

PEACE COMPETENCIES AND WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH: THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN BUILDING A THRIVING WORKFORCE

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Abstract:

The growing mental health crisis in contemporary workplaces necessitates systemic, preventive, and relationally grounded interventions that move beyond individual coping strategies. While existing organisational approaches largely emphasise resilience training and stress management, comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to peace-oriented competencies as structural determinants of workplace well-being. This study develops and tests a Peace-Oriented Workplace Well-Being Model that conceptualises peace competencies—empathy, emotional regulation, non-violent communication, tolerance, and collaborative conflict transformation—as foundational predictors of psychological safety and mental well-being, culminating in organisational thriving.

Using a convergent mixed-methods design, data were collected from 200 employees across four sectors. Quantitative analyses included reliability assessment, correlation analysis, hierarchical regression, and bootstrapped mediation testing. Results revealed significant positive associations between peace competencies and psychological safety ($r = .68, p < .001$) and between peace competencies and mental well-being ($r = .62, p < .001$). Mediation analysis indicated a significant indirect effect through psychological safety (indirect effect = .27, 95% CI [.18, .38]), confirming partial mediation. Qualitative thematic findings provided contextual depth, illustrating how relational climates characterised by respectful dialogue and constructive conflict engagement function as psychosocial buffers.

Building on these findings, the study proposes a multi-level Peace-Oriented Policy and Practice Framework integrating individual competency development, team-based relational systems, leadership accountability, and organisational governance architecture. The research positions peace not as a normative ideal but as measurable preventive infrastructure for sustainable workplace mental health and thriving.

Keywords: workplace mental health, peace competencies, psychological safety, thriving workforce, organisational culture

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Introduction:

Workplace mental health has become one of the most urgent and defining organisational concerns of the twenty-first century. Across sectors and geographical regions, employees are experiencing rising levels of psychological strain characterised by burnout, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, disengagement, interpersonal conflict, and reduced sense of meaning at

work. Rapid technological transformation, performance-driven cultures, economic uncertainty, hybrid work models, and continuous connectivity have reshaped the psychosocial landscape of organisations. While these changes have enhanced productivity and global collaboration, they have simultaneously intensified pressure, blurred work–life boundaries, and weakened relational cohesion within teams.

Mental health challenges at work are not merely individual problems; they are embedded within organisational systems, communication patterns, leadership behaviours, and workplace cultures. Contemporary research increasingly recognises that psychosocial risks such as role ambiguity, lack of recognition, unfair treatment, toxic communication, and unresolved conflict contribute significantly to psychological distress. In many cases, it is not workload alone that causes strain but the emotional climate within which work is performed. Environments characterised by fear of judgment, lack of voice, competitive hostility, or exclusionary practices erode psychological safety and compromise employee well-being.

Organisations have responded to these challenges through employee assistance programmes, resilience workshops, mindfulness sessions, stress management seminars, and mental health awareness campaigns. While these initiatives provide valuable support, they often remain reactive or individually focused. They address symptoms rather than transforming the relational and cultural structures that generate stress. A growing body of scholarship suggests that sustainable workplace well-being requires systemic approaches that cultivate emotionally safe, respectful, and collaborative organisational climates.

Within this context, the concept of peace offers a powerful yet underexplored framework for workplace mental health. Peace, in organisational settings, extends beyond the absence of overt conflict. It encompasses the presence of empathetic communication, fairness, mutual respect, constructive dialogue, emotional regulation, and justice-oriented practices. Peace-oriented workplaces are not conflict-free spaces; rather, they are environments where disagreements are addressed through dialogue, differences are valued, and interpersonal risks can be taken without fear of humiliation or retaliation.

Peace psychology provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how relational harmony and emotional regulation function as protective psychological resources. Core peace competencies—such as empathy, perspective-taking, non-violent communication, tolerance for diversity, and collaborative conflict transformation—directly influence the emotional tone and interactional norms within organisations. These competencies shape how employees respond to stress, manage disagreements, interpret feedback, and support colleagues.

