Chapter 10
A Qualitative Investigation into High Psychosocial Safety Climate University Work Groups

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Abstract Psychosocial safety climate (PSC) is conceptualised as employees' collective view of the organisation's regard for psychological health, expressed through enacted policies, practices and procedures. While empirical evidence validates the PSC theoretical model, there is limited qualitative research examining the operationalisation of PSC in action. We used the context of high PSC work sites in a large public organisation (within the education sector) to explore the interplay between multilevel aspects, including the work environment, managerial practices, and individual level job-design. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with two managers and three workers across two work groups. Interview questions were taken from the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards Indicator Tool and were also informed by the PSC-Hierarchy of Control framework. Using a grounded theory approach, analysis revealed three main themes: (1) a shared sense of meaningful work and social support, (2) high job crafting, and (3) high managerial support for psychological health. We propose a bi-directional feedback model, in which there is a cyclical relationship between PSC and the primary themes; these themes are an expression of PSC, yet simultaneously reinforce PSC's value-based sub-constructs. This study also provides practical recommendations that may cultivate a work group PSC conducive to positive employee wellbeing. Findings may inform future research that focuses on primary psychological health interventions at the work group level.

10.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate *how* a positive psychosocial safety climate (PSC) is operationalised within work teams in a university setting. PSC is the attribute of the organisation that represents organisational standards associated with the protection and promotion of psychological health regardless of productivity expectations (Dollard, 2012). More specifically, PSC is conceptualised as employees' collective views amongst workers regarding the organisation's genuine regard

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for employees' psychological health and safety, supported through the existence and enactment of protective policies, practices and procedures (Dollard, 2012). Total PSC is comprised of four pillars, (1) organisational communication, (2) organisational participatory processes, (3) management priority and (4) management commitment in relation to protecting worker psychological health and promoting wellbeing (Hall, Dollard, & Coward, 2010).

An increasing body of empirical evidence validates the PSC theoretical model, including various cross-cultural organisational and industry studies (Idris, Dollard, & Yulita, 2014; Idris, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2015), in addition to national longitudinal research (Dollard, Bailey, McLinton, et al., 2012). The theory posits that PSC has both a predictive (Dollard, Opie, Lenthall, et al., 2012; Bailey, Dollard, McLinton, & Richards, 2015) and moderating role (Hall, Dollard, Winefield, Dormann, & Bakker, 2013) with respect to aspects of employees' job design and consequential health and productivity outcomes (see Zadow & Dollard, 2015 for theory overview). Overall, PSC theory is regarded as a strong evidence-based conceptualisation of the psychological pathways that exist between an organisational climate and employee psychological health (Law, Dollard, Tuckey, & Dormann, 2011; see Zadow & Dollard, 2015). Importantly, the theorisation that PSC is a leading indicator of psychological health, supports (and is consequently supported by) the best practice view that organisations should focus on establishing a strong climate to prevent problems, rather than solely redesigning the work environment following any issues that arise.

At present, PSC research has mainly centred on theory support and highlighting the more linear psychological pathways within the theoretical model. While these previous studies have been highly valuable in theory validation, there is a research gap in investigating in-depth aspects of work groups with good or high PSC in action. High PSC work groups are characterised as defined work units within an organisation (inclusive of managers) who perceive a great deal of value associated with their psychological health and safety. As a result, in their day-to-day functioning these high PSC work groups demonstrate practices that reflect a strong degree of communication, participatory processes, managerial priority and managerial commitment for psychological health matters. However, research is yet to uncover the *specific* practices or processes that are associated with high PSC work groups across certain industries. Overall, the current PSC literature lacks exploratory or qualitative focused approaches into work groups with good PSC (see Kwan, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2016; Zinsser & Zinsser, 2016 for exceptions). Studies of this nature are much needed to help build on the current theoretical knowledge base, as well as yield recommendations and practical examples for how workplaces with a strong PSC context function to protect and promote psychological heath.

