

# The Power Of Support And Psychological Safety In Enhancing Team Adaptability Among Law Enforcement Teams

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**Abstract**—In today's rapidly changing work environment, team adaptability is a crucial determinant of organizational success. This study examines the relationship between team support, psychological safety, and team adaptability, focusing on the mediating role of psychological safety. Using data from 351 respondents, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess differences in team adaptability across demographic groups, while mediation analysis via PROCESS macro was employed to evaluate the indirect effects of psychological safety. Results indicate that team support significantly enhances adaptability, but its effect is substantially mediated by psychological safety. While team support fosters a collaborative environment, psychological safety plays a stronger direct role in enabling team members to share ideas, take calculated risks, and adjust to change. These findings emphasize that while providing team support is essential, creating a psychologically safe workplace is even more critical for improving adaptability. Organizations should focus on leadership development, transparent communication, and non-punitive feedback mechanisms to cultivate psychological safety and maximize team adaptability. This study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the interactive effects of support and safety in shaping adaptive team behaviors. Future research should explore contextual factors such as leadership styles and industry-specific challenges to deepen the understanding of how teams adapt in various organizational settings.

**Index Terms**—Organizational behavior, psychological safety, team adaptability, team support, law enforcement teams.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Team adaptability represents the foundation of effective operations in dynamic, unpredictable environments and contexts where rapid decision-making and flexibility are not merely advantageous but imperative. Defined as the ability to modify actions, strategies, and decisions in real-time as circumstances evolve or unforeseen challenges emerge [1], team adaptability is particularly critical for law enforcement teams operating under high-pressure scenarios. Whether responding to sudden threats, de-escalating volatile situations, or recalibrating tactics mid-mission, these teams must exhibit an unparalleled capacity to "read the room," adjust their approach, and function cohesively to ensure both safety and mission success. Consider a unit arriving at a rapidly evolving scene: conditions may shift by the minute, demanding immediate recalibration. In such moments, team adaptability becomes the linchpin of operational effectiveness. In chaotic and unpredictable work settings, adaptability rises above being a desirable trait. It becomes an essential survival mechanism. Teams capable of navigating crises and addressing unexpected challenges demonstrate resilience, a quality that is indispensable for success [2]. Nowhere is this more evident than in law enforcement teams, where officers operate within fast-paced, ever-changing environments where no two days, or even hours, are alike. From managing violent crimes to orchestrating responses during large-scale emergencies, their roles demand constant flexibility and innovation [3].

The scope of modern law enforcement has grown exponentially more complex, with responsibilities extending far beyond traditional crime-fighting paradigms. Law enforcement teams now confront high-stakes scenarios such as pandemic responses, counterterrorism operations, and the multifaceted challenges posed by digital transformation [4]. The advent of Industry 4.0 has further amplified these

demands, introducing cybercrime, AI-driven threats, and technology-centric investigations into the equation. In this era of rapid technological advancement, adherence to standard protocols alone is insufficient; officers require agility, strategic foresight, and the ability to integrate cutting-edge tools into their workflows [3]. However, the unstable nature of these environments' places immense strain on teamwork, communication, and coordination, which are the very elements that support successful outcomes. When crises unfold, the inability to share information swiftly and accurately can lead to failures: missions stall, safety is compromised, inter-agency partnerships fracture, and, in the gravest cases, lives are lost [5]. Thus, adaptability emerges not as a mere buzzword but as the glue that binds effective policing together. It serves as the foundation upon which trust, collaboration, and operational excellence are built, ensuring that teams can navigate the complexities of modern law enforcement with precision and resilience.

Beyond unpredictable environments and increasing technological integration, law enforcement officers encounter substantial occupational challenges, including high stress levels, excessive workloads, and ineffective coping mechanisms, all of which impede their ability to adapt to evolving situations [6]. The nature of law enforcement work demands extended working hours, ranging from 200 to 300 hours per month for lower-ranking officers are contributing to chronic stress and exhaustion [6]. Frequent exposure to traumatic events, such as community violence, motor vehicle accidents, and the loss of colleagues, has been linked to increased incidences of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal tendencies among office [6]. These psychological burdens not only affect individual well-being but also diminish collective decision-making capabilities, impair reaction times, and hinder overall team performance. Crime trend fluctuations may, in part, be attributed to these occupational stressors, as officers under high-pressure conditions struggle to adapt dynamically. Heightened stress can lead to cognitive overload, reducing critical thinking and problem-solving capacity. Additionally, stress-induced law enforcement misconduct, including suicide attempts and violent outbursts, signals the urgent need for systemic mental health interventions [7]. To sustain effective law enforcement and enhance team adaptability, law enforcement organizations must prioritize strong team support structures, including peer assistance, leadership-driven encouragement, and accessible mental health resources. The absence of psychological safety worsens team functional issues, as officers may hesitate to voice concerns, seek help, or share vital operational insights, disrupting team learning and collective adaptability. For example, during a community violence incident, a psychologically insecure team may struggle to reassign roles or improvise responses effectively, leading to operational delays or misjudgements that compromise overall team performance and public safety [2]. Therefore, we sought to assess the role of team support and psychological safety in enhancing team adaptability among law enforcement teams. We examined how psychological safety mediates the relationship between team support and team adaptability. Knowledge of whether team support and psychological safety play a role in elevating team adaptability may help guide law enforcement teams in their team functioning.

