


Socially Responsible Leadership and Job Engagement in University Context: Mediation of Psychological Safety

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Abstract

Purpose - This study looks into the connection between job engagement (JE) and socially responsible leadership (SRL) in public universities in Uganda.

Methodology - The study is quantitative in nature and consisted of personnel working at Uganda's public universities supplied data. The information was gathered using a five-point Likert scale in an organized questionnaire. Expert judgment and content validity were used to assess the validity of the instrument. Warp PLS and smart PLS-SEM analysis was run on 214 legitimate responses among 250 public university staff.

Findings - The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between JE and SRL. PS and SRL were found to be positively correlated. Furthermore, the results showed a positive correlation between PS and JE. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that PS acts as mediation in the relationship between SRL and JE.

Originality – The study contributes to the understanding of the approaches related to improving employee job engagement in the education sector. The study adds to the body of knowledge concerning the association between job engagement and psychological safety a crucial aspect of socially responsible leadership by examining data from developing countries in addition to other countries which had previously been ignored.

Practical implications - This study contributes to the corpus of research on SRL and PS, especially in the context of universities, in terms of JE. Additionally, it provides advice on how to use PS and SRL to enhance university workplace conditions such as JE. By emphasizing the crucial roles that a psychologically safe environment and leadership style that is socially responsible play in promoting positive social interactions at work, our article advances the understanding of social exchange theory.

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Introduction

Universities are known for their fast-paced, dynamic environments, where staff members must overcome numerous challenges to provide outstanding customer service (Narenji Thani et al., 2022). In this context, effective leadership plays a critical role in creating a positive work atmosphere and raising employee performance (Meng et al., 2022). The level of emotional commitment and dedication that workers demonstrate toward their work is known as job engagement, and it eventually leads to higher performance and better health (Delina, 2020). Within the university setting, job engagement is especially important because staff members deal directly with customers and are essential to providing outstanding experiences (Sezen-Gultekin et al., 2021). Motivation, dedication, and output are all positively connected with employee engagement, which in turn improves customer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, it is critical for universities to understand the elements that affect job engagement (Sopiah et al., 2020).

Leadership that is socially responsible has been a popular approach of leadership in recent years. Socially responsible managers show sincere concern for their staff members' welfare, provide assistance, and foster a positive work environment (He et al., 2019). Positive employee results, such as higher job engagement, satisfaction, and productivity, are linked to this leadership style (Kyambade et al., 2023). Leaders that take a socially responsible stance put their workers' welfare first, offer assistance, and create a happy workplace. Positive results like increased organizational commitment and job satisfaction have been associated with this leadership style. Employee well-being and organizational sustainability are enhanced by leadership philosophies that prioritize values, respect, dignified treatment, and support (Choi, 2021). The four pillars of socially responsible leadership are community responsiveness, positive engagement, ethical sensitivity, and spiritual depth. These components can help ensure an organization's long-term viability and sustainability (Kyambade et al., 2024). A key component of sustainable organizational growth that strengthens the long-term competitive advantage is socially responsible leadership, which is also linked to organizational citizenship behavior (Waldman et al., 2020). Important insights into efficient leadership techniques can be obtained by looking at how socially responsible leadership affects employee engagement at work (Lin et al., 2020). Furthermore, psychological safety is defined as workers' sense of a safe work atmosphere in which to take interpersonal risks and freely express thoughts, worries, and opinions without fear of unfavorable outcomes is promoted by socially responsible leadership (Edmondson, 2018).

Moreover, psychological safety includes people's perception of their workplace, where they feel comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions without worrying about unfavorable outcomes (Liu et al., 2023). Workers are more likely to actively participate, take chances, and give their all when they feel psychologically safe in their workplace (Ahmad et al., 2022). In order to create a conducive work atmosphere, especially during stressful situations and client relations, psychological safety serves as mediation between socially responsible leadership and employee engagement (Kyambade et al., 2023). Workers are more willing to share ideas, take chances, and work together to solve issues when they feel psychologically safe, which eventually results in higher levels of job engagement (Durrak, 2023). Nonetheless, there is still much to learn about the fundamental processes through which socially responsible leadership affects worker engagement in the education sector (Kyambade et al., 2023). Insufficient research specifically addressing these ideas in university setting has resulted in the majority of prior research on socially responsible leadership, job engagement, and psychological safety focusing on different industries (Ahmad et al., 2022; Khattak et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is a dearth of research that combines the effects of job engagement, leadership style that is socially responsible and psychological safety in a single study, especially in the field of education, despite earlier studies looking at these aspects independently.

A more thorough understanding of these factors' interactions and effects on employee engagement in a university setting can be obtained by conducting research on their combined effects. According to this study,

job engagement is positively impacted by socially responsible leadership and more particularly when psychological safety acts as a mediating factor in this relationship. Thus, this study's goal is to determine the fundamental processes by which socially responsible leadership affects worker engagement and emphasizes the significance of psychological safety in the academic setting. Therefore, the aim of this exploration is to examine the link that exists between job engagement in the university sector and socially responsible leadership. Specifically, psychological safety's mediating role will be examined, as shown in Figure 1.

The research's practical implications are highly valuable for organizations looking to improve employee engagement. Learning about the benefits of a psychologically safe environment and a leadership style that is socially responsible can help firms create leadership development initiatives and foster an environment where employees feel supported. In the end, these initiatives may help boost worker happiness, job engagement, and overall organizational success. This research aims to offer important revelations on how the application of practices of leadership that is socially responsible contributes to the creation of a favorable work atmosphere which improves job engagement and fosters the well-being of employee by examining these interconnected factors. Comprehending these dynamics may hold consequences for establishments seeking to enhance worker engagement and overall efficacy in the rapidly evolving and client-centered education industry.