To extend on the current theoretical considerations, researchers must now ask the question: How does a climate that strongly values psychological health and safety translate into the work design and practicalities of the work unit? In general, it is acknowledged that high PSC organisations have senior management who place a great value on ensuring that there are policies, practices and procedures in place relevant to the commitment, participation, communication and prioritisation of psychological health (Dollard, 2012). Therefore, it is logical to assume that if a workplace

scores highly for PSC, then this will influence how work is designed or how the work group functions. A well-documented relationship between PSC and job demands and job resources (Idris, Dollard, Coward, & Dormann, 2012) supports the notion that PSC influences the job-design level, yet further exploratory research is required to expand and tease out the relationship between PSC and more concrete themes and/or practical outcomes. Importantly, conducting research that extends PSC research into practical manifestations of work design will be beneficial in informing organisational intervention efforts, or will simply provide insight into how work can be designed in a way to improve the psychological health of employees.

10.1.1 The Present Study

The current study exercises a qualitative data analysis and a grounded theory approach to investigate themes that emerge from high PSC work groups (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). We do not seek to validate the theory, but rather employ more of an exploratory qualitative approach to gain a richer view of specific practical characteristics, or examples, that may help conceptualise high PSC work environments. It is important to note that this study purposely solely focuses on the positive aspects of the work units, rather than a critical or more negative investigation. This is because an exclusive examination of the positive work characteristics will help facilitate the transference of practical knowledge, potentially through informing stakeholder training to assist with cultivation of a healthy PSC environment. Also, in this study, the investigatory scope of attaining information will not be purely limited to the organisational climate—or constructs of PSC. Rather, the investigation is open to capturing other informative points that may relate more to the job design features as per the extended Job Demands Resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; see Dollard, Dormann, & Idris, 2019 Chap. 1 this volume) for more details on the extended model) to capture greater detail on a variety of aspects that work groups have implemented to achieve high levels of PSC. We expect that high PSC work environments—whereby policies, practices and procedures are geared towards the protection of worker psychological health and promotion of wellbeing—will produce conditions such as reasonable levels of work demands combined with adequate provisions for job control, support, and resources. The current study will assist in bridging gap between the PSC theoretical research and organisational practice, while further emphasising the importance of valuing employees' psychological health.

10.2   Method

10.2.1   Participants

This study was conducted in a large hierarchically structured organisation of 3000 white-collar employees in a university setting. We investigated two work units that were selected due to their high PSC levels and low absenteeism rates. These specific work units were identified through examining quantitative survey data that had been collected by the university's Human Resources (HR) department. Researchers then ranked all university work units based on PSC and absenteeism scores. With respect to the scores, the researchers proposed three work units would be most suitable for investigation due to having the highest PSC scores and the lowest absenteeism scores. The university's HR department selected and contacted two of these work units to secure their participation in this study.

Employees within the units work together on a daily basis and both groups were quite small—the first being around six staff members and the second around 13 staff members. The two units are located within two separate departments within the same broader organisation. The employees were contacted by the organisation's human resources department with the line managers' permission. A recruitment email was sent to all employees (including managers) within these respective work units.

A total of five participants (two managers from each work group and three employees) were recruited. While this is a small sample, we interviewed the maximum available in the group. It should be noted that it was originally intended that we would also contact workers from low PSC work groups. However, it is interesting to note that we were not able to recruit sufficient numbers of participants. Only one manager from a low PSC work group agreed to volunteer their work group in the study for recruitment, yet no employees responded to the recruitment email.

10.2.2   Procedure

Qualitative methods are the most appropriate for revealing in-depth themes relating to work groups' functioning. Interviews were centred on semi-structured questions with supplementary questions based on participant responses. Interview questions were adapted from the PSC Hierarchy of Control (HOC; Bailey, Pignata, & Dollard, 2014), which is designed to be a practical resource tool based on the PSC framework. The PSC HOC can also be used to address psychosocial risks and hazards by assessing the work environment and uses the following structure to guide questions: organisational policy, implementation of procedures, manager support, job design, individual factors. Example questions include 'are you given supportive feedback about the work that you do?' and 'are you aware of any organisational policies surrounding mental wellbeing? If so, what do these policies, practices or procedures look like?' The Health and Safety Executive Standard (HSE) Indicator tool was also

included to provide insights into aspects of job design, such as demands, role clarity and peer support (Health and Safety Executive, 2007). Example items include 'are you clear on what is expected of you in your role?' and 'if work gets difficult, are your colleagues there to help you?'