The present study builds on this perspective by proposing that peace competencies operate as foundational determinants of workplace mental health. Specifically, it argues that peace competencies enhance psychological safety, which in turn strengthens employee mental well-being and contributes to organisational thriving. By empirically examining these relationships through a mixed-methods design, the study seeks to reposition peace from a moral aspiration to a measurable and strategic organisational resource.

In doing so, this research contributes to three critical areas. First, it extends workplace mental health literature by integrating peace psychology into organisational well-being frameworks. Second, it provides empirical evidence linking relational peace competencies with psychological safety and well-being outcomes. Third, it offers practical policy pathways for embedding peace-oriented approaches within leadership development, human resource systems, and organisational culture initiatives.

As workplaces strive to create environments that are not only productive but also humane, inclusive, and sustainable, integrating peace competencies into mental health strategies represents an innovative and transformative pathway toward building thriving workforces.

Theoretical Foundation:
1. Peace Psychology as a Framework for Organisational Well-Being

Peace psychology extends beyond the absence of violence and focuses on conditions that foster constructive relationships, emotional regulation, social justice, and cooperative problem-solving. Foundational theoretical contributions, including those of Johan Galtung and contemporary positive psychology scholarship, position peace as both the absence of structural harm and the presence of relational justice. Within organisational scholarship, psychological safety theory, as elaborated in works such as *The Fearless Organization* by Amy C. Edmondson, further reinforces the importance of non-threatening interpersonal climates for learning and well-being. Recent empirical reviews (2019–2025) demonstrate that psychologically safe environments predict engagement, innovation, and reduced burnout across sectors. In organisational contexts, peace competencies may be conceptualised as behavioural and emotional capacities that reduce interpersonal threat and promote relational trust.

The following core competencies were examined in this study:

- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Emotional self-regulation
- Non-violent communication
- Tolerance for diversity and disagreement
- Collaborative conflict transformation

These competencies directly address psychosocial risk factors such as hostility, fear of speaking up, exclusion, and unresolved conflict.

2. Psychological Safety as a Mediating Construct

Psychological safety refers to a shared belief that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It includes the ability to voice concerns, admit mistakes, seek help, and propose ideas without fear

of humiliation or punishment. Peace competencies are hypothesised to enhance psychological safety by shaping communication norms and relational climates.

3. Thriving Workforce Model

A thriving workforce is characterised by vitality, learning, engagement, and psychological resilience. This study conceptualises thriving as an outcome of sustained mental well-being supported by peaceful relational ecosystems.

Conceptual Model:

The conceptual model developed in this study positions peace competencies as foundational psychological and relational capacities that influence employee mental health both directly and indirectly through psychological safety. The model is grounded in the assumption that workplace well-being is not solely an individual outcome but an emergent property of relational ecosystems within organisations.

1. Core Constructs of the Model
Peace Competencies (Independent Variable):

Peace competencies are defined as measurable behavioural and emotional capacities that promote constructive interaction and reduce interpersonal threat. In this study, peace competencies include:

- Empathy and perspective-taking (capacity to understand others' emotions and viewpoints)
- Emotional self-regulation (ability to manage impulses and respond calmly under stress)
- Non-violent and respectful communication
- Tolerance for diversity and disagreement
- Collaborative conflict transformation

These competencies influence how individuals interpret workplace events, respond to stressors, and engage in team processes. Employees with high peace competencies are less likely to escalate conflicts, personalise criticism, or perceive disagreement as hostility. Instead, they reframe tension as an opportunity for dialogue.

Psychological Safety (Mediating Variable):

Psychological safety is conceptualised as a shared belief that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It reflects the degree to which employees feel comfortable expressing ideas, acknowledging mistakes, asking questions, or challenging the status quo without fear of negative consequences. Peace competencies are hypothesised to strengthen psychological safety by shaping norms of interaction. When empathy, fairness, and respectful dialogue become embedded in daily exchanges, employees experience reduced interpersonal anxiety.

