BRIDGING DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: MODELING LEADERSHIP'S USE OF DIALOGIC PRINCIPLES IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

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This dissertation was shaped by my personal experiences with communication in professional settings across education, healthcare, and the sports and entertainment industry. For those navigating complex professional environments without a clear roadmap or guidance, this work is for you. It is grounded in the belief that everyday communication holds the power to shape more empowering and fulfilling workplace experiences. Your voice, your feedback, and your experiences matter.

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ABSTRACT

Effective internal communication is critical for fostering employee engagement and shaping organizational culture. As leadership plays a central role in structuring internal communication environments, this study examines how employees' perceptions of dialogic leadership communication influence employee engagement. Grounded in dialogic theory and social exchange theory, the study proposes and tests a model in which dialogic leadership communication operates as a relational signal shaping employees' perceptions of organizational support and psychological safety, which in turn influence engagement.

Using survey data collected from public relations practitioners and analyzed through structural equation modeling, the findings demonstrate that dialogic leadership communication is positively associated with employee engagement both directly and indirectly through perceived organizational support and psychological safety. Perceived organizational support emerged as a particularly strong explanatory mechanism, highlighting the importance of relational evaluations in shaping engagement outcomes. Theoretically, this study extends dialogic theory to internal organizational contexts and advances internal communication scholarship by positioning engagement as an outcome of relational communication processes embedded in everyday leadership interactions.

Practically, findings offer actionable insights for public relations professionals and organizational leaders by emphasizing the importance of dialogue-oriented communication practices in fostering supportive communication climates and enhancing employee engagement.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Employee disengagement remains a persistent challenge across organizational contexts, with many employees reporting low levels of connection, clarity, and support in the workplace (Harter & Pendell, 2026). Internal communication plays a critical role in shaping these experiences since it influences how employees interpret organizational priorities and their relationship with their organization. As contemporary organizations continue to evolve in response to changing workplace structures, understanding how leadership communication is experienced and evaluated by employees remains a critical area of inquiry for both organizational and employee success.

While these challenges extend beyond any single context, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted and changed traditional workplace communication structures (Kniffin et al., 2021). The pandemic necessitated an accelerated adoption of remote and hybrid work arrangements across a variety of industry sectors (Waizenegger et al., 2020), resulting in an evolved landscape for workplace communication to occur. For example, the modes through which employees interact with their supervisors and how they receive organizational information have shifted drastically (Carillo et al., 2021; Shockley et al., 2021). Increased reliance on digitally mediated communication channels also significantly reduced opportunities for more informal workplace interactions to occur (Waizenegger et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2022).

As with any rapid shift in system process or modality, there are several implications that have arisen alongside the modernized, distributed workforce. Some

remote and hybrid employees have reported decreased feelings of connection to colleagues and supervisors (Kniffin et al., 2021), increased communication ambiguity, and reduced opportunities for spontaneous relationship-building that often occurs in co-located workplaces (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Research has also suggested that digitally mediated work environments can create challenges for maintaining visibility of leadership communication and organizational priorities, which may influence how employees interpret support (Carillo et al., 2021) and organizational intent (Kim et al., 2023). As contemporary organizations navigate these distributed work environments they must first understand how employees interpret leadership communication within these evolving communication structures.

Leadership communication plays an increasingly important role in shaping employee perceptions of organizational support and connection (Men, 2014; Meng & Berger, 2019). Internal communication is a critical area of public relations scholarship due to its ability to influence employee experiences and drive key strategic organizational outcomes. Among these outcomes, employee engagement has been repeatedly linked to effective internal communication practices (Lee & Kim, 2020; Lemon & Palenchar, 2018; Arif et al., 2023; Shen & Jiang, 2019). Engagement is demonstrated by physical, emotional, and cognitive investments in one's work and has been attributed to greater performance, reduced turnover rates, and improved organizational culture (Jiang & Men, 2016; Shen & Jiang, 2019). Since organizational culture for internal communication is often modeled by leadership (Berger, 1969), it is important to investigate the role of leadership communication in shaping internal communication quality and outcomes (Arif

et al., 2023). Currently, little is known about how employees perceive leadership's internal communication practice and how these perceptions may translate into engagement related outcomes in modern and rapidly evolving workplace settings.

This study examines employee perceptions of leadership communication through the lens of dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Dialogic principles have been well established in external communication contexts but remain underutilized in internal communication research (Lee & Kim, 2020). Despite existing empirical evidence linking internal communication to employee engagement, prior research has not adequately examined these relationships as part of an integrated relational process shaped by leadership communication. Dialogic theory informs investigations into this gap because it conceptualizes communication processes not as message transmission but instead as ongoing, relationally loaded transactions. This makes it well-suited for understanding how leadership communication is interpreted, evaluated, and eventually practiced by employees. By exploring employee perceptions of dialogic principles (mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment) within the context of organizational leadership communication, this study evaluates how dialogic leadership communication influences employee engagement. In addition, this research examines relevant organizational relationships and factors from industrial organizational psychology such as perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), which may also offer insightful implications for improved employee engagement outcomes.

Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), this study conceptualizes leadership communication as a relational resource through which employees evaluate their relationships with the organization. Social exchange theory suggests that when individuals perceive positive, supportive treatment, they are more likely to reciprocate through favorable attitudes and behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In organizational contexts, leadership communication serves as a key relational signal through which employees interpret organizational intent, support, and relational investment. When leaders engage in dialogic communication, employees may interpret these practices as signals of organizational care, respect, and relational investment. In this way, dialogic leadership communication may function as a relational signal that shapes how employees evaluate the quality of their exchange relationships with organizations. These perceptions are expected to influence employees' sense of psychological safety and perceived organizational support, which are central antecedents to employee engagement (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Edmondson, 1999). By positioning dialogic leadership communication as an initiating exchange cue, this study moves beyond descriptive accounts of internal communication practice by theorizing how leadership communication operates as a relational resource. Accordingly, dialogic leadership communication is modeled as an initiating condition that activates perceived organizational support and psychological safety, which in turn contributes to higher levels of employee engagement.

By surveying a sample of public relations practitioners working across diverse industry contexts, this study assesses how dialogic leadership communication is

perceived by employees and how these perceptions affect engagement. Prior engagement models emphasize communication quality or symmetry broadly; however, this study utilizes structural equation modeling (SEM) to test direct and indirect effects of dialogic leadership communication on engagement, with perceived organizational support and psychological safety considered as potential relational pathways.

Integrating dialogic theory into internal communication and employee engagement research offers new theoretical insights into the role of leadership communication within modern organizations. Dialogic theory emphasizes mutuality, openness, and responsiveness as foundational principles of ethical and effective communication relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). Although these principles have been widely applied to the study of organization-public relationships in public relations scholarship, comparatively little research has examined how dialogic communication functions within internal organizational relationships, particularly between leaders and employees. Rather than conceptualizing leadership communication as an abstract normative ideal, the present study empirically examines how dialogic communication practices are associated with employee-centered outcomes such as engagement. Prior research suggests that supportive and participatory communication from leaders contributes to more positive employee attitudes and behaviors, including stronger engagement with work and the organization (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Men & Bowen, 2017).

Findings from this study may therefore provide practical implications for public relations professionals and organizational leaders seeking to strengthen employee

engagement through supportive and participatory leadership communication practices. Specifically, results may inform leadership communication training, internal communication audits, and the strategic design of employee-centered communication systems. By integrating dialogic theory with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) within a structural model linking leadership communication to employee engagement, this study advances internal communication scholarship by clarifying not only the effects of leadership communication but also the mechanisms through which it influences employee engagement in organizational contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal communication has long been recognized as a central organizational function influencing employee attitudes, relationships, and performance outcomes (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). Early scholarship in management and organizational communication positioned these functions primarily as a mechanism for information dissemination and organizational control (Finet, 1994; Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). Over time, interdisciplinary research in public relations and communication studies has increasingly conceptualized internal communication as a relational and cultural process through which employees construct meaning, interpret organizational values, and develop engagement with their work roles (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012). Public relations scholars have increasingly identified employees as key actors within an organization. As critical internal stakeholders, employees' perceptions of communication quality (Hon & Grunig, 1999), leadership behaviors, and organizational communication climates influence relational outcomes such as trust, commitment, and perceived organizational support (Men & Bowen, 2017).

Building upon these perspectives, dialogic theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding how communication quality shapes organizational relationships by emphasizing mutuality, openness, responsiveness, and ethical engagement between communicating parties (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). Although dialogic principles have been widely applied in studies of external stakeholder communication (e.g., Men & Yue, 2019), less research has examined how employees experience dialogue through everyday

leadership communication within organizational contexts (Kent, 2023). To address this limitation, this study integrates dialogic theory with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which conceptualizes workplace relationships as ongoing exchanges of valued relational resources that influence employees' attitudes and behavioral responses (Saks, 2006). From this perspective, leadership communication serves as a primary relational exchange cue through which employees interpret organizational care, support, and interpersonal risk (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

This chapter reviews literature on internal communication, dialogic theory, leadership communication, perceived organizational support, psychological safety, and employee engagement to establish a theoretical foundation for examining how perceptions of dialogic leadership communication influence engagement outcomes. In addition, this study positions perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and psychological safety (Edmonson, 1999) as both relational and psychological mechanisms that link dialogic leadership communication to employee engagement. This study responds to calls for greater empirical investigation of internal stakeholder dialogue (e.g., Kent, 2023) and advances the understanding of how communication processes shape workplace cultures and employee experiences in contemporary organizations and work environments.

Internal Communication

Workplace Communication & Culture

Internal communication has been conceptualized in different ways across business, management, organizational communication, and public relations scholarship.

Early work often emphasized its strategic and informational value to organizations (e.g., Gray & Balmer, 1998), whereas later scholarship increasingly positioned internal communication as a cultural and relational process through which employees interpret norms, values, and expectations (Wilson et al., 1986). Tracing this shift is important because it clarifies why internal communication should be understood not only as a managerial tool but also as a core mechanism through which employee experiences and engagement are shaped.

Business, management, and corporate communication scholars initiated attention to the process of internal communication due to its promising horizons for improved employee engagement and effectiveness (e.g., Unzicker, Clow, & Babakus, 2000) as well as opportunities for increased revenue through the development of strategic competitive advantages (Balmer & Gray, 1999). Early research examined workplace communication through the lens of its strategic function and value to corporate operations. As a result, this research often reflected hierarchical organizational models and privileged managerial perspectives over employee interpretation and relational experience. For example, Gray and Balmer (1998) argued that internal communication should remain closely tied to executive management in order to advance reputational and organizational goals (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

Early organizational communication scholars were especially aware of the impact that culture plays in facilitating workplace communication and defined organizational communication as "a culturally dependent process" for information sharing and relationship building (Wilson et al., 1986). Internal communication acts as a vehicle for

producing, reflecting, and reinforcing organizational culture (Berger, 1968; Carey, 1975). Communication practices in the workplace signal acceptable organizational norms to employees and provide insight on how power is distributed within organizations (Alvesson, 1996). Internal communication practices exert significant influence on how employees interpret their roles, relate to leadership, and engage within their organizations (Pincus, Knipp, & Rayfield, 1990; White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010).

The definition of internal communication derived from business literature focused primarily on procedural functions like managing information flow, enforcing structure, influencing employee behavior, and gaining corporate advantages (Finet, 1994; Gray & Balmer, 1998). In contrast to managerial approaches, early organizational communication scholars emphasized that workplace communication is culturally situated and relationally embedded. This shift reflected growing interest in how communication not only supports organizational operations but also shapes the values, expectations, and behaviors that constitute workplace culture. For example, Cameron and McCollum (1993) revealed that internal communication both reflected and reinforced organizational subcultures (Cameron & McCollum, 1993). Communication preferences and interpretations varied across employee groups, which led to gaps between managerial communication intent and employee perception. This study also called attention to the importance of aligning employee subcultures and promoting cohesiveness through workplace communication in organizational contexts (Cameron & McCollum, 1993). This work repositioned internal communication as a process of meaning-making and cultural alignment rather than mere information transfer.

Scholarship on communication and culture further supports this relational view of internal communication. Seminal work related to the role of communication in culture argues that communication itself is culture, where engaging in daily practices in modern society (including attending and performing work) requires an ongoing process of negotiating norms and values (Carey, 2009). While this work was based on a broad understanding of social realities, it proposes a lens for understanding the importance of communication in meaning-making, social order, and culture in workplace contexts. Communication plays an active role in the construction of meaning and expectations associated with workplace culture (Brown & Starkey, 1994). Culture is both a product of social interactions that occur through communicative acts and a tool for articulating organizational stakeholders' roles within their affiliated companies (Berger, 1969). Through daily internal communication practices including individual meetings, team meetings, announcements, performance reviews, and supervisor check-ins, employees understand expectations and how to align themselves with organizational values.

Consistent with these cultural perspectives, later scholarship defined internal communication as a dynamic organizational process with direct implications for employee stakeholders (Finet, 1994). A growing body of research increasingly showed that employee behavior reflects organizational norms that are learned and reinforced through communication (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). More recent research in public relations has shown that when these practices are perceived as supportive, transparent, and inclusive, employees reported higher engagement (Shen & Jiang, 2019) and greater perceived organizational support (Men & Yue, 2019). In addition to promoting

engagement, supportive communication climates can foster psychological safety, enabling employees to speak up, share ideas, and take risks without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Overall, this body of scholarship suggests that internal communication affects the relational and cultural conditions under which employee engagement develops.

Internal communication is not merely a channel for distributing information but also a cultural and relational process that shapes how employees interpret organizational values, norms, and expectations (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Because employees often experience these processes most directly through interactions with supervisors and organizational leaders, leadership communication becomes a particularly important area for examining how internal communication influences perceived support, psychological safety, and engagement. This study builds on that premise by examining dialogic leadership communication as a key communicative mechanism through which organizational culture and employee experience are shaped.

Internal Communication in Public Relations

Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of internal communication began to rise as disciplines like public relations gained legitimacy and relevance for effective organizational outcomes. In the 1980s, four fundamental models of public relations were defined as press agency, public information, one-way symmetrical, and two-way symmetrical communication (Hunt & Grunig, 1984). This work established public relations functions in practice and helped define communication strategy enacted for the

purpose of achieving organizational objectives. Throughout the 1990s the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, alongside other emergent relationship management theories (e.g., Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), demonstrated the field's promise for improved organizational communication specific to the formation of mutually beneficial relationships.

However, internal communication and relationship building among internal stakeholders were not often examined in scholarly work. By the early 2000s, public relations scholarship continued to grow as excellence theory and provided practical recommendations for the achievement of effective public relations functions within organizations (Grunig, Dozier, & Grunig, 2003). Theoretical development focused on the importance of stakeholder relationship management, recommended that public relations practitioners participate in upper management roles, and encouraged the use of two-way symmetrical communication in practice (Ferguson, 1984). It was also around this time that scholars began to note that internal communication was an understudied area of scholarship despite its importance in relationship building (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Within public relations scholarship, the terms *internal publics* and *internal stakeholders* are often used interchangeably; however, subtle distinctions between these concepts are important for theoretical clarity. Internal stakeholders are typically conceptualized as individuals or groups within an organization who have a vested interest in organizational outcomes (Welch & Jackson, 2007). In contrast, internal publics are more specifically defined within public relations as groups whose relationships with the

organization are shaped through communication processes and relational exchange (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). In this study, employees are conceptualized as internal publics to emphasize the role of communication in shaping their organizational experiences, although the terms are used interchangeably throughout to reflect broader disciplinary usage.

