdraw from interaction, limiting open dialogue.

This finding strongly supports and reinforces prior empirical evidence, suggesting a high level of consistency across contexts. The robustness of this relationship may be due to the universal psychological impact of social exclusion, which operates similarly across organizational settings regardless of methodological differences. It also aligns with prior research showing that silence and disengagement often precede significant organizational failures (Henriksen & Dayton, 2006; Wen et al., 2025). Furthermore, the effects of ostracism extend beyond direct targets. Observers may internalize similar concerns, reinforcing a broader climate of communicative caution and reducing collective psychological safety (Brison et al., 2025).

The mediation analysis provides further insight into how individual behavior shapes organizational communication outcomes. The significant indirect effect indicates that workplace ostracism acts as a key mechanism linking social chameleon behavior to psychological safety. This finding contributes theoretically by clarifying that the influence of adaptive behavior is not direct, but conditional upon its ability to reduce exclusionary experiences. This finding extends existing literature by demonstrating that psychological safety is not solely determined by structural or leadership factors, but is also shaped by ongoing interactional processes, particularly those involving inclusion and exclusion.

Importantly, these findings should also be interpreted within the cultural context of Indonesia, particularly Bali, where collectivist values, social harmony (*musyawarah*), and sensitivity to social evaluation are strongly embedded. In such contexts, maintaining interpersonal harmony often takes precedence over open disagreement. This may explain why social chameleon behavior effectively reduces ostracism but does not

directly enhance psychological safety. Employees may conform to social expectations to preserve group cohesion, yet still feel constrained in expressing dissenting views. From a practical perspective, these findings offer several implications. Organizations should not rely solely on employees' adaptive capabilities to manage social risk. Instead, they should actively develop communication systems that promote inclusion and reduce subtle forms of exclusion. For example, organizations can implement structured voice mechanisms such as regular feedback forums, anonymous reporting systems, and psychologically safe discussion spaces. Leadership interventions are also critical, particularly in modeling inclusive communication and explicitly discouraging exclusionary behaviors. Additionally, training programs focused on inclusive communication and interpersonal awareness may help transform adaptive behavior into genuinely open dialogue.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences, particularly regarding the mediation relationship. Second, the use of self-reported data raises the possibility of common method bias, despite efforts to minimize it through questionnaire design. Third, the purposive sampling approach may limit the generalisability of the findings to other organizational or cultural contexts. Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal designs, multi-source data, and comparative cross-cultural approaches to further validate and extend these findings. Additionally, future studies may explore potential boundary conditions, such as differences across organizational sectors, hierarchical levels, or demographic characteristics, to better understand when and for whom these relationships are most salient.

Overall, this study demonstrates that managing social risk in organizations requires a deeper understanding of communication processes. Psychological safety emerges not simply from individual behavior or formal structures, but from the dynamic interplay between adaptive strategies and informal interaction patterns. As such, fostering psychologically safe environments requires attention to how inclusion, exclusion, and communication norms are enacted in everyday organizational life.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how social chameleon behavior operates as an adaptive communication strategy in managing social risk and how it relates to psychological safety through workplace ostracism. The findings show that the direct effect of social chameleon behavior on psychological

safety is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.031$, $p = 0.470$), whereas its effect on workplace ostracism is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.298$, $p < 0.001$), and workplace ostracism strongly reduces psychological safety ($\beta = -0.742$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.001$), indicating a full mediation mechanism. Theoretically, these results refine Self-Monitoring Theory by demonstrating that adaptive behavior functions primarily as a risk-avoidance mechanism rather than a direct driver of psychological safety, and extend Social Risk Theory by highlighting workplace ostracism as a key mechanism linking individual behavior to collective outcomes. Rather than directly fostering a safe communication climate, social chameleon behavior appears to reduce exposure to exclusion, through which psychological safety is indirectly shaped.

From a practical standpoint, organizations should not rely solely on employees' behavioral adaptability to maintain psychological safety. More concrete interventions are required, including the development of inclusive communication practices, structured employee voice mechanisms, and systems to detect subtle exclusion (e.g., anonymous feedback tools and communication climate assessments). However, these implications should be interpreted with caution, as the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference. This study has several limitations. In addition to the cross-sectional design and self-reported data, the use of purposive sampling may introduce selection bias, and the absence of formal common method bias testing represents a methodological limitation. Furthermore, the focus on a single cultural context (Bali, Indonesia) may limit generalisability and raise potential concerns regarding cultural response patterns and measurement equivalence. Future research is encouraged to examine alternative mediating mechanisms (e.g., perceived inclusion or trust) and to test potential boundary conditions such as cultural values, organizational hierarchy, and sectoral differences. Longitudinal and multi-source designs are also recommended to strengthen causal inference and reduce method bias.

Overall, this study highlights that psychological safety is not directly produced by individual adaptability but emerges through ongoing interaction dynamics, particularly those related to inclusion and exclusion in workplace communication. By integrating perspectives from organizational communication and human resource management, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how psychological safety is shaped within everyday organizational interactions.

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