Mental Well-Being (Outcome Variable):

Mental well-being in this study encompasses emotional balance, reduced stress levels, job satisfaction, sense of meaning, and psychological vitality. It is viewed as both the absence of distress and the presence of positive psychological functioning.

Organisational Thriving (Extended Outcome):

Thriving represents a higher-order organisational outcome characterised by sustained engagement, learning orientation, collaborative innovation, and collective resilience. Thriving organisations are not merely free from dysfunction; they demonstrate vitality and adaptive growth.

2. Structural Pathways in the Model

The model proposes four primary pathways:

Pathway 1: Direct Effect (Peace Competencies → Mental Well-Being)

Peace competencies directly reduce emotional reactivity, interpersonal strain, and cognitive rumination. Employees who regulate emotions effectively and communicate constructively experience lower stress accumulation and higher emotional balance.

Pathway 2: Relational Climate Formation (Peace Competencies → Psychological Safety)

Peace competencies contribute to the formation of psychologically safe climates. Repeated peaceful interactions create shared expectations of respect and fairness. Over time, this reduces anticipatory anxiety and defensive behaviours.

Pathway 3: Safety–Well-Being Link (Psychological Safety → Mental Well-Being)

Psychological safety reduces fear-based stress responses. When employees feel safe to express themselves without ridicule or punishment, cortisol-triggering stress reactions diminish, and cognitive resources are freed for engagement and creativity.

Pathway 4: Indirect (Mediated) Effect (Peace Competencies → Psychological Safety → Mental Well-Being)

The model hypothesises that psychological safety partially mediates the relationship between peace competencies and mental well-being. Peaceful relational behaviours cultivate safety, which in turn enhances well-being outcomes.

3. Dynamic and Systemic Nature of the Model

Importantly, the model is not linear in practice but cyclical and reinforcing. As mental well-being improves, employees are more capable of demonstrating empathy, emotional regulation, and constructive communication, thereby strengthening peace competencies at the collective level. This creates a positive feedback loop:

Peace Competencies → Psychological Safety → Mental Well-Being → Enhanced Relational Capacity → Stronger Peace Climate

Over time, this feedback loop contributes to organisational thriving. Thus, peace competencies are conceptualised not merely as individual traits but as cultural drivers that influence systemic organisational health.

4. Innovation of the Model

The innovation of this conceptual framework lies in reframing peace as a measurable organisational

variable rather than a philosophical abstraction. While existing workplace mental health models emphasise resilience, job design, or leadership styles, this model foregrounds relational harmony and constructive conflict engagement as central determinants of well-being.

By integrating peace psychology with organisational behaviour and mental health research, the model provides:

- A preventive rather than reactive approach to workplace distress
- A relational lens for understanding psychosocial risk
- A bridge between individual competencies and organisational culture
- A scalable pathway for policy integration

This conceptualisation supports the empirical investigation presented in the subsequent sections and offers a foundation for future intervention-based research.

5. Diagrammatic Representation of the Conceptual Model

Below is a schematic representation of the proposed model:

Peace Competencies

(Empathy, Emotional Regulation,

Non-violent Communication,

Tolerance, Conflict Transformation)

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↓

Psychological Safety

(Interpersonal Risk-Taking, Voice,

Trust, Fairness, Reduced Fear)

↓

↓

Mental Well-Being

(Emotional Balance, Reduced Stress,

Job Satisfaction, Vitality, Meaning)

↓

↓

Organisational Thriving

(Engagement, Learning, Innovation, Collective Resilience)

Additionally, a direct pathway exists between Peace Competencies and Mental Well-Being, while Psychological Safety partially mediates this relationship.

Methodology:

Research Design:

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted to enable simultaneous examination of statistical relationships and lived experiences. The quantitative strand tested hypothesised structural relationships among peace competencies, psychological safety, and mental well-being. The qualitative strand provided contextual elaboration of relational processes underlying statistical associations. Integration occurred at the interpretation stage to enhance explanatory validity.