Internal communication is also distinguished from external communication by its focus on interactions that occur within the organizational boundary and among members who are structurally or relationally connected to the organization. These interactions include both formal and informal communication processes such as supervisor–employee exchanges, team meetings, organizational announcements, and everyday workplace interactions that shape employee understanding of organizational values and expectations (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012).

Within this context, internal publics may include employees at various levels, direct supervisors, managers, and organizational leadership, all of whom participate in and are affected by internal communication processes. While these groups may also be considered stakeholders, conceptualizing them as internal publics emphasizes their role as active participants in communication processes rather than solely as groups with vested interests in organizational outcomes. This distinction highlights the importance of examining how communication is experienced or signaled, interpreted, and finally enacted upon within internal organizational environments.

Organization-Public Relationships

As public relations theory matured, the discipline began to recognize and expand its focus beyond media relations and external image to consider the internal dynamics of organizations. Recognition that employees themselves acted as critical stakeholders for organizational success combined with rising calls for the practice of symmetrical communication laid the foundation for increased focus on strategic internal communication as a vital component of public relations practice. In 1999, the organization-public relationship (OPR) scale for measuring levels of trust, commitment, control mutuality, and satisfaction between organizations and their stakeholders was developed to explore the nature of internal relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999). While the scale was recommended for both internal and external stakeholder usage, little research at the time developed practical insights regarding the importance of internal relations, and research on internal organizational relationships remained underdeveloped. Later work links OPR dimensions such as trust and commitment to outcomes like employee engagement (Shen & Jiang, 2019) and perceptions of organizational support (Men & Yue, 2019), reinforcing their continued relevance to internal public relations research.

In their overview of public relations scholarship, Botan and Taylor (2004) identified a disciplinary turning point by calling attention to the shift from functional message-driven models of public relations to a more co-creational approach. This approach emphasized relationship building and dialogue across all publics, including internal stakeholders. They also highlighted the importance of employee recognition as a

strategy to improve organizational reputation and well-being (Botan & Taylor, 2004). These contributions assisted in the development of a more formalized and strategic approach to internal communication. Over the next decade, a more unified definition of internal communication within public relations emerged; it was increasingly understood as a strategic process aimed at informing or influencing internal stakeholders to support relationship building and organizational alignment (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

While relationship management and cultural approaches remained prominent as research developed excellence theory (Grunig et al., 2003) and the co-creational paradigm (Botan & Taylor, 2004), others focused on the use of dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002) and two-way communication (Grunig, 2013) within organizations to foster mutual understanding between internal publics. Scholars began to explore employees as agents for strategic organizational success (Ruck & Welch, 2012) by measuring their levels of trust, engagement, and commitment (e.g., Kim & Rhee, 2011). The recognition of employee voice, participation, and engagement as direct outcomes of internal communication also encouraged the use of participatory models that extended beyond employee understanding and compliance (Men & Stacks, 2014). Organizational leaders as internal communicators and as key figures for workplace culture and employee satisfaction also became a major focus in the study of internal communication (e.g., Men, 2014; Men & Robinson, 2018). Research revealed that, to optimize employee levels of trust and engagement, leadership should demonstrate a commitment to open, transparent communication with their internal stakeholders (Men & Stacks, 2014). These same leadership communication qualities have been linked to employees' perceptions of

organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), both of which can strengthen engagement outcomes.

Internal communication research from the discipline contributed to the broader understanding of public relations' role in overall organizational success. By recognizing employees as key stakeholders and connecting internal communication to business outcomes like productivity, innovation, engagement, and retention (Welch & Jackson, 2007), a framework for measuring internal communication effectiveness was developed to establish clear links to employee-related outcomes (Welch, 2012). The rise of social and digital media also played a role in shaping internal communication research throughout the 2010s. Organizations had a vested interest in better understanding digital spaces and how internal communication channels and platforms played a role in workplace communication and cultural dynamics (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfeld, 2013). Notable research in this area accounted for the rise of informal communication networks and exchanges, interactivity, bottom-up communication, and meaning-making in digital spaces (Braun et al., 2015).

Current Trends

Over the past decade, the body of internal communication research in public relations has grown and focused on structural changes in the workplace, including digitalization, the expansion of social platforms, evolving governance of communication practices, and shifts in work arrangements following the COVID-19 pandemic (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024). These developments highlight the need to examine internal communication from a strategic public relations perspective, as communication

challenges in contemporary workplaces are not solely technological but also relational and cultural in nature. In addition to technological shifts, post-pandemic workplace transformations have further reshaped internal communication demands. Employees increasingly prioritize work–life balance and flexibility (Parker et al., 2022), while hybrid and remote work arrangements require organizations to rely more heavily on mediated communication environments to maintain both connection and coordination. These shifts heighten the importance of strategic internal communication practices capable of sustaining relational connection, participation, and organizational alignment in contexts of reduced physical proximity (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024).

Evidence across sectors continues to demonstrate that internal communication remains consequential for employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. For example, studies in healthcare contexts show that supportive and transparent communication climates are associated with reduced stress, stronger relational outcomes, and increased employee engagement and commitment (Ledford et al., 2016; Apker et al., 2021; Men & Yue, 2019). These findings illustrate the continued relevance of internal communication as organizations navigate complex and rapidly changing work environments.

Beyond sector-specific trends, research consistently shows that supportive internal communication contributes to the development of positive relational climates characterized by trust, perceived organizational support, and commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Jiang & Shen, 2018; Men & Yue, 2019). These relational conditions are associated with important behavioral and organizational outcomes, including reduced

turnover intentions among public relations professionals (Jiang & Shen, 2018) and lower likelihood of employees engaging in negative discourse about their employers in digital spaces (Lee & Kim, 2020). Internal communication quality has also been linked to broader employee well-being and inclusion outcomes, such as increased workplace happiness and empowerment in the face of gender discrimination (Li, Lee, & Xu, 2023; Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2023). This work reinforces the role of internal communication as a key mechanism shaping both relational and behavioral employee experiences. These findings highlight the importance of examining specific communicative practices, particularly those enacted through leadership communication, in shaping employees' relational interpretations and engagement behaviors.

Shaping Culture Through Communication

Scholars have drawn significant connections between internal communication and organizational culture, with tangible outputs like corporate storytelling as a key strategy to align employees with organizational goals (Gill, 2015). Organizations that prioritize strategic internal communication efforts through storytelling, dialogue, and enforcing a culture of openness report higher levels of employee engagement, satisfaction, trust in leadership, perceived support, and safety for participation (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018; Edmondson, 1999).

Since public relations practitioners are often tasked with the enactment of internal communication strategy in practice, it is crucial for research to offer increased practical recommendations to support their efforts to foster meaningful, effective relationships (Waters, Bortree, & Tindall, 2013). The public relations practitioner also plays a pivotal

role in the creation and reinforcing of organizational culture through the communication of organizational mission, vision, and values (Spaeth, 2019). When internal communication is misaligned or ineffective for employee needs, the consequences may be decreased employee satisfaction, which can lead to reduced productivity or increased turnover rates (Jiang & Shen, 2018).

The trends in internal communication scholarship within the discipline of public relations demonstrate the evolving role of practitioners as facilitators of workplace culture, as most of their internal responsibilities are inherently tied to how culture is communicated, understood, and sustained within organizations (Spaeth, 2019). Despite the constraints of management hierarchies that may influence the internal strategic capability of public relations functions in practice, understanding the role of the public relations professional in relation to internal communication practices across industry sectors remains a key step in understanding practical function and impact.

Social Exchange Theory as an Explanatory Framework

To further clarify the mechanisms through which leadership communication influences employee engagement, this study draws on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) as an explanatory framework. SET conceptualizes social relationships as ongoing exchanges of valued resources that are governed by norms of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958). Under this theoretical lens, individuals assess interactions based on perceived benefits and costs and respond accordingly. If individuals perceive favorable treatment, they are more likely to reciprocate through positive

attitudes and behaviors that better support the relationship (Saks, 2006; Shen & Jiang, 2019).

In organizational contexts, social exchanges are embedded within daily interactions between employees and their organizations, often through exchanges with leadership, management, or supervisors. Leaders act as symbolic representatives of their organizations, and their communication behaviors serve as cues through which employees interpret organizational care and relational investment. As such, leadership communication extends beyond information exchange and operates as a relational resource that shapes employees' perceptions of their standing within the organization, which may have implications for their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward their organizations.

Prior research in organizational communication and management suggests that employees' interpretations of social exchanges in the workplace play a key role in shaping engagement-related outcomes. Employees do not respond solely to formal policies or structural incentives but also how organizational actions are communicated and enacted in everyday interactions. Communication scholars have increasingly emphasized that internal communication functions as a relational signal rather than a neutral information sharing process (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch, 2012). Leadership communication is an especially important exchange to consider as this type of communication can result in elevated employee care and support (Men & Bowen, 2017; Yue et al., 2020).

Perceived Organizational Support & Psychological Safety

Within SET, perceived organizational support (POS) represents a key mechanism through which employees interpret organizational investment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS reflects employees' beliefs regarding the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Empirical research has frequently positioned POS as a mediator linking leadership or communication practices to employee outcomes. For example, Saks (2006) demonstrated that organizational support predicts both job and organizational engagement through reciprocal exchange processes (Saks, 2006). Similarly, public relations research shows that supportive leadership communication strengthens POS, which in turn enhances employee engagement, trust, and relational commitment (Men & Yue, 2019; Shen & Jiang, 2019). When employees perceive high levels of organizational support, they are more likely to feel obligated to reciprocate through greater engagement in their work. Research in public relations and organizational communication has consistently linked supportive communication environments to heightened POS, which in turn predicts engagement and relational commitment (Jiang & Shen, 2018; Shen & Jiang, 2019).

Psychological safety further complements this exchange-based perspective by capturing employees' perceptions of interpersonal risk at work. Psychological safety reflects the extent to which individuals feel safe expressing ideas, asking questions, or voicing concerns without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety has also been examined as an intervening mechanism in models of leadership communication, employee voice, and engagement-related

outcomes (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Research demonstrates that leadership behaviors promoting openness, inclusion, and responsiveness contribute to psychologically safe climates that encourage participation, learning behaviors, and proactive work engagement (Lee & Kim, 2021). From a social exchange perspective, psychologically safe environments signal relational trust and reduced power imbalance, which reinforces employees' beliefs that open communication and participation are valued by leadership (Lee & Kim, 2021).

Social exchange theory has been widely used to explain how supportive organizational and leadership practices translate into employee engagement through relational mechanisms. When employees perceive leadership communication as indicative of organizational support and psychological safety, they are more likely to reciprocate by investing cognitive, emotional, and physical energy into their work roles (Saks, 2006; Rich et al., 2010). When leadership communication has dialogic qualities that enhance perceptions of support and psychological safety, employees are more likely to reciprocate by fully engaging themselves in their work roles (Shen & Jiang, 2019). This study conceptualizes perceived organizational support and psychological safety as relational and psychological exchange mechanisms through which employees interpret dialogic leadership communication. Positioning these constructs as mediators allows for a precise understanding of how communication processes translate into specific, multidimensional engagement outcomes (Shen & Jiang, 2019).

Dialogic Theory

Dialogic theory is grounded in philosophical traditions and was developed in communication scholarship to offer a relational approach to understanding how communicating parties develop shared meaning (Alexander, 1985). Instead of a one-way transmission of information, dialogic communication considers additional factors like mutual understanding, open exchange, and ethical considerations (Kent & Taylor, 1998). As Grunig's two-way symmetrical communication became the standard for public relations theory and practice, Kent and Taylor (1998) argued that, without an understanding of dialogic communication, one is unable to fully grasp the concept of symmetry. Thus, dialogic theory shifts attention from the direction of communication toward the relational quality and ethical orientation of communicative exchanges. Developed for use in organizational contexts, the dialogic theoretical framework encourages the examination of communication between institutions and their internal and external stakeholders in fostering relationships.

Kent and Taylor (1998) argued that while two-way symmetrical communication allows organizations to communicate effectively with their publics, dialogic approaches focus more on the relational nature, quality, and outcomes of these communicative interactions. Dialogic perspectives consider the attitudes held by each party in communication transactions (Johannesen, 2001). Dialogue has also been defined as the basis for the formation of relationships rooted in openness and respect (Buber, 1958). Therefore, dialogic relationships can only exist when the communicating parties desire a shared outcome based on relationship formation or maintenance (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

In an effort to understand how the Internet impacts organization-public relations, Kent and Taylor (1998) relied on historical definitions of dialogic communication to modernize dialogic approaches to enhance strategic digital public relations. They also define dialogic communication as a standardized, ethical framework for relationship building in public relations practice. Philosophical foundations position dialogue as a process of relationship formation grounded in openness, recognition, and shared meaning rather than strategic message exchange (Buber, 1958; Johannesen, 2001).

Five key principles were articulated to form the basis of dialogic communication in strategic practice: mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Mutuality refers to the organization's ability to recognize stakeholders as equals. Propinquity considers an organization's capacity to participate in immediate, or spontaneous, communication in real time, before decisions are made. Its focus on timeliness during decision-making processes assists in relationship formation by keeping stakeholders informed rather than solely providing information after the fact. Empathy involves communicating from a place of understanding and articulating support. Risk is related to an organization's ability to be vulnerable and open to change throughout communicative interactions. Risk entails giving up some control in order to engage genuinely with stakeholders, even if it could result in unexpected or challenging feedback. Finally, commitment is conceived as organizational dedication to continuous engagement in dialogue.

Dialogic theory was originally conceptualized as a normative framework rather than an empirical measurement model; therefore, subsequent scholarship has sought to

operationalize how dialogue is perceived and experienced in organizational contexts (Yang et al., 2015). Yang, Kang, and Cha (2015) demonstrated that employees' perceptions of dialogic communication tend to cluster into broader dimensions of mutuality and openness, empirically capturing several dialogic principles such as empathy, responsiveness, accessibility, and transparency. Building on this approach, this study conceptualizes dialogic leadership communication as a perceptual orientation reflecting employees' holistic assessments of their leaders' dialogic behaviors rather than isolated evaluations of individual dialogic principles.

Digital Dialogic Communication

Although dialogic theory was initially developed to explain organization–public communication, its relational principles are highly applicable to internal stakeholder communication. As previously discussed, in the workplace, internal communication is not only used for transmitting orders or updates. Rather, it is also a process through which culture is constructed and reaffirmed, trust is established, perceptions of organizational support are strengthened, psychological safety is fostered, and employees are engaged.

Understanding internal communication from a dialogic perspective opens new possibilities for public relations practice to better evaluate how organizations are engaging with their internal stakeholders and what relational and context-based outcomes may be influenced by the communication. In response to increased calls for more ethical (e.g., Chen, Hung-Baesecke, & Chen, 2020) and inclusive (e.g., Kim, 2023) organizational communication related to leadership and employee implications, dialogic

theory provides a relevant and timely lens for these explorations. Specifically, dialogic principles align closely with engagement's emotional, cognitive, and physical dimensions identified in survey-based research examining how communication and relational workplace factors shape employees' investment in their work roles (Shen & Jiang, 2019). Perceived organizational support has been conceptualized and measured as employees' global beliefs about organizational care and valuation of their contributions in large-scale organizational behavior studies (Eisenberger et al., 1986), while psychological safety has been examined in team-based research as a shared perception that interpersonal risk-taking, idea sharing, and voice behaviors will not result in negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999).