All interviews were conducted individually by the primary researcher and at a time that was convenient to the participant. The project received ethics approval from the respective institution. Each interview went for approximately 40 min to 1 h. Note that participants were asked questions adapted from the PSC HOC and HSE indicator tool, rather than the specific PSC-12 items. Following the interviews, the interview recording was transcribed and thematically analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Key categories were created as themes emerged within the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure core themes were representative of the work units, all participants were sent the results, and a close to final version of the paper, to read and ensure that the themes were accurate and representative of their work environment.

10.3   Results from Thematic Analysis

The five interviews were transcribed and NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to conduct thematic analysis. With respect to the framework of questions derived through the PSC HOC and the HSE Indicator Tool, categories were developed surrounding the organisational policy position, management, job (design and demands) and the participants' individual experiences. Given that the study was centred on positive aspects of the work groups, themes that did not relate to this understanding were excluded. Through an iterative process undertaken by the researchers, three major themes were identified from the interviews and this construction of themes is summarised in Table 10.1. As stated, the thematic findings were also shared with the participants for their feedback and the findings were validated to be an accurate representation. It should be noted that more closed questions were asked regarding job-design aspects through the HSE tool (e.g., the level of role clarity), which produced a more yes or no response (however some participants did expand on these points) As such, themes relating to this nature may be under-represented in the qualitative findings, serving as a potential study limitation.

The results (see Table 10.1) provide a rich view of specific practical characteristics, or examples, which are central to (and therefore may help conceptualise) high PSC work environments. The core themes—or expressions of a high PSC environment—to emerge from the interviews were (1) a shared sense of meaningful work (i.e., common goals) and social support (enhanced through collaborative work group practices and processes), (2) a high level of job crafting and (3) management support for psychological health. It is important to note that the following themes are not completely discrete and inevitably there is some degree of interrelation. These themes were constructed as they reflected the most consistency and commonality in responses from participants - above and beyond having broad organisational policies

Table 10.1 Themes that represent other or indirect outcomes of a high PSC workplace

Primary theme	Sub-themes	Sample quotes of the primary theme
Shared sense of meaningful work (i.e., common goals) and social support: enhanced through collaborative work group practices and processes	– Collaborative and innovative work design and structure	"We have a system where we have a person who is a lead for a particular program, if (name) is the lead person but they need help or someone else to assist then he will ask one of the team"
	– Work underpinned by a strong collective sense of value from employees and perception that work is meaningful	"And I think everyone's that way inclined too (motivated) … you know they see it as good work"
	– High level of communication, particularly through regular team and individual meetings	"We have a six week cycle of team meetings so people can bring issues to the table in what we hope is a very collaborative environment"
	– Valuing all employees	"Cultivating a more loving environment rather than a fearful one where people do feel cared about by each other"
	– Working towards a shared vision or goal through teamwork	"So part of it is making a goal clear and making by-in that they (team) do actually support it and that they may have creative ideas that you haven't thought of"
	– Fair and equitable distribution of resources	"No one is jealous of what anyone else is getting and doing"
	– Given opportunities to communication issues and give/receive feedback	"If they (employees) have a personal issue then they have to have a personal meeting but if it's a team related issue then hopefully they are confident enough to say … the team environment is strong enough to raise them so that's the sort of way I have tried to establish it"
	– Regular informal social gatherings	"You want people to have those social conversations and that was really important when we were building the team to keep those connections open"
	– High level of peer support and assistance to achieve work	"Everyone is happy to say well I'll do this bit, you do this bit and we'll share it around and make sure you have a day off presenting face to face … and that sort of thing so it does flow pretty well. And like I say it's that backup from the team that makes it possible"
	– Team has good skill set and positive about what they do	"I think the team we have has a really good set of skills and are really positive about the work they do and I think everyone likes coming to work too. So that makes a difference and we get on pretty well on the whole"

Table 10.1 (continued)