## II. METHOD

### A. Survey Design

Team adaptability was measured using an interval scale through a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The team adaptability scale was adapted from Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel (2012) and [8] and consists of eight dimensions: (1) handling emergencies and crises (four items), (2) managing work stress (six items), (3) solving problems creatively (five items), (4) dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations (four items), (5) training and learning effort (five items), (6) interpersonal adaptability (five items), (7) cultural adaptability (four items), and (8) physical adaptability (three items). In total, the team adaptability scale comprised 36 items. The reliability score for this scale has been reported as 0.91 [1], [8]. Meanwhile, the team support scale was adapted from Freeman et al. (2011) and was also measured using an interval scale via a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The scale captures four dimensions: (1) emotional support (three items), (2) esteem support (four items), (3) informational support (four items), and (4) tangible support (two items). In total, the scale comprised 13 items, with reliability scores ranging from 0.86 to 0.89 [9] The third variable, team psychological safety, was assessed using an interval scale with a seven-

point Likert response format ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The measurement scale was adapted from [10] and [11] consisting of eight items. The reliability value for team psychological safety was reported as 0.82 [10], [11]. These measurements were selected to assess the extent to which team adaptability, team support, and team psychological safety contribute to team effectiveness in high-pressure environments.

### **B. Statistical Analysis**

351 sets of data were first imported into Microsoft Excel for initial processing, including the calculation of respondent scores. The dataset was then transferred to SPSS [12] for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed, where mean  $\pm$  standard deviation (SD) was reported for continuous variables, and frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize categorical data. Missing values were addressed using the pairwise deletion method to maintain the integrity of the dataset while minimizing bias. Since team adaptability, team support, and psychological safety were measured using Likert-scale responses, they were treated as continuous variables for analysis. This approach was justified by the large sample size, which supports the assumptions of parametric statistical techniques, ensuring more precise and generalizable results. To assess differences across demographic groups, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The relationship between team support, psychological safety, and team adaptability was examined using linear regression analysis, with team adaptability as the dependent variable. To test the mediating effect of psychological safety in the relationship between team support and team adaptability, mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS [13], with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. This method allowed for the estimation of indirect effects and their 95% confidence intervals, providing a more robust statistical inference. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was used to determine mediation effects. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (IBM Corp., 2021), ensuring a solid evaluation of the proposed relationships.

## **III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The mean score for team adaptability was  $M = 5.79$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ , indicating that respondents generally perceive themselves as adaptable to workplace changes. Team support recorded a mean score of  $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ , suggesting that respondents experience strong support from their team members. Similarly, psychological safety had a mean score of  $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ , reflecting a high level of trust and openness within teams. The high scores across all three variables suggest that the surveyed teams operate in environments where support and psychological safety contribute to adaptability. These findings set the foundation for further statistical analysis to explore relationships between the variables.

A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were then conducted to examine whether team adaptability significantly differs across demographic factors, including age group, rank, and work experience. The analysis yielded a statistically significant result,  $F(3,6) = 34.25$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , indicating that there is a significant difference in team adaptability among the different age groups. This suggests that team adaptability varies with age, implying that experience and maturity may play a role in an individual's ability to adapt within a team setting. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to examine the differences in team adaptability across different ranks. The results yielded  $F(7,2) = 6.12$ ,  $p = 0.148$ , which is not statistically significant. This indicates that rank does not significantly impact team adaptability, suggesting that adaptability levels may be consistent regardless of hierarchical positions within the law enforcement team. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was performed to assess whether work experience influences team adaptability. The results showed a significant effect,  $F(3,6) = 34.25$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , suggesting that team adaptability significantly differs based on the length of service. This finding highlights that individuals with more years of experience tend to demonstrate varying levels of adaptability, potentially due to their accumulated skills, exposure to diverse situations, and decision-making capabilities in high-pressure environments.

Next, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among team adaptability, team support, and psychological safety. The findings reveal the following:

1. Team support and team adaptability ( $r = 0.779$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )  $\rightarrow$  Higher perceived team support is strongly associated with greater adaptability.
2. Psychological safety and team adaptability ( $r = 0.819$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )  $\rightarrow$  Teams with greater

psychological safety tend to exhibit higher adaptability.

3. Team support and psychological safety ( $r = 0.898$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) → Strong team support fosters a psychologically safe environment, reinforcing adaptability.

These results indicate that both team support and psychological safety contribute significantly to adaptability, justifying further regression and mediation analyses.

Hierarchical regression analysis was then conducted to examine the direct effects of team support and psychological safety on team adaptability. The results are as follows:

4. Model 1 (Team Support → Team Adaptability):  $R^2 = 0.608$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , meaning team support alone explains 60.8% of variance in adaptability.

5. Model 2 (Psychological Safety → Team Adaptability):  $R^2 = 0.671$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , indicating that psychological safety alone accounts for 67.1% of adaptability variance.