In this study, dialogic theory provides the normative framework for evaluating the quality of leadership communication, while social exchange theory (Kahn, 1990), offers an explanatory mechanism for how employees respond to these communicative practices. Together, these perspectives position dialogic leadership communication as a relational exchange signal that shapes employee engagement through perceived organizational support and psychological safety.

In Public Relations

Early dialogic theory engagement in public relations focused largely on external stakeholder communication, especially that which occurred in digital contexts. For example, some early research examined how nonprofit organizations were utilizing dialogic principles on their websites to build and maintain relationships with their donors and supporters (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). That study used message interactivity,

return visit metrics, and access to decision-makers to operationalize dialogic strategy. As social media evolved, scholars continued to explore dialogic strategy on emergent platforms like Facebook and Twitter to build trust, encourage transparency and responsiveness, and to promote engagement from audiences (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters et al., 2009; McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Watkins, 2017). In more recent years, public relations scholarship continues to explore how dialogic theory is applied within organizations to build relationships with external publics. Dialogic theory remains one of the most cited theories in public relations scholarship (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Research employing it's ethical and relational integrates insight related to organizational communication and emphasizes important themes for public relations practice like mutuality, openness, and engagement.

A more recent shift toward the application of internal dialogic principles for stakeholder communication is evidenced by ongoing research and publications in this area (e.g., Men & Bowen, 2017). Empirical studies have examined how leadership communication openness, responsiveness, and opportunities for employee participation influence relational and engagement outcomes in organizational settings (e.g., Atouba et al., 2016; Men & Yue, 2019). The rising emphasis on internal dialogic communication highlights the practical value of dialogue for strengthening organizational relationships, improving communication climates, and supporting strategic public relations objectives (Men & Bowen, 2017; Yue et al., 2021).

For example, survey-based research examining internal communication practices found that dialogic communication behaviors such as encouraging upward

communication and maintaining leadership visibility were positively associated with employee organizational identification and engagement (Atouba et al., 2016). Related public relations scholarship demonstrates that supportive, dialogic leadership communication contributes to employees' perceptions of organizational support and more participatory communication climates that enable employee input (Men & Yue, 2019). These relational dynamics are conceptually aligned with psychological safety research showing that environments characterized by openness and interpersonal trust promote employee participation and idea sharing (Edmondson, 1999). In addition, research on internal communication strategy suggests that framing communication as a relationship-building process rather than a one-way information function reinforces dialogic principles in practice (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Despite the growing area of interest in internal dialogic communication in public relations, it remains understudied (Kent, 2023). Scholarship that explores the use of dialogic principles in external practice have been evolving for more than two decades (e.g., Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008), yet few studies translate these concepts and findings into tangible internal applications. Since public relations professionals are experts on communication strategies and often oversee internal and external messages, they are uniquely positioned to examine and enrich dialogue use in day-to-day communication practices. Research suggests that not only does dialogue use help to shape workplace culture (Men & Yue, 2019) but also its application is an essential component of advancing organizational and employee-based objectives toward more ethical, transparent, and effective public relations strategies (Kent, 2023).

Dialogue in Leadership Communication

As noted, dialogic theory has traditionally emphasized its five main relational dimensions of mutuality, propinquity, risk, commitment, empathy, and responsiveness. However, much of the existing literature overlooks the role of leadership and supervisory communication in facilitating and enacting dialogue within organizations. Internal communication effectiveness and success are deeply influenced by how leaders communicate with their teams and employees (Schamir, Arthur, & House, 1994; Harrison & Mühlberg, 2014; Men, 2015). The modern internal communication landscape is characterized by various changing factors, including digital platforms, fragmented interactions, and diminishing face-to-face exchanges (Tkalac Verčič, 2024). Therefore, it is critical to examine how leadership communication facilitates, enacts, and sustains dialogue within organizations. Since leadership communication sets the tone for key aspects of organizational culture (Schnurr, 2009), it is important to identify how dialogic communication may best support employee engagement and the relational conditions that enable it, such as perceived support and psychological safety. By exploring employees' perceptions of dialogue in leadership and supervisory communication, this study reveals the extent to which these perceptions can act as predictors of employee engagement and supportive workplace climates.

A communication-centered approach to leadership identifies communication as the central, defining, and constitutive feature of leadership (Lee & Kim, 2021). Leadership communication refers to the process through which leaders connect with stakeholders to inform, influence, and promote alignment with organizational goals

(Harrison & Mühlberg, 2014). While communication is considered a central component of leadership itself (Schamir, Arthur, & House, 1994), few studies have attempted to operationalize daily communication transactions between leadership and their teams to identify specific styles or characteristics (de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2009). To answer the call to explore the impact of leadership style on antecedents of effective internal communication, many studies in public relations have analyzed transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership communication on employee outcomes (e.g., Jiang & Men, 2016; Men & Stacks, 2014).

More recently, leadership communication has emerged as an important area of interest for public relations scholars since it can shape how internal stakeholders view an organization's reputation and image (Men & Bowen, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2021). While research has shown that strategic leadership communication can advance public relations functions (Men, 2015), few studies have investigated the effects of dialogue on employee engagement and related relational outcomes. It is recommended that public relations professionals improve leadership communication by enhancing symmetrical communication, facilitating feedback opportunities, and developing training programs for leaders within their organizations (Lee & Kim, 2021). Supportive, relationship-oriented leadership communication promotes employee trust and engagement (Lee & Kim, 2021) as well as employees' perceptions of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and feelings of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). However, little research addresses direct employee behavioral outcomes related to internal stakeholder dialogic perceptions.

Dialogic Theory Critiques

Despite its prominence in public relations scholarship, dialogic theory has received ongoing conceptual and empirical critiques (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Scholars have noted that dialogue is often inconsistently defined and operationalized within public relations research, leading to variation in how dialogic principles are interpreted and applied across studies (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012; Gutiérrez-García, Recalde, & Piñera-Camacho, 2015). Others have noted its theoretical applications often diverge from its deeper ethical and philosophical roots by focusing on outcomes rather than the intrinsic values of dialogue itself (Gutiérrez-García, Recalde, & Piñera-Camacho, 2015). The public relations field has been largely criticized for reducing the value of dialogue as a way to achieve organizational goals rather than as a process for mutual understanding (Theunissen & Wan Noordin 2012). Thus, dialogic practice may be misapplied or reduced to a checklist of tools. To avoid misuse, it is essential for researchers to continue to conceptualize and operationalize dialogue as a dynamic, open-ended, and reciprocal process separate from persuasion. One suggestion for improvement includes reframing publics outside of the organization as co-creators of meaning rather than stagnant, or as normative receivers of organizational information and messages (Theunissen & Wan Noordin 2012).

One study analyzed the evolution of dialogic theory in public relations research and concluded that while social media offer interactive features to promote dialogic communication, most organizations do not realize true dialogic potential in digital environments (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Also, many organizations favor one-way

communication in their use of digital tools for disseminating information rather than engaging in genuine dialogue. These findings echo additional claims that when operating under pressure, organizations tend to revert to one-way communication strategies (Theunissen & Wan Noordin 2012). Measurement tools for dialogic features in digital environments like feedback forms and comment sections are also often used as proxies for actual dialogue in content analyses, which can oversimplify the theoretical implications (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018).

Scholars have also raised concerns about performative dialogue, noting that organizations may adopt dialogic strategies to maintain communicative control rather than to share power with stakeholders (Davidson, 2016). These critiques highlight the need to move beyond treating dialogic theory as an aspirational ethical ideal toward developing empirically grounded applications. Some scholars argue that theoretical advancement has been limited since the articulation of Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2002) five dialogic principles, resulting in a perceived theoretical plateau (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Advancing dialogic theory therefore requires greater attention to dialogic intent, communicative behaviors, and measurable relational outcomes.

Responding to these calls, the present study examines dialogic leadership communication as a relational mechanism influencing employee engagement, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety. By focusing on internal stakeholder communication and leadership's role in shaping participatory communication cultures, this research contributes to extending dialogic theory into contemporary organizational practice (Capizzo, 2018).

Linking Leadership and Dialogue

In this research, dialogic theory is operationalized through leadership communication by examining how employees perceive dialogic elements in everyday supervisory interactions. Leadership communication occurs across multiple formal and informal interactions that signal supportive and participatory workplace cultures. For example, mutuality is reflected when supervisors invite employee input into decision-making, while propinquity is demonstrated through leadership visibility and responsiveness. Empathy and commitment are reflected in leaders' efforts to acknowledge employee contributions, support professional needs, and foster climates of trust and inclusion. These communicative principles can strengthen perceptions of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999).

While leadership communication has been examined through various leadership styles such as transformational (e.g., Men, 2014), ethical (e.g., Meng & Neill, 2022), and participatory (e.g., Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2022), these approaches often emphasize leaders' specific behaviors, traits, or decision-making orientations. In contrast, dialogic leadership communication is conceptualized as a communicative signal that is interpreted by employees through their everyday interactions with leadership. Rather than focusing solely on what leaders intend or enact, this perspective centers on how employees receive, experience, and make sense of leadership communication as more or less dialogic. Accordingly, dialogic leadership communication reflects employees' perceptions of relational and responsive communication processes. Instead of

representing a discrete leadership style, this approach functions as a communicative orientation that can be enacted across leadership styles, industry types, and hierarchical levels, ultimately shaping how leaders are understood through their communication practices. This distinction is especially important as leaders with similar styles or intentions may still differ significantly in how dialogic their communication is perceived to be in practice by employees.

Since employees typically experience dialogic communication through ongoing, daily interactions with organizational leadership, their overall perceptions thereof offer a meaningful way to evaluate these routine processes. Rather than focusing on isolated leadership communication behaviors, this study employs the dialogic communication scale developed by Yang, Kang, and Cha (2015) to capture employees' holistic perceptions of dialogic leadership communication. These perceptions provide a useful proxy for assessing the relational quality and effectiveness of leadership communication enacted through dialogue across varying leadership styles and organizational contexts. It is also important to recognize that leadership communication is often shaped by individual leadership styles and preferences (Men, 2014). Leaders may vary in their natural inclination toward openness, responsiveness, and employee involvement, which can influence how dialogic principles are enacted in practice. As a result, even within the same organizational context, employees may experience varying levels of dialogic leadership communication depending on how individual leaders approach communication.

Emerging empirical research supports integrating leadership communication and dialogic interaction as predictors of employee trust, engagement, and satisfaction (e.g., Yue et al., 2021; Men & Stacks, 2014). Leadership visibility, closely aligned with dialogic propinquity, can enhance employee trust (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Beyond trust, dialogic leadership communication may strengthen employees' beliefs that organizations value and support them and foster psychologically safe environments that encourage voice and initiative. Each of these conditions can enhance engagement (Men & Yue, 2019; Edmondson, 1999; Shen & Jiang, 2019). These findings support linking leadership communication practices linked with dialogic frameworks in research. Not only is leadership communication supplemented by dialogic principles, but also it is integral to its success.

Integrating leadership communication into dialogic theory responds to critiques regarding the theory's limited measurement and application in internal organizational contexts (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Given that employees often interpret the dialogic nature of their organizations through leadership, their immediate supervisors, or senior leaders, this study also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of internal dialogue. Framing POS and psychological safety as relational outcomes of dialogic leadership provides an additional mechanism to explain how perceptions of dialogue can translate into deeper engagement, resonating with the call for improved dialogic models to capture complexities, subjectivity, and power dynamics (Capizzo, 2018).

Extending dialogic theory to leadership communication enhances its relevance for understanding relational workplace dynamics in contemporary organizations. As scholars

seek to inform increased relational, participatory, and ethical workplaces in public relations practice (Kent, 2023), it is vital to analyze how leadership communication can represent dialogic perceptions. Since dialogue has significant implications for employee trust, engagement, and organizational reputation (Men & Bowen, 2017; Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2021), and is conceptually aligned with supportive climates (POS) and safe spaces for voice (psychological safety), it may also be linked to the multidimensional aspects (physical, emotional, and cognitive) of engagement (Shen & Jiang, 2019). Accordingly, dialogic leadership communication is examined in this study as an overarching communicative orientation grounded in dialogic theory and operationalized using established empirical measures. Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study examines how employees' perceptions of dialogic leadership communication relate to engagement and key relational workplace conditions. So, the first research question is posed:

RQ1: How are employee perceptions of dialogic leadership communication associated with employee engagement?

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a multidimensional construct that reflects the physical, emotional, and cognitive investment employees bring to their work roles (Shen & Jiang, 2019). Engaged employees demonstrate vigor, dedication, and absorption in their tasks, which has been linked to enhanced performance, lower turnover intentions, and stronger organizational cultures (Jiang & Men, 2016; Lemon & Palenchar, 2018). In public relations and internal communication scholarship, engagement is increasingly recognized

as a key strategic outcome of effective communication practices (Men & Stacks, 2014; Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2021).

Shen and Jiang's (2019) model of engagement offers a particularly useful framework for public relations research, as it captures the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of workplace involvement. Physical engagement reflects the level of energy and effort employees devote to their work, and emotional engagement measures their affective connection to their roles and organizations. Finally, cognitive engagement captures their focus, absorption, and willingness to apply mental resources to work tasks.

Research indicates that internal communication quality, especially when it is open, transparent, and participatory, plays a significant role in fostering engagement (Men & Yue, 2019; Lemon & Boman, 2022). Dialogic leadership communication is uniquely positioned to promote engagement by inviting employee input, demonstrating empathy, and committing to ongoing, two-way interaction, which are behaviors that align directly with the core principles of dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). In this study, employee engagement is measured using Shen and Jiang's (2019) validated scale to assess physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions as primary outcomes of dialogic leadership communication.

Dialogic leadership communication is expected to function as a relational exchange cue that encourages employees to invest greater physical effort, emotional connection, and cognitive focus in their work roles:

H1a: Employees who perceive higher levels of dialogic leadership communication will report higher levels of physical engagement.

H1b: Employees who perceive higher levels of dialogic leadership communication will report higher levels of emotional engagement

H1c: Employees who perceive higher levels of dialogic leadership communication will report higher levels of cognitive engagement

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' beliefs about the extent to which their organizations value their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). High POS has been consistently linked to increased organizational commitment, reduced turnover intentions, and greater discretionary effort (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In public relations contexts, POS is closely related to the trust and commitment dimensions of the organization–public relationship (OPR) framework (Hon & Grunig, 1999) and is an important indicator of relationship quality between employees and the organization (Men & Yue, 2019).

Internal communication plays a central role in shaping POS. Supportive, transparent, and responsive communication signals that the organization respects employees' perspectives and prioritizes their needs (Jiang & Shen, 2018). Dialogic leadership communication signals organizational support, especially when leaders actively seek employee input, respond to concerns, and provide timely, relevant information.

Although POS is not the primary dependent variable in this study, it will be included as an environmental, relational factor that may explain how dialogic leadership influences engagement. From a social exchange perspective, perceived organizational support reflects employees' evaluations of the organization's commitment based on repeated communicative interactions. Leadership communication that signals respect, responsiveness, and investment may therefore function as an exchange cue, shaping employees' perceptions of support and obligation. Specifically, this study will examine whether POS acts as a mediator between dialogic leadership communication and the physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement.