Primary theme	Sub-themes	Sample quotes of the primary theme
A high level of employee job crafting	– Flexibility	"Flexibility in working is a great thing, that's a real improvement over the years and it comes at things like mental health and just general wellbeing because you need flexibility to be refreshed, enlivened and to be able to be productive"
		"Work doesn't just happen when you're in front of a computer—it happens in a whole range of ways"
	– Autonomy in how their day and work is structured (within reason)	"You spend a lot of time at work so you want it to be a good environment for people and you want them to feel like they have a say in their work"
	– Meaningful work and participation with fellow employees	"I really like the work we do and I like the interactions with schools and that sort of thing. So it allows you to grow new ideas and develop new ideas with someone else"
	– Freedom to negotiate work tasks	"Certainly they (managers) will negotiate with me or with each other about it (work tasks). So it's always worked out quite well. So that sort of thing I do find that variety keeps it interesting"
	– Variety in job tasks	"But that's quite an interesting thing about my job because it evolves depending on all sorts of things …"
	– Adding and changing work tasks	"Framing the work is kind of up to you with inputs from the manager … there's a high degree of flexibility in the work which is nice and challenging"
Management support for employee psychological health	– Respect for healthy work/life balance	"I badger some of my staff and say you have a day of leave today and I saw an email from you—why? Give yourself a break, because you're more productive when you give yourself a break"

(continued)

Table 10.1 (continued)

Primary theme	Sub-themes	Sample quotes of the primary theme
		"People have families and other commitments outside of work and so it's balancing those things but in saying that the organisation has a very family friendly policy and that is helpful for those who have children"
		"Everybody needs a head rest. One of the stressors which sort of comes in by stealth is that everybody has their work connected to their mobile phone"
	– Prioritisation of psychological health	"It's supporting them to do work but it's also about supporting them to be well I think. So that's the balance. Because we all know we can't work 24/7 because that's no good for our mental health anyway"
	– Recognising problems and addressing them swiftly	"If there are issues between team members they (managers) will address them promptly no doubt"
	– Open and honest	"They're very open about talking to people. … They are very honest with enough people, there's not just one thing happening here and so that does help build up trust"
	– Frequent communication with employees and processes to ensure communication (e.g., induction process)	"[I] meet with them about every three weeks and then the other manager would meet that person and me every six weeks, so we had this cycle of induction so that people would start to feel comfortable with the processes and just working within them to determine their core hours etc"
	– First port of call if there's an issue (i.e., 'open door' policy and accessible through phone and email if out of office)	"There are a couple of people that you're closest to but I think here I'm happy and confident enough with my managers"
	– Awareness of mental health issues	"You know a lot of mental health issues don't really surface because their radars aren't attuned to it but when you get repeated symptoms that are escalating … even things like leave. You know people are off every Monday or whatever and you've just gotta ask yourself are they taking advantage of their sick leave, taking a sickie or is there something actually wrong with them?"
	– Employee Assistance Program	"The people that have used it do speak highly of it. So it is good but it needs to be visible—not hidden. So things like that really need to be in those induction packs. If people do express the fact that they are stressed then the managers need to know what the resources are"

in place. Results showed that it was the actual team unit's work environment that was most influential, such as the culture that the team members' created and how they interacted. These themes were consistent across both work groups, with the most prominent theme being the high level of shared sense of work and social support.

10.4   Discussion

The central aim of this study was to gain a more practical understanding of the characteristics that are relevant to high PSC work units. High PSC represents good ethics and morals, and has strong value-based components consisting of participation, commitment, communication and priority regarding psychological health. This investigation generated practical recommendations on how to cultivate better PSC in work units. The study also revealed the favourable outcomes that emerged as a result of a robust PSC.

Overall, it was recognised that the three core themes are both contributors of a high PSC context yet are also the outcomes of having good PSC; likely the result of a cyclical spiraling effect of positive resources and outcomes. It is important to note that some participants were also aware of more broad organisational policies that related to psychological health (e.g., an anti-bullying policy). However, the knowledge of these organisational policies were variable, and participants generally perceived that these policies were poorly communicated and/or implemented at a more detailed level within work groups. Next, the three main themes that emerged from the work groups will be discussed.