Sample and Sampling Strategy:

A total of 200 employees were recruited from education, healthcare, corporate services, and non-governmental organisations using stratified purposive sampling to ensure sectoral diversity. Sample size adequacy was evaluated using power analysis principles. For mediation analysis with medium effect sizes ($f^2 \approx .15$) and $\alpha = .05$, a minimum sample of approximately 150 participants is typically recommended to achieve power above .80. The final sample of 200 exceeded this threshold, strengthening statistical reliability and reducing Type II error risk.

Sector	N	Percentage
Education	60	30%
Healthcare	50	25%
Corporate Services	55	27.5%
NGOs	35	17.5%
Total	200	100%

Gender distribution: 52% female, 46% male, 2% non-binary.

Mean age: 34.8 years (SD = 7.6).

Mean work experience: 9.3 years (SD = 5.1).

Instruments and Measurement Validity:

1. Peace Competency Scale (20 items; Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$)
2. Psychological Safety Scale (7 items; $\alpha = .86$)
3. Workplace Psychological Well-Being Scale (18 items; $\alpha = .91$)

Internal consistency coefficients above .80 indicate strong reliability. Construct validity was supported through significant intercorrelations consistent with theoretical expectations. Common method bias was assessed procedurally through anonymity assurances and statistically through variance inspection, with no evidence of extreme multicollinearity (all correlations $< .80$).

Data Analysis Strategy:

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine central tendency and dispersion. Pearson correlations assessed bivariate relationships. Hierarchical regression analysis tested incremental predictive validity of peace competencies over and above psychological safety. Effect sizes were interpreted using standardized beta coefficients and R^2 change values.

Mediation was tested using PROCESS Macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrapped resamples. Bootstrapping was selected due to its robustness against non-normal indirect effect distributions. Confidence intervals excluding zero were interpreted as evidence of significant mediation.

Qualitative data from 20 semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis involving open, axial, and selective coding. Credibility was strengthened through iterative coding, peer debriefing, and triangulation with quantitative findings.

Quantitative Findings:

Quantitative Findings:

1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Peace Competencies	3.87	0.54	1–5
Psychological Safety	3.75	0.61	1–5
Mental Well-Being	3.92	0.58	1–5

2. Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3
1. Peace Competencies	—		
2. Psychological Safety	.68***	—	
3. Mental Well-Being	.62***	.71***	—

*** $p < .001$

The results indicate strong positive correlations between peace competencies and psychological safety ($r = .68$), and between peace competencies and mental well-being ($r = .62$). Psychological safety shows the strongest association with mental well-being ($r = .71$).

3. Regression and Mediation Analysis

Hierarchical regression showed:

- Peace competencies significantly predicted mental well-being ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$).
- When psychological safety was added, the effect of peace competencies reduced ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), while psychological safety remained significant ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$).

Bootstrapped mediation analysis confirmed a significant indirect effect: Indirect effect = .27 (95% CI [.18, .38])

This indicates partial mediation, suggesting that peace competencies improve mental health both directly and indirectly through enhancing psychological safety.

Qualitative Findings and Analysis:

Twenty participants participated in in-depth interviews.

Four major themes emerged:

Theme 1: Emotional Climate as Stress Amplifier or Buffer

Participants reported that hostile communication and sarcasm intensified stress more than workload. Conversely, respectful dialogue reduced emotional exhaustion.

"When disagreements are handled calmly, even difficult tasks feel manageable." (Participant 7, Corporate Sector)

Analysis: Peaceful communication acts as a stress buffer by reducing emotional threat perception.

Theme 2: Psychological Safety and Voice

Employees in peace-oriented teams felt comfortable admitting mistakes and asking for help.

"I don't fear being judged when I share concerns." (Participant 12, Education Sector)

Analysis: Psychological safety fosters openness, reducing anxiety and performance pressure.

Theme 3: Conflict Transformation vs Conflict Suppression

Teams that engaged in dialogue-based conflict resolution reported stronger cohesion and lower lingering resentment.

Analysis: Peace competencies shift conflict from destructive confrontation to constructive engagement.

Theme 4: Leadership as Peace Catalyst

Leaders who modelled emotional regulation and fairness influenced overall team climate.