H2: Perceived dialogic leadership communication will be positively associated with employees' perceived organizational support.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is defined as a shared belief among team members that it is safe to take interpersonal risks. In the workplace these risks can include things like sharing ideas, asking questions, or admitting mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). In organizational contexts, psychological safety supports learning, innovation, and proactive communication behaviors (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It is conceptually aligned with dialogic principles such as risk, empathy, and mutuality, which emphasize openness, trust, and shared responsibility in communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Public relations scholarship has indirectly addressed psychological safety through studies on open communication climates, employee voice, and inclusive leadership

communication (Men & Bowen, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2021). When employees perceive leadership communication as participatory and responsive, they are more likely to share ideas and concerns, which is essential for effective dialogic communication practice.

In this study, psychological safety is conceptualized as an environmental, relational condition that may mediate the relationship between dialogic leadership communication and employee engagement. Within social exchange theory (Kahn, 1990), psychological safety can be understood as an assessment of interpersonal risk and trust in workplace exchanges. When leadership communication demonstrates dialogic qualities such as openness, empathy, and willingness to share control, employees may perceive the exchange environment as low-risk, reinforcing safety and engagement. Leaders who demonstrate dialogic behaviors such as inviting input before decisions are made (*propinquity*) or showing genuine understanding of employee perspectives (*empathy*) may foster a psychologically safe environment, thereby increasing employees' willingness to invest physically, emotionally, and cognitively in their work.

H3: Perceived dialogic leadership communication will be positively associated with employees' psychological safety.

Having reviewed the theory and literature supporting this research, as well as the research questions and hypotheses, the next chapter outlines the methods used for examination.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study employs a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the relationships among dialogic leadership communication, employee engagement, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety among public relations professionals. The survey method was selected because it enables systematic assessment of employees' perceptions of leadership communication behaviors and workplace experiences across organizational contexts. Given the study's focus on latent constructs grounded in dialogic theory and social exchange theory, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used as the primary analytic approach. SEM is well suited for testing theory-driven models involving multiple interrelated constructs measured through observed indicators, allowing for the simultaneous estimation of measurement quality and structural relationships (Kline, 2016).

This chapter outlines the sampling strategy and participant characteristics, recruitment and data collection procedures, measurement of focal constructs, data preparation and screening procedures, and the analytic strategy used to test the proposed theoretical model.

Sampling and Participants

Participants were recruited using a purposive convenience sampling strategy that targeted communication professionals who were current members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), a national professional association representing practitioners across organizational and agency contexts. This population was selected to align with the

theoretical focus of the study, which examines perceptions of leadership communication and employee engagement within communication-intensive professional roles.

Eligibility criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age, be employed full-time in public relations, strategic communication, or a closely related communication function, and work under the supervision of a direct manager or organizational leader. Participants were also required to work within a team or organizational unit to meaningfully assess perceptions of psychological safety within their immediate work environments.

A purposive focus on PRSA membership for participants was theoretically justified because communication practitioners are more likely to possess baseline familiarity with organizational communication processes, professional norms, and leadership messaging practices (Grunig, 2013; Sha, 2011). This professional expertise positions them to evaluate more nuanced characteristics of dialogic leadership communication, thereby enhancing construct validity when assessing relational perceptions of leadership communication behaviors. Sampling within a defined professional population also reduces interpretive variability that may arise when respondents differ substantially in occupational role or communication expectations (Men & Bowen, 2017).

Although this sampling approach supports theory development within the public relations context, it does not permit statistical generalization to all employee populations. Rather, findings are intended to provide analytical generalization regarding the relational mechanisms through which dialogic leadership communication may influence employee

engagement outcomes. In addition, they will provide rich insight given the participant's communicative experience.

A target sample size of approximately 200 or more participants was established based on recommended guidelines for structural equation modeling involving multiple latent constructs and estimated parameters (Kline, 2016). This threshold was intended to support stable model estimation and adequate statistical power for detecting structural relationships. The researcher monitored incoming responses throughout the data collection period to evaluate response quality.

Procedure

Following approval from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited to complete an anonymous online survey administered through Qualtrics. Recruitment targeted members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in chapters across the United States.

A systematic outreach process was employed using the publicly available PRSA chapter directory. Chapter leaders were identified through chapter websites and contacted directly via professional email or LinkedIn messaging. In cases where individual leadership contact information was not publicly listed, recruitment requests were sent through general chapter communication channels (e.g., "info@" or chapter contact forms). Recruitment messages included a brief description of the study purpose, eligibility criteria, estimated survey length, and the voluntary nature of participation. Chapter leaders were asked to share the survey link with their membership through newsletters, email distributions, and social media channels.

In addition to chapter-level outreach, the survey link was disseminated through professional networking platforms and relevant practitioner communication channels to broaden visibility among eligible public relations professionals. The survey instrument included a screening question to confirm active PRSA membership. If respondents did not meet this criteria they were removed from the survey. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no incentives were provided to organizations or chapter leaders for distributing the survey. However, individual participants were offered an incentive for participation in the form of a $20 Amazon gift card.

After accessing the survey link, participants first reviewed an informed consent statement that outlined study procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality protections, and the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. A brief screening section confirmed eligibility using the aforementioned criteria prior to proceeding to the main questionnaire. Eligible participants then completed measures assessing perceptions of dialogic leadership communication (Yang et al., 2015), employee engagement (Shen & Jiang, 2019), perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), followed by demographic and professional background questions (see Appendix for full questionnaire).

To acknowledge participants' time while preserving survey anonymity, respondents were invited to complete a separate optional form to receive the digital gift card, which was distributed to the first 220 eligible participants who completed the survey. Contact information for incentive distribution was collected independently from survey responses and could not be linked to questionnaire data.

The survey was estimated to require approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Data collection occurred over a multi-week period spanning from February 19 to March 13, 2026, during which reminder outreach was periodically conducted through chapter contacts and professional communication channels to support response rates.

Measures

The online questionnaire consisted of multiple sections designed to assess employees' perceptions of leadership communication and workplace experience. The survey was structured to present study variables in separate blocks to reduce potential response bias. All substantive constructs were measured using previously validated multi-item scales drawn from public relations, organizational communication, and management scholarship. As necessary, minor wording adaptations were made to reflect an internal organizational communication context and to ensure clarity for practitioner respondents.

Attitudinal constructs were measured using Likert-type agreement scales. Dialogic leadership communication, employee engagement, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety were assessed using five-point Likert-type agreement scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Additional measures assessing communication frequency, effectiveness, and workplace characteristics used response formats appropriate to the construct being measured.

Demographic measures included age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income, years of work experience, tenure with current employer, industry, organizational size, and organizational level or role. Additional professional background questions assessed PRSA membership status, accreditation, reporting structure, number of direct reports,

years of work experience, and work modality (e.g., remote or hybrid versus in-office). These variables were used for descriptive purposes and considered potential control variables where theoretically appropriate.

The questionnaire was structured to guide respondents from perceptions of leadership communication to broader workplace attitudes and finally demographics. Following eligibility screening, participants first responded to items assessing perceptions of dialogic leadership communication in reference to their current direct supervisor or manager (*hereafter referred to as leaders*). Subsequent sections assessed employee engagement at the individual job level, perceived organizational support at the organizational level, and psychological safety at the immediate team level, reflecting the relational focus of the study. Presenting constructs in this sequence was intended to reduce priming effects and encourage respondents to evaluate leadership communication before considering broader workplace outcomes.

Demographic and professional background questions were positioned at the end of the survey to minimize respondent fatigue and reduce potential stereotype or identity priming effects (e.g., Stern et al., 2014). The survey concluded with a redirect to a separate external form for incentive distribution to maintain anonymity of substantive responses.

Dialogic Leadership Communication

Dialogic leadership communication was measured using items adapted from the organization–public dialogic communication (OPDC) scale (Yang et al., 2015), which operationalizes dialogic communication as higher-order perceptions of mutuality and openness grounded in dialogic theory (Yang et al., 2015). Although originally developed

to assess organization–public dialogue in external contexts, the scale was adapted to reflect internal stakeholder perceptions of leadership communication. Fifteen items assessed employees' perceptions of leaders' use of dialogic principles, including propinquity, empathy, mutuality, risk, and commitment. See Table 1 for the adapted scale items.

Table 3.1
Dialogic Leadership Communication Scale (Yang et al., 2015, adapted)

Dimension	Survey Items
Propinquity	My leaders communicate with employees before making important decisions. My leaders respond promptly to employees' questions or concerns. My leaders keep employees informed about changes as they happen.
Empathy	My leaders try to understand problems from employees' perspectives. My leaders are sensitive to employees' needs in the moment. My leaders communicate in ways that show they care about employees' feelings.
Mutuality	My leaders value employees' opinions. My leaders encourage employees to share their ideas. My leaders treat employees as partners in solving workplace issues.
Risk	My leaders are willing to admit when they do not have all the answers. My leaders are open to feedback, even if it is critical. My leaders are willing to change their approach based on employees' input.
Commitment	My leaders make a genuine effort to maintain two-way communication over time. My leaders follow through on what they say they will do. My leaders consistently make time to listen to employees.

Table 3.1 Continued
Note. All items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was measured using Shen and Jiang's (2019) multidimensional engagement scale, which captures physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement. The scale includes 18 items measuring intensity, enthusiasm, and immersion at work. Sample items include "I exert my full effort on my job" (*physical*), "I am enthusiastic in my job" (*emotional*), and "At work, I pay a lot of attention to my job" (*cognitive*). See Table 2 for the complete scale.

Table 3.2
Employee Engagement Scale (Shen & Jiang, 2019)

Dimension	Items
Physical	I work with intensity on my job.
	I exert my full effort on my job.
	I devote a lot of energy to my job.
	I try my hardest to perform well on my job.
	I strive as hard as I can to complete my job.
	I exert a lot of energy on my job.
Emotional	I am enthusiastic in my job.
	I feel energetic at my job.
	I am interested in my job.
	I am proud of my job.
	I feel positive about my job.
	I am excited about my job.

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Cognitive	During work, my mind is focused on my job.
	During work, I pay a lot of attention to my job.
	During work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job.
	During work, I am immersed in my job.
	During work, I concentrate on my job.
	I devote a lot of attention to my job.

Note. All items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Perceived organizational support was assessed using Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Survey of Perceived Organizational Support. Eight items measured the extent to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (e.g., "My organization values my contributions to its well-being"). Two items were reverse scored. See Table 3 for the complete list of items.

Table 3.3
Perceived Organizational Support Scale (Eisenberger et al., 1986)

Items (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree → Strongly Agree)
My organization values my contributions to its well-being.
My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
My organization really cares about my well-being.
My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
My organization cares about my opinions.
Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.
My organization would show very little concern for me if I were absent for a long time. (R)
Even if I did the best job possible, my organization would fail to notice. (R)

Note. (R) = reverse-scored items.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety was measured using Edmondson's (1999) seven-item scale, which assesses the extent to which employees perceive their work groups as safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Items assess the degree to which employees hold these perceptions (e.g., "It is safe to take a risk on this team"). Three items are reverse scored. See Table 4 for the complete list of scale items.

Table 3.4
Psychological Safety Scale (Edmondson, 1999)

Items (5-point Likert: Strongly Disagree → Strongly Agree)
If you make a mistake on your team, it is often held against you. (R)
Members of your team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
People on your team sometimes reject others for being different. (R)
It is safe to take a risk on your team.
It is difficult to ask other members of your team for help. (R)
No one on my team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
Working with members of my team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Note. (R) = reverse-scored items.

Control Variables

Several demographic and professional characteristics were assessed and considered as potential control variables in the structural model. Control variables were selected based on prior research in internal communication (e.g., Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007), leadership communication (e.g., Men & Bowen, 2017), and employee engagement (e.g., Shen & Jiang, 2019) suggesting that workplace experiences

and relational perceptions may vary across organizational context and career stage (Saks, 2006).Variables considered included organizational tenure, tenure with current supervisor, organizational size, position level, and work arrangement (e.g., remote, hybrid, or on-site). These factors may influence employees' opportunities for interaction with leaders, exposure to organizational communication processes, and access to relational resources that shape engagement outcomes. For example, employees in larger organizations or more senior roles may experience leadership communication differently than those in smaller organizations or entry-level positions.

In addition, measures related to frequency of communication with supervisors and leadership span of control (i.e., the number of employees directly managed) were collected to provide contextual insight into supervisory relationships. These variables were examined descriptively and considered for inclusion as control variables as theoretically justified and statistically appropriate.

Consistent with recommendations for structural equation modeling, control variables were included selectively to avoid unnecessary model complexity and potential overfitting (Kline, 2016). Only variables demonstrating meaningful associations with focal constructs or contributing to improved model fit were retained in final analyses.

Data Preparation and Screening

Prior to hypothesis testing, data were cleaned and screened to ensure suitability for structural equation modeling (SEM). Data cleaning procedures were conducted using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics, followed by model estimation in SPSS AMOS.

Initial screening involved removal of incomplete responses and cases that did not meet eligibility criteria. Responses with substantial missing data were excluded using listwise deletion, consistent with SEM recommendations when missingness is minimal and data are assumed to be missing at random (Kline, 2016). For cases with limited item-level missingness, mean substitution within scale dimensions was considered only when fewer than 5% of items were missing.

Given increasing concerns regarding data integrity in online survey research, additional procedures were implemented to identify potentially fraudulent or low-quality responses. Online surveys are vulnerable to risks such as automated bot participation, duplicate submissions, and misrepresentation of eligibility characteristics, particularly when incentives are offered (Georgeac, 2026). Researchers are therefore encouraged to adopt multi-indicator screening approaches when evaluating response validity.

Responses were first examined for unusually short completion times relative to the estimated survey duration. Extremely short completion times were treated as indicators of insufficient engagement with survey content. Patterned responding, including straightlining across multi-item scales, was also evaluated as a potential indicator of inattentive or automated responding (Hulland et al., 2018).

Geographic metadata recorded by the survey platform were inspected for duplicate latitude and longitude coordinates. While shared geolocation alone does not necessarily indicate fraudulent participation, disproportionately repeated geographic indicators may signal coordinated or automated entries and were therefore examined in conjunction with other quality indicators (Georgeac, 2026).

Univariate and multivariate outliers were assessed prior to model estimation. Standardized z-scores were inspected for extreme values, and Mahalanobis distance statistics were used to identify potential multivariate outliers that could distort parameter estimates in SEM analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983).

Distributional assumptions were evaluated through examination of skewness and kurtosis at the item level. Maximum likelihood estimation in SEM assumes approximate multivariate normality; however, SEM procedures are generally robust to moderate deviations from normality in samples of sufficient size (Kline, 2016).

Multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted using variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics to ensure that predictor constructs were sufficiently distinct. High multicollinearity can inflate standard errors and compromise interpretability of structural relationships (Hair, 2010). Correlation matrices were also inspected to confirm theoretically expected relationships without evidence of construct redundancy.

Following data screening, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated through standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Hair, 2010). These procedures align with best practices for validating latent constructs in public relations research employing SEM approaches (Men, Yue, & Liu, 2020).

Only after confirming acceptable measurement properties and data assumptions was the dataset deemed appropriate for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural

model testing. After applying data screening procedures, the final analytic sample consisted of N = 407.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships among dialogic leadership communication, employee engagement, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety. SEM is particularly appropriate for theory-driven research involving latent constructs measured through multiple observed indicators, as it allows researchers to simultaneously assess measurement quality and structural relationships within a unified analytic framework (Kline, 2016). Compared to traditional regression approaches, SEM provides a more rigorous examination of complex relational models by accounting for measurement error and enabling the estimation of both direct and indirect effects.