10.4.1   Shared Sense of Meaningful Work and Social Support: Enhanced Through Collaborative Work Group Practices and Processes

First, the most prominent theme to emerge through the interview analysis was the high level of co-worker support and socialisation among employees. Social support has been highlighted as important to protect psychological and physical health. Social support is linked to motivational aspects of work and is considered an important attribute of work design (Gersick, Bartunekm, & Dutton, 2000), and subsequent states of well-being and perceptions that work is meaningful (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). A well-supported theoretical paper by Cohen and Wills (1985) outlines two models of social support. The model shows as a social support is a buffer because it safeguards a person from potentially pathological influences of stressful events, yet it is still beneficial even if an employee is not under stress (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social support has also been found to enhance work motivation (Adler & Kwon, 2002), pro-social work behaviours (Grant, 2007), performance

and job satisfaction (Neilsen, 2015). In addition, perceived social support is also associated with positive organisational citizenship behaviours that also help other employees at work (Ladd & Henry, 2000)

Within this study, it was stated that the high degree of social support was facilitated via the nature of work design structures, likely reflective of a high PSC environment, which encourages collaboration and positive interpersonal interaction. The presence of strong social support due to PSC can be conceptualised via two perspectives. First, in high PSC environments it is likely that there are also high levels of the PSC dimensions participation and communication as integral components of the working environment. Second, a high PSC environment is known to lead to a reduction in psychosocial risks factors (i.e., poor co-worker support), which would therefore result in a positive effect on social relationships via the practices of the work group. A further important sub-theme is that participants stated that they could rely on their colleagues to assist them in completing work for a deadline or for advice if they were unsure of their work tasks. It was also specified that there was no competition between staff members for resources, suggesting policies and procedures reflective of high PSC ensure that employees are provided adequate resources to complete their tasks.

As well, the work group members were regarded to be both skilled and positive about their work—a likely outcome of social support. In one work unit, the projects and workload was divided into small teams in which an employee held responsibility or autonomy in leading the project. This enabled a great deal of teamwork and productivity. Also, the innovative and creative nature of work tasks required sharing ideas and efforts for the efficient execution of projects. This is consistent with review by Delarue, Hootegem, Proctor, and Burridge (2008) that demonstrated how teamwork positively influenced all four dimensions of performance. Structure the work this way also facilitates a high degree of communication, namely through regular team meetings. In turn, the high level of communication through meetings contributes to greater task and role clarity, which has been shown as being particularly important when the social support is high, through moderating the relationship between demands and psychological strain (Bleise & Castro, 2000). In addition, within these meetings, participants stated that informal praise was given and managers often communicated praise on behalf of other people.

Furthermore, an important subtheme that contributed to the recognition of social support was that there was a common vision and clear goals communicated among the employees. Participants perceived their work as having great value and felt like they were working towards common goals; underpinned by a shared belief that the work is meaningful. Intrinsic meaningfulness is also highlighted in the literature as a critical aspect of work motivation (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). The participants stated that they are encouraged to interact socially and to build upon this strong sense of common values, teamwork and a shared perception of meaningful work. Overall, all participants stated feeling valued and welcomed into the work culture. These sub-themes demonstrate how policy and practice in a high PSC environment establishes reasonable demands, which are clearly communicated to

workers, while providing flexibility to socially interact and work together to achieve goals.

10.4.2 High Level of Employee Job Crafting

Another key theme is that employees experienced a high degree of job crafting, which is conceptualised as the employees' ability to take initiative in customising their own work to fit their needs, values and abilities (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Academic literature proposes that employees who job craft actively restructure their job using three primary techniques: (1) task crafting (i.e., adding or removing tasks, changing the nature of tasks or altering the amount of time energy and attention are given to certain tasks), relational crafting (i.e., altering how when or with whom employee interact with in the completion of their job) and cognitive crafting (changing the way they perceive tasks and relationship that make up their jobs) (Berg et al., 2013). Comparable to social support, in the current study job crafting was greatly facilitated through specific structures and processes that allowed participants to influence how their work is designed. Policy and practice that provides employees' with these high levels of job control, skill discretion, and decision authority was a feature of these high PSC work environments (Dollard, 2012).

Within the literature job crafting has also been recognised as indicative of meaningful work (see Berg et al., 2013), which was a prominent theme that emerged in this study (discussed in the above section). Using these job-crafting techniques employees are able to mold the boundaries of their work in order to alter how they experience the meaningfulness of their role. In research studies, job crafting has been positively related to enjoying work and therefore leads to greater work performance (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2014). In addition, the high degree of meaningfulness shared amongst participants, and a deeper sense of intrinsic motivation to complete tasks, also relates to Hackman and Oldman's (1976) job characteristics model. Within their model, Hackman and Oldman describe meaningful work as corresponding to jobs that have aspects such as task variety, identity, significance, feedback and autonomy.