Analysis: Leadership behaviours operationalise peace values within organisational systems.

Integrated Findings:

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data confirms that peace competencies function as both individual psychological resources and collective cultural mechanisms. Quantitative evidence demonstrates statistically significant associations, while qualitative narratives explain the lived experiences behind these relationships.

Peace competencies reduce perceived interpersonal threat, enhance trust, and create emotionally secure environments. These conditions foster sustained well-being, engagement, and collaborative innovation.

Discussion:

The present study advances workplace mental health research by positioning peace competencies as central determinants of psychological safety and well-being. Rather than treating emotional and relational skills as peripheral, the findings demonstrate that empathy, emotional regulation, and constructive conflict engagement function as core organisational resources. A strong positive relationship between peace competencies and psychological safety indicates that employees' communicative and emotional capacities actively shape the climate of trust and openness within organisations. In turn, the direct association with mental well-being confirms that individuals who can regulate emotions and engage in respectful dialogue experience lower stress and greater psychological balance. These results shift the focus of workplace mental health from purely structural or individual coping models toward a relational understanding grounded in everyday interactions.

A key contribution of the study lies in identifying psychological safety as a partial mediating mechanism.

Peace competencies not only support individual regulation but also create shared environments where employees feel safe to express ideas, admit mistakes, and participate without fear. This reduces defensive behaviours and frees cognitive and emotional resources for collaboration and creativity, positioning psychological safety as a cultural amplifier of relational competencies. Qualitative insights reinforce this interpretation, revealing that employees often experience relational hostility—such as dismissive communication, exclusion, or unresolved conflict—as more distressing than workload itself. Conversely, teams that engage in dialogue-based conflict resolution report stronger cohesion, emotional relief, and sustained motivation. Leadership further emerges as a critical influence, with calm, fair, and attentive leaders fostering stability and reinforcing relational norms across teams.

The study also reconceptualises peace as a form of preventive organisational infrastructure rather than a remedial intervention. Instead of addressing mental health only after stress accumulates, peace competencies reduce the frequency and intensity of interpersonal stressors at their source. This reframes responsibility from individual coping to systemic design, highlighting the importance of embedding relational norms into everyday organisational processes. Improved well-being, in turn, contributes to organisational thriving by enhancing engagement, learning orientation, and collaborative capacity. A cyclical dynamic becomes evident: as well-being improves, employees are better able to demonstrate empathy and regulation, further strengthening the peace-oriented climate.

Building on these insights, the proposed framework translates empirical findings into a multi-level organisational approach. At the individual level, structured development of emotional and communicative skills is essential. At the team level,

regular dialogue practices and norms for respectful disagreement help normalise open communication. Leadership must model and be held accountable for relational behaviours, while organisational systems—such as recruitment, performance evaluation, and conflict resolution policies—should formally integrate peace competencies. This alignment across levels enables cultural internalisation, where peace becomes an embedded organisational norm rather than an imposed practice. Continuous evaluation through psychological safety assessments and qualitative feedback ensures adaptability and long-term effectiveness.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and reliance on self-report measures introduces potential bias. The geographically limited sample may affect generalisability, and the model does not account for additional variables such as leadership styles or organisational justice that may influence outcomes. The qualitative component, while insightful, is based on a relatively small sample. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal and experimental designs, incorporate multi-source and behavioural data, and explore more complex multilevel models. Expanding cross-cultural comparisons and integrating physiological indicators of stress would further strengthen the evidence base.

Overall, the findings underscore that workplace mental health is fundamentally relational. By embedding peace competencies and fostering psychological safety, organisations can move beyond reactive approaches and cultivate resilient, inclusive, and thriving work environments.

Conclusion:

Peace-oriented competencies provide a transformative and measurable pathway for promoting mental health and well-being at the workplace. By strengthening psychological safety and relational harmony,

organisations can cultivate thriving, resilient, and innovative workforces. Peace, therefore, emerges not as an abstract moral aspiration but as a strategic organisational asset for sustainable development.

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