SEM has been increasingly utilized in public relations scholarship to examine internal communication processes (e.g., Men et al., 2020), leadership communication (e.g., Men & Stacks, 2014), employee relational outcomes (e.g., Ki & Hon, 2007), and organizational support dynamics (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Consistent with this tradition, SEM was selected to test the proposed theoretical model grounded in dialogic theory and social exchange theory.

Analyses were conducted using SPSS AMOS with maximum likelihood estimation. A two-step modeling procedure was implemented in accordance with recommended SEM practices (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Kline, 2016). First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model.

Model evaluation focused on standardized factor loadings, internal consistency reliability, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and evidence of discriminant validity among constructs (Hair, 2010).

Following establishment of an acceptable measurement model, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized direct relationships among latent variables. Structural paths were estimated simultaneously to account for intercorrelations among constructs and to evaluate the overall theoretical model.

Model fit was assessed using multiple indices to provide a comprehensive evaluation of model adequacy, including the chi-square statistic (χ^2), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). These indices collectively provide evidence regarding the extent to which the proposed model adequately represents the observed covariance structure (Kline, 2016).

To examine the indirect relationships proposed in the conceptual model, bootstrapping procedures with bias-corrected confidence intervals were used to test mediation effects. Bootstrapping is recommended for mediation testing in SEM because it does not assume normality of indirect effect distributions and provides more accurate estimates of statistical significance (Rockwood & Hayes, 2020).



Figure 3.1. Proposed SEM model.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample

The final analytic sample consisted of 407 public relations and communication professionals representing diverse demographic, professional, and organizational backgrounds. The sample was predominantly male (66.3%), followed by female participants (32.2%), with a small proportion identifying as nonbinary or preferring not to disclose (1.2% combined).

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 64 years old, with the largest concentration in their mid-30s. Overall, the age distribution reflected a professionally experienced sample, with most respondents clustered between approximately 30 and 40 years old. Consistent with this pattern, tenure in the public relations or communication field was generally moderate to high, with the largest proportions reporting approximately five or eight years of professional experience.

In terms of racial and ethnic identity, the majority of respondents identified as White (68.6%), followed by Black or African American (22.1%). Smaller proportions identified as Hispanic or Latino (3.2%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (2.7%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (2.5%), and Asian (0.2%).

Most respondents reported holding a bachelor's degree (64.1%), followed by a master's degree (15.2%). Smaller proportions reported associate's degrees (7.6%), professional degrees (3.7%), doctoral degrees (2.0%), or some graduate coursework without degree completion (3.9%).

Respondents were employed across a range of organizational contexts. The largest proportion worked in corporate in-house communication roles (38.1%), followed by agency or consultancy positions (19.9%) and healthcare organizations (15.0%). Additional representation included education (10.1%), nonprofit or NGO settings (6.9%), higher education institutions (6.4%), and government organizations (3.2%).

Participants also represented diverse industry sectors. The largest proportions were employed in healthcare (19.7%), professional services (18.4%), and technology (18.4%), followed by energy and utilities (13.5%) and education (13.3%). Smaller proportions reported working in finance (7.6%), consumer goods (6.4%), and government sectors (1.2%). Annual income levels were broadly distributed, with the largest proportion reporting salaries between $40,000 and $60,000 (29.2%), followed by $60,000 to $80,000 (26.3%).

Geographically, respondents represented more than 40 U.S. states, with the largest concentrations located in California (20.1%), Tennessee (8.6%), Florida (8.1%), Texas (7.6%), and Arizona (6.4%).

Table 4.1

Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 407)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	270	66.3
	Female	131	32.2
	Nonbinary / Prefer not to say	5	1.2

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Race / Ethnicity	White	279	68.6
	Black or African American	90	22.1
	Hispanic / Latino	13	3.2
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	11	2.7
	American Indian / Alaskan Native	10	2.5
	Asian	1	0.2
Education Level	Bachelor's degree	261	64.1
	Master's degree	62	15.2
	Associate's degree	31	7.6
	Professional degree	15	3.7
	Doctoral degree	8	2.0
	Some graduate coursework	16	3.9
	Other / HS or less	14	3.4
Organizational Type	Corporate (In-house)	155	38.1
	Agency / Consultancy	81	19.9
	Healthcare	61	15.0
	Education	41	10.1
	Nonprofit / NGO	28	6.9
	Higher Education	26	6.4
	Government	13	3.2
Industry Sector	Healthcare	80	19.7
	Professional Services	75	18.4
	Technology	75	18.4
	Energy / Utilities	55	13.5
	Education	54	13.3
	Finance	31	7.6
	Consumer Goods	26	6.4
	Government	5	1.2
Annual Income	Less than $20,000	8	2.0
	$20,000–40,000	58	14.3
	$40,000–60,000	119	29.2

Table 4.1 (Continued)

$60,000–80,000	107	26.3
$80,000–100,000	57	14.0
$100,000+	55	13.5

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. All focal variables were positively associated with each other. Dialogic leadership communication was strongly correlated with employee engagement ($r = .80$, $p < .001$) and perceived organizational support ($r = .72$, $p < .001$), suggesting that employees who perceived higher levels of dialogic leadership communication also reported higher engagement and stronger perceptions of organizational support. Psychological safety was also positively related to dialogic leadership communication ($r = .27$, $p < .001$), perceived organizational support ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), and employee engagement ($r = .32$, $p < .001$), although these associations were comparatively weaker.

Although correlations between dialogic leadership communication and both employee engagement and perceived organizational support were substantial, they remained below commonly cited thresholds, indicating strong multicollinearity (e.g., $r \geq .90$). These results provided preliminary support for the theorized relationships and justified subsequent structural modeling to examine direct and mediated effects among the focal constructs (Kline, 2016).

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to conducting confirmatory factor analysis and structural model estimation, all Likert-type items were coded numerically from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly

agree). Reverse-worded indicators were recoded to ensure consistent scale directionality. Internal consistency reliability was then assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

The dialogic leadership communication scale demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .81), and the employee engagement scale demonstrated strong internal consistency (α = .88). The perceived organizational support scale initially exhibited low reliability due to misalignment of reverse-worded items (α = .21), a common issue in survey research where reverse-coded items can introduce measurement error and reduce internal consistency (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2003). After reverse coding and examination of corrected item–total correlations, two indicators were removed, resulting in an acceptable six-item measure (α = .65).

Psychological safety also demonstrated low reliability when all indicators were retained (α = .44). Following item-level evaluation, a refined three-item measure capturing core interpersonal safety perceptions was retained for subsequent analysis (α = .56). Although internal consistency was modest, lower reliability estimates are not uncommon in abbreviated scales (Little et al., 2002) and may reflect the multidimensional and context-sensitive nature of psychological safety perceptions across diverse organizational settings (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017).

Importantly, given the exploratory nature of this study and the use of a diverse practitioner sample, retaining theoretically central items helped ensure the constructs were meaningfully represented, even though internal consistency estimates were modest.

Inspection of descriptive distributions indicated adequate variability across all key variables and approximate univariate normality (Byrne, 2001). Subsequent analyses were conducted at both the latent construct level using individual indicators and at the composite level using scale means to examine structural relationships under different modeling specifications.

Table 4.2

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability, and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4
Dialogic Leadership Communication	3.57	.62	.81	—			
Perceived Organizational Support	3.38	.58	.65	.72***	—		
Psychological Safety	3.26	.50	.56	.27***	.23***	—	
Employee Engagement	3.63	.69	.88	.80***	.72***	.32***	—

Note. $N = 407$. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha. Correlations are Pearson's r. ***$p < .001$.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Prior to testing the hypothesized structural relationships, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the adequacy of the full measurement model including dialogic leadership communication, perceived organizational support, psychological safety, and employee engagement. Consistent with recommended two-step structural equation modeling procedures, the measurement model was assessed to establish acceptable levels of model fit and construct validity before proceeding to structural model estimation (Kline, 2016).

The four-factor measurement model demonstrated acceptable overall fit with the data, $\chi^2(815) = 1181.88$, $\chi^2/df = 1.45$, CFI = .91, TLI = .90, and RMSEA = .033. Although the chi-square statistic was statistically significant, this result was not unexpected given the complexity of the model and sample size (Byrne, 2001). Overall, the pattern of approximate fit indices revealed that the hypothesized measurement structure provided a reasonable representation of the observed covariance matrix.

All retained indicators loaded significantly on their intended latent constructs, providing evidence of convergent validity (Kline, 2016). Standardized factor loadings were generally moderate to strong, indicating that the observed measures adequately reflected the underlying theoretical dimensions.

Examination of latent correlations indicated strong associations between dialogic leadership communication, perceived organizational support, and employee engagement, with comparatively weaker relationships observed for psychological safety. These results provided support for the adequacy of the measurement model and justified proceeding to structural model testing.

Structural Model

Full Mediation via Perceived Organizational Support

Following confirmation of the adequacy of the measurement model, the hypothesized structural relationships were tested using structural equation modeling. The primary structural model examined whether perceived organizational support mediated the relationship between dialogic leadership communication and employee engagement.

The full mediation model demonstrated acceptable overall fit to the data, $\chi^2(700) = 1013.62$, $\chi^2/df = 1.45$, CFI = .92, TLI = .91, and RMSEA = .033. Although the chi-square statistic was statistically significant, this result was not unexpected given model complexity and sample size (Byrne, 2001). Collectively, the approximate fit indices suggested that the structural model provided a reasonable representation of the observed covariance matrix.

Results indicated that dialogic leadership communication was a strong and statistically significant predictor of perceived organizational support ($\beta = .995$, $p < .001$). In turn, perceived organizational support was a strong and statistically significant predictor of employee engagement ($\beta = .957$, $p < .001$). These findings were consistent with the hypothesized mediation mechanism.

The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in both perceived organizational support ($R^2 = .99$) and employee engagement ($R^2 = .92$), indicating that dialogic leadership communication functioned as a dominant relational predictor within the model. Examination of total effects further indicated that dialogic leadership communication exerted a strong indirect influence on employee engagement through perceived organizational support. The structural relationships are demonstrated in Figure 4.1.

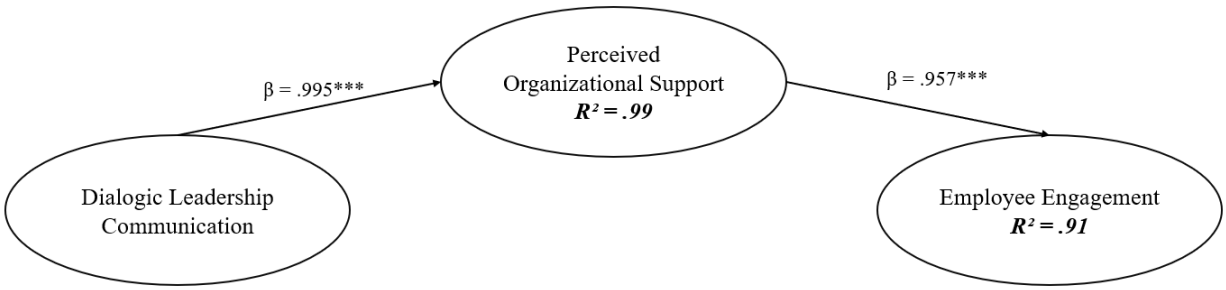


Figure 4.1. Full Mediation Model. Standardized coefficients shown. ***p < .001.

Structural equation model illustrates the fully mediated relationship between dialogic leadership communication and employee engagement through perceived organizational support. Standardized path coefficients are displayed. The model demonstrated acceptable overall fit to the data, $\chi^2(700) = 1013.62$, CFI = .92, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .033.

Supplementary Structural Analysis

Composite Path Model

Given the high degree of shared variance observed among key relational constructs and the convergence instability encountered in the full latent structural specification, a supplementary path analysis using composite scale scores was conducted. Methodological guidance suggests that when complex latent models present estimation challenges, more parsimonious structural models based on validated composite indicators can provide useful complementary insight into hypothesized relationships (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016). This approach allows researchers to examine structural pathways while

reducing model complexity and potential identification problems, particularly in contexts where constructs are theoretically related and empirically overlapping (Little et al., 2002). Given the high latent overlap observed in the measurement model, a supplementary path analysis was conducted using composite scale scores to further examine the proposed relationships. The observed-variable path model included dialogic leadership communication as an exogenous predictor of perceived organizational support, psychological safety, and employee engagement.

The composite path model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(1) = 1.59$, $p = .207$, $\chi^2/df = 1.59$, CFI = .999, TLI = .996, and RMSEA = .038. These indices suggested that the specified structural relationships provided a satisfactory representation of the observed covariance structure.

Results indicated that dialogic leadership communication was a strong and statistically significant predictor of perceived organizational support ($\beta = .671$, $p < .001$) and a smaller but statistically significant predictor of psychological safety ($\beta = .216$, $p < .001$). In turn, both perceived organizational support ($\beta = .332$, $p < .001$) and psychological safety ($\beta = .136$, $p < .01$) were positively associated with employee engagement.

Importantly, dialogic leadership communication also exerted a strong direct effect on employee engagement ($\beta = .638$, $p < .001$) after accounting for both mediators. These findings suggest evidence of parallel partial mediation, such that dialogic leadership communication influences employee engagement both directly and indirectly through relational mechanisms. The indirect pathway through perceived organizational support

was comparatively stronger, whereas psychological safety represented a smaller but statistically meaningful explanatory pathway.

This supplementary composite path analysis indicates that although perceived organizational support functions as a dominant mediator, dialogic leadership communication retains a substantial residual association with employee engagement and may also contribute to engagement through perceptions of psychological safety.

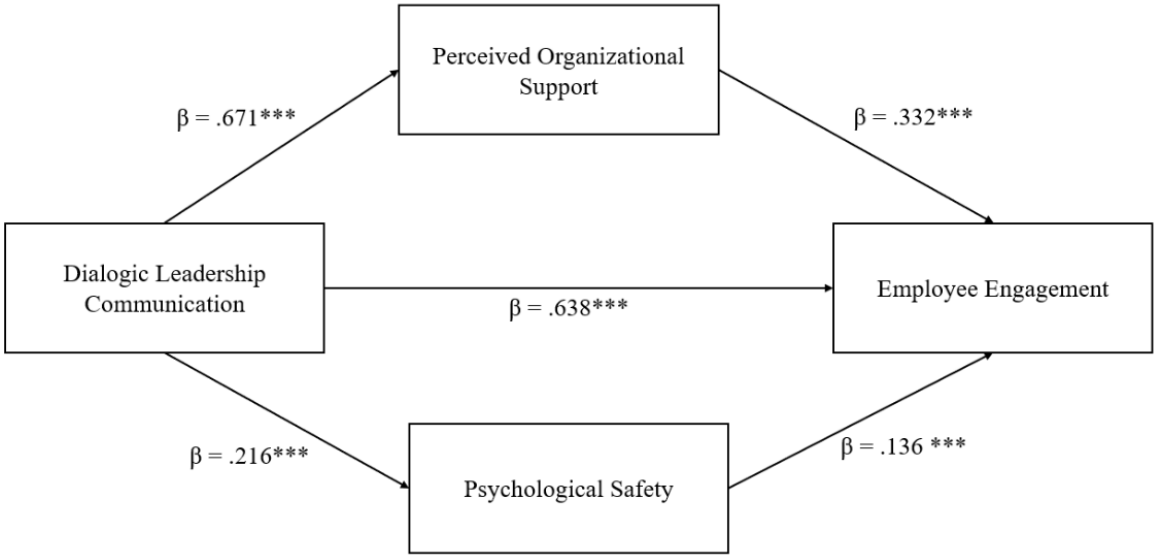


Figure 4.2. Full Composite Path Model. Standardized coefficients shown. ***p < .001.