One work group in particular was highly innovative and creative, and employees had opportunities to cultivate new projects and ideas. The job crafting techniques were utilised by participants, who reported adding in extra tasks or workload that they felt were right (even if management did not request). Further, participants stated a high degree of clarity, reasonable deadlines and expectations, which were predominantly identified through the closed-questions from the HSE indicator tool. In addition, giving employees the responsibility to lead their small groups on short term projects allows each employee to have responsibility and a degree of control and autonomy in managing their work. Also, due to the project-based work design, employees experienced a high degree of task variety and change in how they task crafted their work. It was noted that these projects are clearly and collaboratively planned through a comprehensive planning calendar, designed to ensure role clarity and adequate resources to manage demands. Participants also reported having variety in their job

tasks and autonomy in structuring their day (within reason), and there was freedom to negotiate tasks as well as work hours, particularly to fit around family life. In general, high PSC work groups effectively provide resources in the form of job control and skill discretion—with management support to employ those resources—resulting in an environment that encourages job crafting.

10.4.3 Middle Management Support for Employee Psychological Health

The final key theme was the level of regard that the work group's management placed on psychological health, and therefore translation of relevant policies or processes into action. Managerial practices and leadership are well-documented in the literature as being fundamental for employee health and work performance (Chiok Foong Loke, 2001; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006; Zohar & Luria, 2004). In our study, it was apparent that the work group management fostered and highly valued social support amongst participants, evident in the design of work tasks and other practices (e.g., frequent formal and/or informal social gatherings). Also, in the case of any issues relating to psychological health, managers were the first port of call if any concerns arose. Participants (both employees and managers) stated that their managers had an open door policy, and were also easily contactable via phone and email. In addition, the managers who participated within this study had a high level of awareness and prioritisation for employees' health, and provided several examples of when they acted swiftly if they suspected that their employees were experiencing any distress. Managers would also seek support (external) from HR if required. Managers referred employees onto the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which was viewed very favourably by all participants (yet stated by all that it should be made more visible by the organisation). These are all examples of managers' actively prioritising worker psychological health and communicating this clearly to their employees as a direct reflection of enacted PSC values (also see Biron et al., 2017).

Furthermore, one manager acknowledged the psychological stress of starting at the organisation and therefore took initiative in creating a work group induction folder and processes for their work unit. They arranged to meet employees on a regular basis and ensured that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) was highly visible to employees. This demonstrates active PSC concepts including participation by managers in prioritising worker wellbeing and visible communication about worker psychological health. Both managers also ensured high levels of consultation between themselves and employees, evident in frequently communicated supportive feedback both in one-on-one and team meetings.

Another important sub-theme that emerged was the managers' respect for the psychological distinction between the work and family domain. For instance, one manager stated that they preferred employees to have a work and personal phone so when employees are on leave they are disconnected from their work. This is

indicative of policy that prioritises worker wellbeing by ensuring workplace demands do not have a detrimental impact on personal resources. Overall, there was a great appreciation for the need for work-life balance, and family priorities, which was a message communicated down from the top of the organisation for instance family friendly policies. The managers also appreciated the psychological stress caused by job insecurity (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995).

10.4.4   The Central Themes in Relation to PSC Sub-Constructs

The four sub-constructs (e.g., communication) of PSC are evident within each of the core themes. In essence, while the four pillars of PSC are embedded within the three main themes, they also act as the *mechanisms* that facilitate these themes themselves. First, in relation to the initial theme (e.g., social support), it is the elevated degree and enactment of PSC's participation and communication dimensions that enables the high level of social support to arise. For instance, participants stated that there was a high degree of communication around *all* work-related issues, as well as participation with others, which contributed to a more caring environment. A lesser or minimal degree of employee participation and communication would hinder a good PSC, leading to lower levels of social support and opportunities to discuss psychological health and safety, consequentially reducing that strong buffer for work-related stress.

The second theme of job crafting also echoes the values aligned with the protection of psychological health, and primarily the participation and communication dimensions of PSC. This is likely due to the positive amount of participatory processes in the work design, which provides employees the freedom to create the aforementioned high degree of social support and teamwork. As well, having a great deal of communication, participation and collaboration further creates more time spent with the work group (including managers) and greater levels of shared support. Thus, this increases the opportunities to raise psychological health and safety issues and also boosts employee comfortability in discussing matters on an individual-level too.