6. Model 3 (Team Support + Psychological Safety → Team Adaptability):  $R^2 = 0.681$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , showing that the combined model explains 68.1% of variance in adaptability.

These findings confirm that both team support and psychological safety significantly predict team adaptability, with psychological safety having a stronger direct effect.

To examine whether psychological safety mediates the relationship between team support and team adaptability, a mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS [13], with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. This bootstrapping approach provided a more robust estimate of the indirect effect and its 95% confidence interval (CI), ensuring greater statistical precision in testing mediation effects.

Table I summarizes the mediation analysis.

**Table I:** Summary of Mediation Analysis

Effect	Value	Interpretation
Total Effect (c)	0.660, $p < 0.001$	Team support has a significant positive impact on team adaptability before considering the mediating role of psychological safety.
Indirect Effect (a x b)	0.470 (95% CI: 0.372 to 0.568)	The indirect effect is statistically significant (CI does not include zero), indicating that psychological safety partially mediates the relationship between team support and adaptability.
Direct Effect (c')	0.191, $p < 0.001$	After accounting for psychological safety, team support still significantly influences adaptability, but its effect is reduced, supporting mediation.
Path a (Team Support → Psychological Safety)	0.841, $p < 0.001$	Team support strongly enhances psychological safety, indicating that higher perceived support fosters an environment where individuals feel safe to take interpersonal risks.
Path b (Psychological Safety → Team Adaptability)	0.559, $p < 0.001$	Psychological safety has a significant positive effect on adaptability, suggesting that when team members feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to adjust effectively to changing situations.

The mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether psychological safety mediates the relationship between team support and team adaptability, using 5,000 bootstrapped samples via the PROCESS macro [14]. The results indicate that team support has a significant positive impact on team adaptability before considering psychological safety (Total Effect:  $c = 0.660$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). When psychological safety is introduced as a mediator, the indirect effect ( $a \times b$ ) is 0.470, with a 95% confidence interval of 0.372 to 0.568, confirming a statistically significant mediation since the confidence interval does not include zero. This suggests that psychological safety partially mediates the relationship between team support and

adaptability. Even after accounting for psychological safety, team support still has a significant direct effect on adaptability ( $c' = 0.191$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but the effect is reduced compared to the total effect, reinforcing the mediating role of psychological safety. Further, team support significantly enhances psychological safety (Path  $a = 0.841$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that when team members perceive higher support, they feel safer to engage in open communication and take interpersonal risks. In turn, psychological safety significantly improves team adaptability (Path  $b = 0.559$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that when individuals feel psychologically safe, they are more willing to adjust to changing circumstances and collaborate effectively. These findings highlight the importance of fostering both team support and psychological safety to enhance team adaptability in dynamic work environments.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the roles of team support and psychological safety in fostering team adaptability. The findings indicate that while team support has a direct and significant impact on adaptability, its full potential is realized when team members experience psychological safety. This reinforces the notion that it is not just the presence of support that matters, but also the extent to which individuals feel secure in utilizing it. These findings align with established theories on social support and team dynamics, which emphasize that when individuals perceive a strong support system within their team, they are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving, risk-taking, and adaptive learning behaviours [11], [13]. The ability to share ideas, experiment with new approaches, and learn from setbacks without fear of negative repercussions strengthens collective problem-solving efforts and allows teams to be more flexible and responsive in dynamic or uncertain work conditions.

A key insight from this study is that psychological safety exhibits a stronger direct effect on adaptability than team support alone. This suggests that while structural and emotional support within teams is necessary, ensuring that individuals feel safe to express themselves, challenge norms, and take calculated risks may be even more critical in improving adaptability. This is particularly relevant in high-pressure work environments where adaptability is essential, such as public sector organizations, emergency response teams, and innovation-driven industries. Moreover, this study highlights that psychological safety functions as a key mechanism that enhances the effectiveness of team support. Without a psychologically safe environment, team support alone may not be sufficient to drive meaningful adaptability, as individuals may still hesitate to voice concerns, propose ideas, or embrace change-oriented behaviours. This aligns with prior research emphasizing that psychological safety amplifies the benefits of team support by fostering an inclusive, trusting, and innovation-friendly climate [15], [16].

From a practical perspective, these findings emphasize the need for leaders and managers to go beyond simply providing team-based support structures. Organizations must actively cultivate an environment of trust and inclusivity. This can be achieved through leadership training, structured communication workshops, and team-building initiatives that reinforce psychological safety. Additionally, workplace policies should encourage transparent feedback mechanisms, non-punitive approaches to mistakes, and open channels for expressing concerns, all of which contribute to a more adaptive and resilient workforce. In conclusion, this study emphasizes that while team support serves as a foundation for adaptability, psychological safety acts as a crucial enabler that magnifies its impact. Future research should further explore context-specific factors that may influence the strength of these relationships, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and industry-specific challenges, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teams can effectively navigate change and uncertainty. Future research should explore longitudinal studies and qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into how team adaptability evolves over time in high-pressure environments.

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