The observed-variable path model demonstrated parallel partial mediation of the relationship between dialogic leadership communication and employee engagement through perceived organizational support and psychological safety. This composite model was estimated to further examine direct and indirect structural relationships following convergence instability in the full latent specification.

Comparison of Structural Modeling Approaches

Taken together, the latent structural model and the supplementary composite path analysis provide complementary insight into the relationship between dialogic leadership communication and employee engagement. In the latent structural model, the effect of dialogic leadership communication on employee engagement operated primarily through perceived organizational support. The strong association between dialogic leadership communication and perceived organizational support suggested substantial shared variance between these constructs, resulting in a fully mediated relational pathway at the latent level.

In contrast, the composite path analysis indicated that dialogic leadership communication retained a significant direct association with employee engagement ($\beta = .638$) after controlling for both perceived organizational support and psychological safety. This pattern suggests that dialogic leadership communication influences engagement through both generalized relational evaluations, such as perceptions of organizational support ($\beta = .995$, $p < .001$), and more immediate motivational or communicative mechanisms that are not fully captured by the mediators ($\beta = .638$).

The divergence between modeling approaches may reflect the difficulty of statistically partitioning highly overlapping relational constructs within complex latent structural models. Whereas latent SEM provides a more stringent test of unique construct-level effects by explicitly modeling measurement error (Little et al, 2002), composite path analysis offers a more parsimonious estimation of structural relationships among validated scale scores. Accordingly, taken together, the findings indicate that

dialogic leadership communication is strongly associated with employee engagement, with perceived organizational support functioning as a dominant explanatory pathway and psychological safety contributing additional, though smaller, explanatory value.

Hypothesis Testing

Overall, the findings provided substantial support for the proposed relationships among dialogic leadership communication, perceived organizational support, psychological safety, and employee engagement. Consistent with expectations, dialogic leadership communication was positively associated with employee engagement. The supplementary composite path analysis indicated that dialogic leadership communication retained a significant direct effect on employee engagement ($\beta = .638$), supporting the proposition that leadership communication behaviors are closely linked to employees' motivational investment in their work.

Perceived Organizational Support

Results also supported the hypothesized mediating role of perceived organizational support. Structural equation modeling demonstrated that dialogic leadership communication strongly predicted perceived organizational support ($\beta = .995$), which in turn was positively associated with employee engagement ($\beta = .957$). Thus, the influence of dialogic leadership communication on engagement operated primarily through employees' relational evaluations of organizational support at the latent construct level.

Finally, psychological safety emerged as a smaller but statistically significant mediator ($\beta = .029$) in the supplementary composite model. Although the latent structural

model was not able to compute associations involving psychological safety, the observed-variable path analysis indicated that dialogic leadership communication was positively related to psychological safety (β = .029), which was subsequently associated with higher levels of employee engagement (β = .136). Together, these results suggest evidence of parallel partial mediation, with perceived organizational support functioning as the dominant explanatory mechanism and psychological safety contributing incremental explanatory value.

Table 4.3

Unstandardized and Standardized Effects from Composite Path Analysis

Path	b	β	Bootstrap SE	p
H1: DLC → EE (Direct Effect)	.638	.638	.047	< .001
H2a: DLC → POS	.671	.671	.039	< .001
H2b: POS → EE	.332	.332	.051	< .001
H3a: DLC → PS	.216	.216	.043	< .001
H3b: PS → EE	.136	.136	.044	< .001
Indirect: DLC → POS → EE	.223	.223	—	—
Indirect: DLC → PS → EE	.029	.029	—	—
Total Effect: DLC → EE	.890	.890	—	—

Note. N = 407. DLC = Dialogic Leadership Communication; POS = Perceived Organizational Support; PS = Psychological Safety; EE = Employee Engagement. Standardized coefficients are reported. Bootstrap standard errors are based on 2,000 resamples (Hayes, 2014).

As shown in Table 3, dialogic leadership communication exerted a substantial total effect on employee engagement (β = .890). This overall association was composed

of a strong direct effect (β = .638) as well as indirect effects operating through perceived organizational support (β = .223) and psychological safety (β = .029). Among the mediating pathways, perceived organizational support represented the more influential relational mechanism linking dialogic leadership communication to employee engagement (β = .223). Psychological safety contributed an additional, though comparatively modest, indirect pathway (β = .029). These findings suggest that dialogic leadership communication is associated with employee engagement through both generalized relational evaluations of organizational support and more specific perceptions of interpersonal safety, while retaining a meaningful residual direct association with engagement.

These results provide converging evidence that leadership communication operates through multiple relational and motivational pathways, offering a comprehensive foundation for theoretical interpretation in the subsequent discussion.

DISCUSSION

This study examined if and how employees' perceptions of dialogic leadership communication relate to employee engagement, and whether these relationships operate through key relational mechanisms rooted in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), specifically perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Drawing on dialogic theory's emphasis on relational communication quality (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002), this research positioned leadership communication as a central exchange mechanism through which employees interpret

their organizations level of care, which in turn either supports or hinders their physical, emotional, or cognitive engagement at work.

Summary of Findings

Overall, findings indicate that dialogic leadership communication functions as a meaningful predictor of employee engagement. Across both latent structural modeling and supplementary composite path analysis, dialogic leadership communication was associated with employee engagement outcomes. These findings extend prior internal communication scholarship linking supportive and participatory leadership communication to engagement-related attitudes and behaviors (Lemon, 2019; Men & Yue, 2019; Shen & Jiang, 2019) by clarifying the relational pathways through which communication perceptions translate into motivation and engagement at work.

Perceived organizational support emerged as the dominant explanatory mechanism linking perceptions of dialogic leadership communication to employee engagement. This pattern is consistent with social exchange theory's (Blau, 1964) assertion that employees reciprocate perceived organizational care with increased commitment and effort (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). Psychological safety also contributed explanatory value; dialogic communication may foster engagement not only through evaluations of organizational support but also through reduced perceptions of interpersonal risk in workplace interactions.

Together these findings reinforce the conceptualization of leadership communication as a relational resource, more than a purely informational exchange process. In contemporary organizational contexts, which are often characterized by

distributed communication environments and evolving work arrangements (Kniffin et al., 2021; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024), dialogic leadership communication plays a key role in sustaining employee engagement by shaping how employees interpret organizational investment.

Dialogic Leadership Communication and Engagement

As predicted, dialogic leadership communication had a strong, positive association with employee engagement. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that leadership communication characterized by openness, responsiveness, and participatory opportunities contributes to employees' psychological investment in their work roles (Men & Bowen, 2017; Yue et al., 2021). By operationalizing dialogue as a perceptual orientation grounded in mutuality and openness (Yang et al., 2015), the present study provides empirical support for that employees' holistic evaluations of leadership communication quality are closely linked to engagement outcomes.

Hypothesis 1, which predicted dialogic leadership communication would be positively associated with employee engagement, was supported. The persistence of a direct pathway in the composite path analysis (β= .638), indicates dialogic leadership communication influences engagement through more immediate communicative or motivational mechanisms. This finding suggests that dialogic leadership communication may influence engagement through additional motivational or communicative mechanisms beyond the relational exchange pathways examined in this study. Specifically, dialogic leadership communication may improve engagement by reducing uncertainty, enhancing clarity regarding organizational goals, or increasing employees'

perceived influence over workplace decisions (Lee & Kim, 2021). Leadership communication can provide clarity regarding expectations, reduce uncertainty in evolving work environments, and enhance employees' perceived abilities to contribute meaningfully to organizational processes (Ruck et al., 2017; Lee & Kim, 2021). These workplace dynamics may encourage engagement independently of broader relational evaluations by enriching employees' day-to-day task involvement and sense of agency at work.

These results extend internal communication scholarship that positions communication as both a cultural and relational process that shapes employee attitudes and behaviors (Men & Bowen, 2017; Yue et al., 2021; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012). When employees perceive leadership communication as dialogic, they may interpret organizational interactions as more supportive, which in turn encourages greater physical, emotional, and cognitive contributions at work. This interpretation is consistent with social exchange theory's assumption that employees invest more energy into their roles when they perceive meaningful social interactions and connections with organizational actors (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006).

Dialogic leadership communication also reflects relational qualities like mutual recognition, empathy, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002), which may assure employees that their perspectives are valued and that their contributions matter (Men & Stacks, 2014; Walden et al., 2017). Therefore, increased relational signals through dialogic leadership communication can strengthen employees' sense of belonging and psychological investment in their roles, promoting higher levels of engagement.

Leadership communication serves as a key mechanism through which employees interpret organizational norms, expectations, and culture (Men, 2014). Therefore, when leaders engage in dialogic communication practices such as inviting input, responding promptly to concerns, and demonstrating empathy, employees perceive their work environments as more participatory and supportive.

Together these findings provide empirical support for the proposition that dialogic leadership communication represents an important predictor of employee engagement in contemporary organizational contexts. By demonstrating that employees' perceptions of dialogue in leadership communication is closely linked to engagement outcomes, this study extends prior research on participatory leadership communication (e.g., Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men, 2014) and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how relational communication processes shape employee motivation and involvement at work. Not only does dialogic leadership communication operate as a relational exchange mechanism, but also it is a practical communication resource that helps support employees' day-to-day task involvement and motivation at work.

Dialogic Leadership Communication and Perceived Organizational Support

Hypothesis 2 predicted perceived dialogic leadership communication is positively associated with employee's perceived organizational support and was supported. Dialogic leadership communication was strongly and positively associated with perceived organizational support across both the latent structural model ($\beta = .995$, $p < .001$) and the supplementary composite path analysis ($\beta = .671$). Dialogic leadership communication emerged as a key predictor of employees' perceptions that their organizations value their

contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This finding also aligns with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which suggests employees interpret interpersonal treatment from organizational representatives as indicative of broader organizational intent (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006). Because leaders often function as symbolic representatives of the organization (Levinson, 1965; Eisenberger et al., 2010), their communication exchanges with employees serve as relational signals of overall organizational support.

This result is consistent with prior public relations and internal communication research that reveals supportive and participatory leadership communication contributes to stronger perceptions of organizational support (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men, 2014; Men & Stacks, 2014; Men & Yue, 2019; Shen & Jiang, 2019). Dialogic leadership communication reflects relational behaviors such as openness to feedback, responsiveness to employee concerns, and inclusion in decision-making processes (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Yang et al., 2015). These communicative practices may signal respect, recognition, and relational investment, which are central to employees' evaluations of organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

The relationship between dialogic leadership communication and perceived organizational support was particularly strong in the latent structural model ($\beta = .995$, $p < .001$), suggesting substantial shared variance between these constructs. This indicates that employees may interpret dialogic communication behaviors not only as interpersonal leadership qualities but also as direct indicators of organizational care and support. Such conceptual likeness is theoretically consistent with social exchange perspectives that

emphasize that relational experiences in daily communication interactions inform global evaluations of organizational relationships (Blau, 1964; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch, 2012). Instead of representing entirely distinct relational processes, dialogic leadership communication and perceived organizational support exert shared influence on employee perceptions of positive organizational relationships.

Dialogic Leadership Communication and Psychological Safety

Psychological safety has been consistently positioned as a critical enabling condition for discretionary employee behaviors, including voice, learning behaviors, and broader forms of engagement (Edmondson, 1999; Clark et al., 2025). Findings provided partial support for Hypothesis 3, predicting that dialogic leadership communication is positively associated with employees' perceptions of psychological safety. Although this relationship was statistically significant in the composite path analysis ($\beta = .216$, $p < .001$), the magnitude of the association was notably smaller than the relationship observed between dialogic leadership communication and perceived organizational support ($\beta = .671$, $p < .001$). This suggests that while dialogic leadership communication may contribute to psychologically safe workplace climates, its influence may operate as a more incremental relational signal relative to broader evaluations of organizational care and support. Dialogic communication may influence engagement less through reducing interpersonal risk and more through shaping employees' broader evaluations of organizational care. While psychologically safe environments facilitate voice, learning, and experimentation at work (Clark et al., 2025), engagement may be more strongly activated by relational signals that employees are valued and supported in their roles.

This supports previous research demonstrating that leadership communication behaviors characterized by openness, inclusion, and responsiveness can foster environments in which employees feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and engaging in interpersonal risk-taking (Lee & Kim, 2021). Dialogic communication principles such as empathy, mutuality, and propinquity with employee feedback may signal reduced power distance and increased relational trust (Kent & Taylor, 2002), thereby supporting perceptions of safety for participation. From a social exchange perspective, repeated communicative interactions that are experienced as respectful and responsive may reinforce employees' expectations that workplace exchanges will not result in negative interpersonal consequences, ultimately encouraging engagement-related behaviors (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Other emerging leadership research in digitally mediated work environments indicates that communicative climates characterized by openness and responsiveness can strengthen employees' perceptions of psychological safety and encourage proactive engagement behaviors (Ashraf et al., 2026). This relationship further reinforces the importance of examining how relational communication conditions in shape employee desire to participate, contribute ideas, and remain psychologically invested in their work roles.

At the same time, the relative strength of the psychological safety pathway should be interpreted through additional measurement considerations. Internal consistency reliability for the psychological safety scale was lower than desirable ($\alpha = .56$), reflecting the broader challenges associated with capturing complex interpersonal perceptions using abbreviated self-report measures within cross-sectional survey designs. Prior scholarship

has documented variability in both the operationalization of psychological safety and its reliability estimates across organizational contexts and levels of analysis (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017). Despite retained indicators reflecting core perceptions of interpersonal safety, reduced reliability may have diminished the observed structural relationships for this construct. Therefore, the present findings should be interpreted as evidence of a meaningful but comparatively modest explanatory pathway linking dialogic leadership communication to employee engagement through psychological safety.

Overall, results suggest that dialogic leadership communication contributes to employee engagement somewhat through shaping perceptions of interpersonal safety, but broader relational evaluations of organizational support may play a more central motivational role.

Structural Modeling Findings

The latent structural model and the supplementary composite path analysis provide complementary insight into how dialogic leadership communication relates to employee engagement. While the latent structural model indicated that the effect of dialogic leadership communication on engagement operated directly through perceived organizational support ($\beta = .995$), the composite path analysis suggested that dialogic leadership communication retained a substantial direct association with engagement after accounting for both perceived organizational support and psychological safety ($\beta = .638$). This pattern highlights the multifaceted nature of leadership communication as both a relational exchange mechanism and a tactical communication resource that influences employee motivation. By examining dialogic leadership communication as a relational

organizational process, this study responds to calls for research that moves beyond transmission-based views of internal communication toward interactional and co-constructive perspectives (Dhanesh & Lemon, 2026).

The fully mediated relationship observed in the structural equation model reinforces the importance of the role of relational exchange processes in explaining engagement outcomes. The strong mediated pathway observed in the structural model ($\beta = .995$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .957$, $p < .001$) therefore supports the proposition that employees' engagement is closely tied to how they interpret leadership communication as indicative of broader organizational treatment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Saks, 2006; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Men & Stacks, 2013).