The final theme most visibly reflects all four of the PSC constructs in action: communication, participation, prioritisation and commitment for psychological health. Quite literally, the managers are acknowledged to directly engage in all of these actions. For instance, ensuring communication about psychological health and safety matters within meetings, allowing employees to participate in work matters, prioritising psychological health through supporting good work-life balance practices and commitment in implementing processes, practices and procedures that uphold a good PSC work environment. Also, from a work design perspective, it was obvious that both work group managers communicated and reinforced valuing employees' psychological health through ensuring reasonable levels of work pressure and allowing the opportunity for job control while providing adequate resources to complete job tasks.
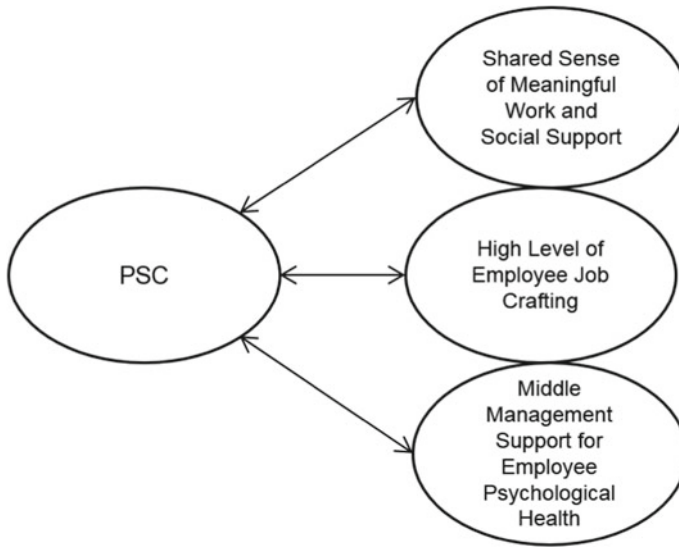
Fig. 10.1 Bi-directional feedback model between PSC and core themes

10.4.5 Theoretical Conceptualisation of Findings

This grounded theory analysis supports a bi-directional feedback model; proposing a cyclical and reinforcing relationship between PSC and the established primary themes i.e., (1) shared sense of meaningful work (i.e., common goals) and social support (enhanced through collaborative work group practices and processes), (2) job crafting, and (3) middle management support for psychological health (see Fig. 10.1). Theoretically, work unit PSC precedes these factors and therefore acts as the foundation which enables social support, the construction of processes that facilitate job crafting, and also middle management prioritisation of worker mental health. However, in turn, the occurrence of these aspects feeds back to employees that there is strong PSC, and strengthens their perceptions that their work unit/environment values their health.

In addition, another theorisation is that even if the work group fosters a high level of communication, prioritisation, commitment and participation about issues o*ther than* psychological health, it is logical that these values will still have a positive impact on PSC. For example, structuring high levels of shared social support means that there is a high level of participation and communication between colleagues and managers, so if an issue of psychological health does arise it facilitates appropriate action. Through considering a bi-directional model between PSC and job design elements, good work practices directly enhances the four pillars of PSC and consequentially makes it more likely that these principles and values will be exercised if there are issues regarding psychological health.

10.4.6   Practical Implications

The results from this research demonstrate that in work groups where policy, practices, and procedures prioritise employee psychological health, an environment will be created which allows collaborative work amongst teams, individual freedom to craft job design and supportive management practices. By setting tasks that balance creativity and responsibility with adequate resources the need for unhealthy competition is reduced and instead team work is encouraged. Team cohesion is advanced when employees are provided with clear goals that instill a common vision. Further formal practises, such as regular team meetings, that focus on achieving these goals, combined with informal mechanisms for positive social interaction, all create an atmosphere of support and productivity. Therefore, it would be favourable for workplaces to establish common values and what they are ultimately working towards in unity, cultivating a shared intrinsic motivation in employees.