Rather than representing contradictory findings, the divergence between modeling approaches (*structural equation modeling and composite path analysis*) underscores the complexity of communication processes within organizational relationships. Relational perceptions such as dialogic leadership communication, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety are inherently interconnected because they emerge from ongoing communicative interactions and shared organizational experiences (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch, 2012). Structural models that account for measurement error may emphasize the explanatory role of generalized relational evaluations, whereas the composite path model reveals additional motivational influences operating at the behavioral level. These findings suggest that dialogic leadership communication operates through both relational and exchange mechanisms as well as more immediate motivational pathways. While the latent mediation model highlighted the central role of

relational evaluations such as perceived organizational support and psychological safety, the observed-variable analyses reveal that dialogic leadership communication also maintained a residual direct association with engagement. These results yield a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership communication shapes employee engagement in contemporary workplaces.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical insights that advance internal communication and public relations scholarship by illuminating how dialogic leadership communication shapes employee engagement through both relational exchange processes and employees' everyday communicative experiences.

Extending Dialogic Theory to Internal Leadership Communication

First, these findings extend dialogic theory by positioning dialogue not only as a framework for organization–public relationship building but also as a relational mechanism within routine internal leadership communication. Although dialogic principles have traditionally been examined in relation to external stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018), little empirical research has explored how employees interpret dialogue through everyday supervisory interactions (Kent, 2023). By operationalizing dialogic leadership communication as employees' holistic perceptions of mutuality and openness, this study demonstrates that dialogue can function as a meaningful antecedent to engagement-related outcomes in internal workplace contexts.

This perspective contributes to ongoing efforts in internal communication scholarship to move beyond transmission-based models of organizational messaging toward interactional and relational understandings of communication processes (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012). Conceptualizing leadership communication as an outlet for dialogic opportunity highlights how everyday communicative exchanges can meaningfully shape employees' interpretations of participation and relational recognition. This extends prior research demonstrating that leadership plays a foundational role in shaping internal communication systems (e.g., Men, 2014). Men (2014) conceptualizes leadership as a contextual force that influences the presence of symmetrical communication at the organizational level. However, this study focuses on employees' perceptions of leadership communication itself as the primary mechanism through which dialogic principles are enacted and experienced in everyday workplace interactions. Regardless of overall leadership style or other contextual factors, when employees experience their day-to-day work interactions with leadership as dialogic, they are more likely to engage with the organization. Therefore, when leaders demonstrate consistent active listening, timely response to concerns, input in active decision-making processes, and are empathetic toward employee well-being, employees are more likely to engage themselves at work through physical, cognitive, and emotional labor. When these dialogic communicative behaviors are signaled to employees through leadership or upper management on a regular basis, employee perceptions of perceived organizational support also increase.

Work environments that reflect these relational conditions (dialogic, supportive, psychologically safe) evidence how leadership communication translates into employee outcomes through employees' everyday work experiences. For example, ensuring that employees feel heard and taken seriously may be just as important as adhering to a specific leadership style (Men, 2014). When employees perceive that their input is acknowledged and valued, they are more likely to feel supported and included, which fosters stronger investment in their work. This study suggests that employee engagement is not only shaped by overarching formal communication systems or hierarchies but also through routine, seemingly mundane daily interactions between leaders and employees. These day-to-day interactions with supervisors, managers, and leaders, involve plentiful opportunities for communication exchanges to signal listening, thoughtful response, and invitations for input. Regardless of whether leadership explicitly recognizes these dynamics, the impact of everyday interactions accumulates over time and ultimately plays a central role in shaping employees' perceptions of the organization as a whole.

This study also engages with ongoing tensions in dialogic theory between its philosophical foundations and its empirical application. Dialogic theory has traditionally been conceptualized as a holistic, process-oriented framework grounded in relational ethics, mutual understanding, and ongoing interaction (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). However, in some research, dialogic principles are operationalized into measurable dimensions (e.g., Yang et al., 2015), creating a tension between dialogue as an emergent relational process and dialogue as a set of observable communication practices.

This tension is further reflected in broader debates within dialogic scholarship regarding what constitutes dialogue in practice (Lane, 2020). Previous research has explained that dialogue exists along a continuum ranging from basic two-way communication to higher-order forms of "true dialogue," with many organizational practices falling somewhere in between (Lane, 2020). This perspective highlights the risk of conflating all two-way communication with dialogue while also recognizing that dialogic qualities may be enacted to varying degrees in practice. This study navigates this tension by conceptualizing dialogic leadership communication as a perceptual and relational signal rather than a fixed set of leader behaviors. While the use of established dialogic dimensions allows for empirical testing, the focus on employee perceptions preserves the inherently interpretive and processual nature of dialogue. Therefore, dialogic leadership communication is reflected through employees' holistic assessments of how leadership communication aligns with dialogic principles, rather than assuming the presence of "true" dialogue in its most idealized form.

This approach contributes to dialogic theory by extending its application to internal organizational contexts while maintaining its relational and process-oriented foundations. Rather than resolving the tension between measurement and philosophy, this study demonstrates that dialogic principles can be meaningfully operationalized while still accounting for variation in how dialogue is both enacted and experienced in practice. In doing so, it responds to calls for dialogic theory to better capture complexity, subjectivity, and power dynamics in organizational communication (Capizzo, 2018), particularly within leadership–employee relationships.

Dialogic Leadership Communication as a Social Exchange Signal

Second, findings advance theoretical integration between dialogic theory and social exchange perspectives by illustrating how dialogic leadership communication operates as a relational exchange signal that informs employees' broader evaluations of organizational treatment. Consistent with exchange-based frameworks suggesting that employees reciprocate perceived organizational care with increased role investment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2006), perceived organizational support emerged as the dominant explanatory pathway linking dialogic communication to engagement. This finding underscores the importance of the symbolic role of leadership communication in shaping employees' sensemaking about organizational intent and translating communicative interactions into motivational and behavioral outcomes.

The importance of dialogic communication in practice is supported by prior research demonstrating that employee voice and leadership's receptiveness to their voices are significant predictors of engagement (e.g., Ruck & Welch, 2017). From this perspective, dialogic leadership communication may enhance engagement not only by signaling organizational support but also by actively creating conditions in which employees feel heard, valued, and able to contribute to organizational processes. In this way, dialogic communication operationalizes employee voice by embedding opportunities for upward communication and responsiveness into everyday workplace interactions.

Prior engagement models grounded in social exchange theory have also specified how communication itself functions as a symbolic exchange resource (e.g., Shen & Jiang,

2019). Prior research has emphasized organizational strategies broadly, but this study demonstrates that employees interpret dialogic leadership communication as a direct indicator of organizational support, which supports the argument that communication interactions signal broader relational evaluations. Additionally, these findings complement prior work linking leadership and internal communication processes (e.g., Men, 2014) by demonstrating that employees do not merely respond to structural communication systems but actively interpret leadership communication behaviors as signals of organizational intent.

Importantly, the persistence of direct effects in the path analysis suggests that dialogic leadership communication may influence engagement through both generalized relational evaluations and more proximal communicative mechanisms. While perceptions of organizational support provide a foundational explanatory pathway, dialogic communication may also enhance engagement by reducing uncertainty, reinforcing clarity regarding expectations, and increasing employees perceived influence over organizational processes. These influences contribute to ongoing theoretical debates regarding both the cultural and strategic functions of internal communication practices within organizations (Men, 2014; Men & Bowen, 2017). Overall, findings resonate with emerging work that situates engagement within co-creational communication processes (e.g., Lemon, 2019; White & De Moya Taveras, 2026), reinforcing the view that dialogue is not simply a communication strategy but also a foundational mechanism through which employees construct meaning about their organizational experiences.

Employee Engagement as a Relational Outcome

Finally, these findings contribute to an emerging effort to reconceptualize employee engagement as a relationally constructed outcome (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018) influenced by communication climates rather than solely as a productivity-enhancing managerial tool (White & De Moya Taveras, 2025). Prior research analyzing public relations trade discourse has demonstrated that employee engagement is frequently framed as an instrumental leadership objective that is often orchestrated without consideration of employees' participatory agency or lived experiences (White & De Moya Taveras, 2025). By empirically linking dialogic leadership communication to perceptions of organizational support, this study advances an alternative perspective that positions engagement not as a top-down outcome to be managed, but as an emergent, employee-centered response to the quality of everyday communicative interactions stemming from leadership. This perspective positions employee engagement as an outcome influenced less by organizational attempts to motivate work performance and more by employees' ongoing interpretations of whether workplace communication environments are supportive and responsive to their voices and contributions.

Extending previous scholarship that conceptualizes employee engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral role performance (Shen & Jiang, 2019), these findings extend this framework by clarifying additional communication mechanisms through which engagement is enhanced. While Shen and Jiang (2019) position organizational engagement strategies as key antecedents, this research demonstrates that employee perceptions of dialogic leadership

communication serve as an influential relational signal that affect these engagement processes at the level of everyday managerial interactions.

This perspective is further supported by research that conceptualizes employee engagement as a meaning-making process constructed through communicative interactions rather than solely as an outcome of organizational initiatives (e.g., Lemon, 2019). From this view, engagement emerges through employees' lived experiences of dialogue, particularly interactions characterized by active listening, responsiveness, and mutual understanding. These findings extend extant research in the area by demonstrating that employees' perceptions of dialogic leadership communication function as a central mechanism through which these meaning-making processes are shaped in everyday organizational contexts.

These findings are also aligned with previous scholarship that emphasizes the importance of employee-centered communication systems in fostering meaningful connection, psychological investment, and workplace well-being (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018; Lemon, 2019; Men & Yue, 2019). This study extends this line of research by demonstrating that dialogic leadership communication operates as a central communicative mechanism through which relational conditions are enacted and experienced by employees in daily organizational life. In doing so, these findings move beyond simply supporting prior work (e.g., Welch & Jackson, 2007; Saks, 2006; Men & Bowen, 2017) to articulating how leadership communicative practice translates into broader relational evaluations of an organization. Overall, this research sharpens and

expands a relational theoretical lens through which to examine employee engagement outcomes.

In practice, this investment in dialogic leadership communication may be reflected in everyday interactions such as managers asking for employee input before making decisions, following up on feedback or ideas shared in meetings, or taking the time to explain the reasoning behind organizational changes. Beyond these behaviors, dialogic leadership communication is also evidenced in how leaders recognize and respond to employee contributions in meaningful ways. Recognition must go beyond generic praise and instead reflect active investment with employees' ideas and efforts. For example, leaders could reference specific employee suggestions in team meetings, communicate implemented changes based on employee feedback to the team, or simply acknowledge when an employee's input influenced a decision. In individual interactions, this could look like signaling dialogic practice by asking follow-up questions or revisiting previous conversations.

Though seemingly simple integrations, these types of communicative investments demonstrate that employee voice and contributions are not only heard but also remembered and acted upon. These dialogic behaviors signal to employees that their perspectives carry weight within the organization regardless of rank. Leading through dialogic communication establishes work environments that are inherently more inclusive and supportive in nature. Over time, these repeated interactions contribute to employees' sustained investments in their work. Employee engagement is not only driven by isolated

exchanges or formal programing but also by accumulated, consistent communication experiences with leadership.

These results also contribute to ongoing theoretical developments in internal communication research by reframing engagement as an outcome of relational communication processes embedded in organizational culture (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018), rather than as an isolated attitudinal variable or managerial target (White & De Moya Taveras, 2025). This shift highlights the key role of leadership communication in shaping not only performance-related outcomes but also employees' lived experiences of belonging, recognition, and inclusion within the workplace. Rather than locating engagement in standalone initiatives such as events or morale-building activities, these findings position it as a product of communication culture, shaped by the ongoing interactions through which leaders and employees co-construct relational meaning.

The Role of Perceived Organizational Support and Psychological Safety

The selection of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) as mediators is theoretically grounded in their ability to capture distinct yet complementary aspects of employees' relational and psychological experiences in the workplace. Drawing from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), perceived organizational support reflects employees' evaluations of organizational care and investment, representing a relational exchange mechanism through which leadership communication signals are interpreted. In contrast, psychological safety captures employees' perceptions of interpersonal risk and their comfort in engaging, speaking up, and participating within their work environment (Edmondson, 1999).

Together, these constructs provide a more comprehensive understanding of how dialogic leadership communication operates within internal communication systems, capturing both how employees evaluate organizational support and how safe they feel to engage in communication processes.

While perceived organizational support emerged as a particularly strong explanatory mechanism in this study, the role of psychological safety remains theoretically and practically significant. The comparatively smaller effect observed for psychological safety may reflect its more nuanced and context-dependent nature, as well as its relative underemphasis in public relations and internal communication scholarship. In practice, psychological safety is not always explicitly addressed in internal communication strategy or practice despite its importance for enabling employee engagement. This suggests that psychological safety may represent an underdeveloped area within internal communication research and practice. By including psychological safety alongside perceived organizational support, this study extends existing models of internal communication by highlighting the importance of not only how supported employees feel, but also how safe they feel to engage within organization-led communication processes.

Clarifying Dialogic Principles in Practice

While prior sections demonstrate how dialogic theory can be extended to internal leadership communication contexts, this study further contributes by clarifying how dialogic principles are enacted and interpreted in organizational practice. Beyond extending dialogic theory to leadership communication, this study contributes to ongoing

efforts to more clearly define how dialogic principles are enacted in organizational practice. Prior scholarship has highlighted tensions between dialogue as a normative ideal and its application in real-world communication contexts, including the existence of situations where dialogue is either not possible or not appropriate, or where two-way communication is mistakenly labeled as dialogue (Kent & Lane, 2017; Lane, 2020).

The present findings offer a more tangible framework for understanding how dialogic communication operates within internal organizational settings by demonstrating how specific dialogic principles are perceived through leadership communication and linked to employee-centered outcomes. In particular, the principles of mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment are signaled through leadership communication and reflected in how employees evaluate their organization's level of support. Rather than treating these principles as abstract ideals, this study illustrates how they function as perceptual signals that shape relational and psychological outcomes, including perceived organizational support and psychological safety. Greater alignment with dialogic principles in leadership communication is associated with higher levels of employee engagement. Therefore, this study advances dialogic theory by bridging the gap between its philosophical foundations and its practical application and offering a more concrete understanding of how dialogic communication can be enacted and evaluated within internal communication systems.

Practical Implications

Findings from this study offer several practical implications for public relations professionals and organizational leaders seeking to strengthen employee engagement.

They also provide insight for those looking to improve broader employee experience and relational workplace outcomes through strategic internal communication practices. Consistent with prior scholarship emphasizing the importance of supportive and participatory leadership communication (Men & Bowen, 2017; Yue et al., 2021), results suggest that dialogic communication behaviors such as inviting employee input, responding to concerns, and maintaining leadership visibility may play a critical role in fostering heightened perceived organizational support and engagement. These communicative practices align with recommendations in internal communication research that advocate for more relational, employee-centered communication systems capable of sustaining meaningful connection and experiential engagement in digitally mediated and hybrid work environments (Lemon, 2019; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024).

From an organizational perspective, strengthening dialogic leadership communication may also contribute to improved employee retention and reduced turnover by shaping employees' day-to-day experiences of organizational care (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Tackett & Lemon, 2026). Research has increasingly highlighted how communication climates influence employee commitment, job satisfaction, and intentions to remain with an organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Men, 2014), suggesting that relational communication practices can function as important stabilizing mechanisms in labored environments characterized by mobility and uncertainty (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Saks, 2006). Specifically, dialogic leadership communication may reduce turnover risk by fostering employees' sense of being heard, valued, and supported in everyday interactions, which strengthens relational attachment to the organization and

increases the perceived cost of disengagement or exit. By reinforcing perceptions of organizational support (Men & Yue, 2019; Shen & Jiang, 2019), dialogic leadership communication may therefore operate as a practical intervention through which organizations can enhance both engagement and longer-term workforce sustainability.

Finally, public relations practitioners are often responsible for designing internal communication strategies and advising leadership on communicative behaviors (Me, 2014; Zerfass & Volk, 2018). This work positions them as playing a central role in embedding dialogic practices into organizational routines and communication flow. Practically, this could include developing leadership communication training that equips managers with specific dialogic behaviors, such as prioritizing regular, two-way check-ins and actively soliciting and responding to employee feedback. Another key opportunity lies in the consistent acknowledgment of employee contributions, not only in the completion of their formal job responsibilities but also when they speak up, offer feedback, or contribute ideas for problem solving in visible and meaningful ways. In addition, PR practitioners can support the integration of dialogic principles into existing communication channels by designing feedback loops (e.g., pulse surveys, open forums, or team debriefs) where employee input is not only collected but also visibly enacted.

The use of a public relations professional sample also offers insight into how dialogic principles are understood and interpreted by those responsible for translating communication theory into organizational practice. In this study, participants are not only recipients of leadership communication but may also contribute to how it is structured and implemented within their organizations. This dual role positions them as uniquely

informed evaluators of dialogic leadership communication, as they possess both experiential and strategic insight into how communication functions in practice. Studying this population therefore adds value to internal communication research by capturing the perceptions of individuals who both experience and shape leadership communication environments, highlighting potential gaps between intended communication strategies and how they are perceived by employees.

These findings encourage public relations professionals to adopt a more critical and reflective approach to internal communication strategy. Since dialogic leadership communication functions as a perceived relational signal these results suggest that intended communication strategies may not always align with how they are experienced by employees. This highlights the importance of practitioners moving beyond the design and delivery of messages to consider how communication is interpreted in practice. By recognizing the gap that can exist between communication intention and perception, public relations professionals may be better equipped to design, implement, and evaluate internal communication strategies that more effectively support employee engagement.

This study's findings can also be applied within various workplace modalities, including remote and hybrid work environments. In digitally mediated contexts, employees have fewer spontaneous interactions with leadership, thus dialogic communication may need to be more intentional. Additionally, these settings must prioritize responsiveness since delayed or missing feedback can make employees feel unsupported or overlooked. To better allow for genuine, authentic communication and improved response time, especially in remote work environments, leaders should

consider establishing structured opportunities for informal dialogue to occur, such as virtual office hours. Hosting small-group check-ins or asynchronous channels where employees can comfortably share input without the pressure of real-time response may also be valuable investments. Finally, leadership must actively work to reduce barriers to communication in digital contexts by inviting participation regardless of whether meetings are recorded, who is present on the call, or time constraints that may unintentionally limit contribution.

Specific social media tools can also provide channels for scaling dialogic practice in more visible ways. Internal social platforms (e.g., Slack, Teams, etc.) can be used not only for information dissemination but also as spaces for ongoing dialogue. These tools allow leaders to actively engage in conversation and respond in a timely manner to employee questions, which can signal relational investment. Specific features like reaction tools can also provide leaders with digital ways to demonstrate listening behaviors in real time. Reactions to statements or messages on digital platforms like *loving* a message or adding a *thumbs up* to a contribution also demonstrate leaderships' increased and visible acknowledgments of their teams working in online spaces. By engaging in these online behaviors, dialogic leadership communication can be evidenced across both physical and virtual environments to bolster employee engagement, even in contexts where face-to-face communication is limited.

Importantly, these findings suggest that engagement-oriented communication strategies should move beyond a narrow focus on message clarity or communication frequency to instead prioritize the relational quality and responsiveness of leadership

communication. For example, rather than increasing the frequency of internal messaging or scheduled meetings, organizations may benefit from training leaders to engage in more responsive, empathetic, organic, and participatory interactions within existing communication touchpoints. This approach may also address critiques of engagement initiatives within industry discourse that emphasize performance outcomes over employee voice and relational inclusion (e.g., White & De Moya Taveras, 2025).

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions on the relationships among dialogic leadership communication, perceived organizational support, psychological safety, and employee engagement. Although the theoretical model was grounded in dialogic theory and social exchange theory, which suggest directional relational processes, the data captured perceptions at a single point in time. As such, findings do not account for the dynamic and evolving nature of these relationships, which may shift as employees' experiences and interactions with leadership unfold over time. It is also possible that engagement levels may shape how employees interpret leadership communication or organizational support. Longitudinal or experimental research designs would also provide additional evidence regarding the causal dynamics of these relational mechanisms. For example, longitudinal studies could assess how changes in leadership communication behaviors over time correspond with shifts in perceived organizational support and employee engagement. Experimental designs could also further strengthen

causal claims by manipulating dialogic versus non-dialogic communication conditions to examine their impact on employee response.

Second, the purposive sampling strategy focused on members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), which limits statistical generalizability beyond communication-intensive professionals. Public relations practitioners likely possess heightened awareness of organizational communication processes and leadership messaging practices, which influence how leadership communication behaviors are perceived and evaluated. While this sampling approach supports analytical generalization within internal communication scholarship, future research should examine the proposed model across a wider range of occupational groups and organizational settings to better understand the broader applicability of these findings for employees with less communicative expertise.

Measurement considerations also warrant attention. Internal consistency reliability for the psychological safety scale was modest after item refinement, reflecting ongoing challenges associated with capturing complex interpersonal climate perceptions through abbreviated survey measures. Psychological safety has been conceptualized as both an individual perception and a shared team-level construct (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Therefore, cross-sectional self-report designs may not fully capture its contextual and dynamic nature. Reduced reliability may have weakened structural relationships with psychological safety, suggesting that future research should consider multi-level measurement approaches or alternative operationalizations of this construct. Prior research has also suggested that employees may withhold workplace

contributions when they perceive risk or lack of receptiveness from leadership (e.g., Ruck & Welch, 2017), highlighting the importance of communicative environments that support psychological safety. The comparatively weaker effects observed for psychological safety in this study may reflect the complexity of capturing these dynamics through individual-level survey measures, particularly when voice behaviors are shaped by both interpersonal and broader organizational communication climates.

In addition, all focal variables were assessed using self-reported perceptual measures collected within a single survey instrument. Although structural equation modeling helps account for measurement error, and theoretical model specification reduces concerns regarding ingenuine relationships (Kline, 2018). However, common method variance cannot be entirely ruled out. Employees' broad evaluations of leadership communication and organizational support may be influenced by other affective orientations toward their workplaces, which could potentially inflate observed associations among the relational constructs.

Finally, the substantial shared variance observed among relational constructs highlights broader conceptual challenges inherent in studying communication-based workplace perceptions. Dialogic leadership communication, perceived organizational support, and psychological safety are all grounded in employees' interpretations of ongoing organizational interactions. Though these linkages reflect the lived complexity of communication processes within organizations, they can also create challenges in statistically isolating distinct explanatory pathways. Rather than undermining the theoretical model, this limitation underscores the need for future research employing

mixed methods, multi-source data, or longitudinal designs to accurately capture how communication experiences shape relational and motivational outcomes over time.

Future Research Directions

Several opportunities for future research to address the limitations were discussed. Further future research should continue to examine dialogic leadership communication as a relational communication mechanism shaping employee engagement across diverse organizational and cultural contexts. Although the present study provides empirical support for the relevance of dialogic principles within internal workplace relationships, additional research is needed to understand how these communicative dynamics develop and change over time and across varying organizational structures. Given the cross-sectional design of this study, longitudinal research designs would be particularly useful in identifying progression of dialogic communication and relational evaluations such as perceived organizational support or other subsequent engagement outcomes. Such approaches would yield deeper insight into the durability of communication-driven engagement effects and the extent to which dialogic leadership communication functions as an ongoing relational resource rather than a situational influence.

Future studies should also employ multi-level and team-based research designs to better understand the contextual nature of psychological safety within internal communication environments. While these findings suggest that dialogic leadership communication contributes incrementally to employees' individual perceptions of psychological safety, research examining shared safety climates at the team or unit level could provide a more nuanced understanding of how communication norms and

leadership behaviors collectively shape engagement processes. Integrating social network mapping or communication flow analyses may further illuminate how dialogic communication practices diffuse across organizational structures and influence relational dynamics beyond immediate supervisor–employee interactions.

Methodologically, qualitative and mixed-method approaches are promising avenues for extending the present findings. In-depth interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic observation could help capture how employees interpret dialogic leadership behaviors in everyday workplace encounters and contexts. Critical investigations could also examine how communicative signals of openness, responsiveness, and mutuality are negotiated within hierarchical organizational settings among leadership and teams. These approaches would complement survey-based results by providing richer insight into the meanings employees attribute to communication experiences with leadership and how these interpretations shape motivational investment in work roles.

Future research may also benefit from examining dialogic leadership communication and employee engagement at the dimensional level, rather than as higher-order constructs. Disaggregating these constructs could provide more nuanced insight into how specific aspects of dialogic communication relate to distinct dimensions of engagement, offering additional precision for both theory development and practical application.

Finally, future research may benefit from examining dialogic leadership communication in relation to other established leadership communication orientations, including transformational (Men, 2014), ethical (Neubert et al., 2009), servant

(Walumbwa et al., 2010), or inclusive leadership communication (Carmeli et al., 2010). Comparative and integrative research could clarify whether dialogic communication represents a distinct relational framework or functions as a communicative dimension embedded within broader leadership styles. Exploring these relationships may also advance understanding of how multiple leadership communication signals interact to influence employee engagement, organizational relationship quality, and longer-term outcomes such as retention, well-being, and discretionary performance behaviors.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study advances internal communication and public relations scholarship by demonstrating that dialogic leadership communication functions as a meaningful relational mechanism shaping employee engagement. Grounded in dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the findings provide empirical support for conceptualizing leadership communication as a relational exchange signal through which employees interpret organizational care, participation opportunities, and communicative intent. Across analytic approaches, perceived organizational support emerged as a central explanatory pathway linking dialogic leadership communication to engagement, while psychological safety contributed additional, though comparatively modest, insight into the relational conditions that enable employee engagement. The persistence of direct effects further highlights the multifaceted nature of communication processes within organizational relationships.

By extending dialogic theory into internal stakeholder contexts, this research advances understanding of leadership communication as a relational exchange process rather than a purely informational function. The results underscore how employees' holistic perceptions of everyday communication interactions affect motivational investment in work roles as well as reinforce prior scholarship emphasizing the cultural and relational significance of internal communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012). In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing efforts within public relations

research to identify the mechanisms through which communication processes influence employee attitudes and behaviors.

Collectively, these findings highlight the continued theoretical relevance of dialogic communication for understanding contemporary organizational dynamics and provide a foundation for future research to examine how relational communication processes shape organizational culture and sustain employee engagement over time. As workplace communication environments continuously evolve, dialogic leadership communication offers a rich, theoretically grounded framework for fostering more participatory and employee-centered organizational relationships. Ultimately, prioritizing dialogic communication in leadership practice may play a critical role in strengthening employee engagement. In contemporary work environments, engaged employees represent a vital internal public for organizations' long-term success and sustainable effectiveness. Accordingly, continued scholarly and practical efforts to better support employee engagement remain essential for the healthy, functioning organization. This research generated rich theoretical insight and applied recommendations that support more effective, efficient, and positive workplace cultures.

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APPENDIX

Full Questionnaire: Leadership & Workplace Survey

Eligibility Screen:

Do you have a direct supervisor or manager?
- Yes
- No

Do you currently hold an active PRSA membership?
- Yes
- No

Membership type:
- Professional
- New Professional
- Student (PRSSA)
- Associate

APR accreditation:
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Dialogic Leadership Communication:
Please indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

My leaders respond promptly to employees' questions or concerns.
My leaders keep employees informed about changes as they happen.
My leaders try to understand problems from employees' perspectives.
My leaders are sensitive to employees' needs in the moment.
My leaders communicate in ways that show they care about employees' feelings.
My leaders value employees' opinions.
My leaders encourage employees to share their ideas.
My leaders treat employees as partners in solving workplace issues.
My leaders are willing to admit when they do not have all the answers.
My leaders are open to feedback, even if it is critical.
My leaders are willing to change their approach based on employees' input.
My leaders maintain open and ongoing communication with employees.
My leaders follow through on what they say they will do.
My leaders consistently make time to listen to employees.

Employee Engagement:
Please indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

Physical Engagement
I work with intensity in my job.
I devote a lot of energy to my job.
I try my hardest to perform well at my job.
I strive as hard as I can to complete my work.
I exert a lot of energy in my job.
I exert my full effort in my job.

Emotional Engagement
I am enthusiastic about my job.
I feel energetic at my job.
I am interested in my job.
I am proud of my job.
I feel positive about my job.
I am excited about my job.

Cognitive Engagement
During work, my mind is focused on my job.
During work, I pay a lot of attention to my job.
During work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job.
During work, I am immersed in my job.
During work, I concentrate on my job.
During work, I devote a lot of attention to my job.

Perceived Organizational Support:
Please indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

My organization values my contributions to its well-being.
My organization considers my goals and values.
My organization really cares about my well-being.
My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
My organization cares about my opinions.
Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.
My organization would show very little concern for me if I were absent for a long time.
Even if I did the best job possible, my organization would fail to notice.

Psychological Safety:
Please indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

If you make a mistake on your team, it is often held against you.
Members of your team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
People on your team sometimes reject others for being different.
It is safe to take a risk on my team.
It is difficult to ask other members of my team for help.
No one on my team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
My unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Professional Background & Demographics:
Years of experience in public relations/communication (cumulative)
Years with current employer
Employer type:
- Agency/Consultancy
- Corporate (In-house)
- Nonprofit/NGO
- Government
- Higher education
- Healthcare
- Other / Prefer not to say

Industry:
- Technology
- Healthcare
- Finance
- Consumer goods
- Energy/Utilities
- Professional services
- Education
- Government
- Other / Not applicable / Prefer not to say

Organization size:
- 1–9
- 10–49
- 50–249
- 250–999
- 1,000–4,999
- 5,000–19,999
- 20,000+

Current position level:
- Entry-level
- Mid-level / Specialist
- Senior-level / Lead
- Manager
- Director / VP
- Executive (C-suite)
- Other / Prefer not to say

Job responsibilities (select all that apply):
- Internal communication
- Employee engagement
- Media relations
- Social/digital media
- Issues/Crisis communication
- Executive/Leadership communication
- Research & analytics
- Brand/Marketing communication
- Public affairs
- Education
- Other

Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Race:
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Other / Prefer not to answer

Education level:
- Less than high school → Doctoral degree

State of residence

Income:
- Less than $20,000 → $100,000+
- Prefer not to answer

Age

VITA

Carla White is a doctoral candidate in public relations at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her dissertation examines the role of dialogic leadership communication in shaping employee engagement, with particular attention to the mediating influences of perceived organizational support and psychological safety. Drawing on dialogic theory and social exchange theory, her research highlights how employees interpret leadership communication as a signal of organizational care, participation, and relational investment. Her work contributes to internal communication and public relations scholarship by advancing understanding of how everyday leadership communication practices foster more engaged and supportive workplace environments.