Management that openly and clearly supports practices such as encouraging individual job control so that workers feel comfortable to job craft are clearly important. If appropriate, direct supervisors should allow individuals the freedom to determine how they will achieve their work goals. Greater autonomy and flexibility will be favourable of teams working together to achieve goals, providing a positive, supportive atmosphere that appears to be highly productive. In accordance with research by Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades (2001), employees' perceived level of support from their workplace will then lead to a desire to reciprocate through work performance. Overall, the employees' degree of job control results in workers feeling motivated and valued.

Management also should have clear communication relating directly to worker psychological health by openly discussing issues such as worker wellbeing, employee assistance, positive feedback, and work life balance. This demonstrates to workers that their psychological health and wellbeing is valued, and thus further encourages them to engage in practices that protect worker health, creating the cyclical effect as described in Fig. 10.1. Alternatively, it is likely that low PSC work groups may be the result of unreasonable demands with limited resources that lead to unhealthy competition and low levels of teamwork. Goals would not be clearly established and social interaction discouraged. Also managers would not actively prioritise worker mental health practices via methods such as positive feedback, work life balance, appropriate use of EAP. It is therefore suggested that in order to achieve a high PSC environment organisational policy, including psychosocial strategies and interventions, will have clear descriptions about how social interaction, job crafting, and management support will be achieved.

10.4.7   Limitations

This chapter is intended to provide some insight into the good work practices that are arose through investigation into high PSC work environments. However, there are various limitations that should be noted. First, the study was only conducted with participants who are white-collar university workers and in a specific work environment (high-level knowledge workers). Therefore, results are not necessarily generalisable to all contexts or occupations. Furthermore, while obtaining rich qualitative data, the study ultimately had a limited small sample size with a small number of participants in two work units. Larger sample sizes would provide additional evidence for the mechanisms, which exists in high PSC work groups.

It was also unfortunate that individuals from low PSC groups did not participate, and so contrasts with a low PSC work environment could not be made. It is possible that the lack of participation is reflective of low PSC for instance high demands, low resources or support having an impact on motivation. Future studies need to account for how low PSC may affects recruitment and consider methods for obtaining information that will provide the evidence base for contrasting practices that cause and/or are a consequence of low PSC.

The qualitative nature of this study does not allow for model testing to determine certain relationships between factors such as how much does the high PSC create the emerging themes versus whether those activities lead to higher levels of PSC. The suggested spiral model in Fig. 10.1 is based on previous research that clearly situates PSC as preceding aspects such as social support, job design, and management practices, which then feeds back to the PSC thereby positively reinforcing an echo effect that begins with PSC. There may also be other pathways whereby high PSC → management activities → social support and job crafting. Future theory and model testing will continue to illuminate the means by which PSC contributes to workplace factors and how those practices then impact upon PSC.

Further, the participants did not describe in detail the wider organisational policy that may be acting to support themselves or their managers to create these high PSC environments. Yet, there was a sense of understanding that the wider organisation promoted positive PSC aspects. The current study could not seek to investigate the reasons why these organisational policies did not transfer other works groups that reported low PSC. Future studies should also focus on the upper level activities that enable the awareness or translation of organisational PSC type policies. Future studies should seek to understand and how PSC is transferred via facilitators and/or limited through barriers within an organisation.

10.5   Future Directions and Conclusions

This study demonstrates some of the characteristics of a high PSC work environment. It was conceptualised that these themes were both an expression of PSC and

well as a reinforcer of PSC. The themes of social support and job crafting are both closely related to work design and as such are key to successful psychosocial hazard intervention strategies. Overall, the themes that emerged in this study are highly informative for future intervention studies at both an organisational level (e.g., managerial support for psychological health) and a job design level (increasing job crafting). As well, interventions are more effective particularly when primary (organisational) and secondary (work design) changes are conducted in tandem. We suggest that future studies should continue investigation into PSC contexts using qualitative approaches to further illuminate the systems and process that exist to achieve a high PSC working environment. Future research should also seek to investigate how work design relates to the PSC in other industries and settings, and in low PSC contexts, particularly with a view to informing how to consequently increase levels of PSC.

Key Messages
- High PSC work groups demonstrate, (1) a shared sense of meaningful work (i.e., common goals) and social support (enhanced through collaborative work group practices and processes), (2) high employee job crafting and, (3) high managerial support for employee psychological health.
- Findings provide both theoretical and practical recommendations to cultivate PSC in groups.

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