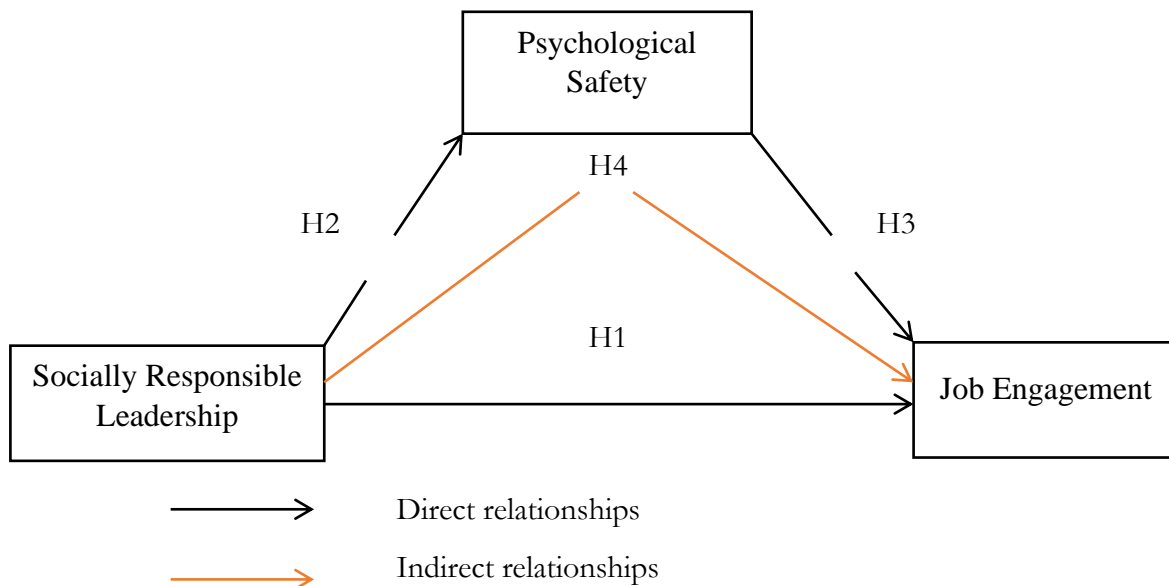


Figure 1: Hypothesized Conceptual Model

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Social Exchange Theory

Using the framework of Social Exchange Theory, it is possible to explore the networks between job engagement, socially responsible leadership, and psychological safety (Liu et al., 2023). As per this theory, persons create social ties by pooling resources such as assistance, trust, and cooperation. According to Kyambade et al. (2023), a leadership style that is socially responsible serves as an illustration of how leaders and employees can have positive social exchanges. According to Xu et al. (2022), leaders who uphold social responsibility offer support, nurturing, and inspiration creating an environment that is conducive to interpersonal interactions that yield to favorable worker results such as job engagement. It is possible to see

psychological safety as an important resource that is shared at work and influences employee engagement (Mao & Tian, 2022). Because it creates an atmosphere where workers feel appreciated, supported, and valued, the leadership style that is socially responsible is crucial for fostering psychological safety. Staffs have a higher probability of feeling psychologically safe and more focused at work if they trust that their leaders are responsible socially (Vakira et al., 2023). Workers who feel safe enough to take risks, express own opinion, and interact openly are more likely to be committed to their jobs and feel satisfied with their work (Kyambade et al., 2023). The Social Exchange Theory states that socially responsible leadership promotes positive social interactions, which in turn lead to an increase in psychological safety. In turn, these resources support increased levels of work engagement. Workers appreciate leadership that's responsible socially and return the favor through investing their time, effort, and devotion to their work (Kyambade et al., 2023).

Socially responsible Leadership and Job Engagement

Engagement on Job refers to the level of zeal, involvement, and commitment that workers demonstrate in their work. Employees that are engaged are motivated to put in their best efforts, show inventiveness, and participate actively in the accomplishments of their company (Yadav et al., 2022). Socially responsible managers provide their staff member's freedom to decide for themselves and carry out tasks. Empowerment fosters a sense of accountability and ownership, which in turn increases job engagement. Workers are more likely to be driven, show initiative, and feel fulfilled by their work when they are trusted and empowered (Kyambade et al., 2023). A key component of socially responsible leadership is encouraging staff members' personal and professional development via coaching, mentoring, and educational opportunities. This emphasis on growth both professional and personal fulfills workers' intrinsic inspiration and desire for ongoing development, which in turn increases job engagement (Adinew, 2023). Furthermore, leaders who practice social responsibility constantly provide feedback and acknowledgement to their staff members. They celebrate successes, offer helpful criticism, and acknowledge contributions. Employees who receive this kind of feedback and acknowledgment feel more competent and valuable which increases their motivation to perform at a high level which increases job engagement (Aftab et al., 2022). Furthermore, socially responsible leaders emphasize the necessity of a peaceful balance between the personal and professional spheres because they understand the importance of the wellbeing of employees and work-life balance. By placing a high priority on employee wellbeing, they reduce work pressure, foster contentment at work, and promote a healthy balance between personal and work life, all of which increase job engagement (Wei et al., 2023). There is a reciprocal relationship between engaging employees and socially responsible leadership. Socially responsible leaders foster an atmosphere that supports opportunities for personal development, trust, and support in line with the principles of job engagement. In turn, motivated staff members support a favorable corporate culture and improved results. According to Kyambade et al. (2023), the existence of socially responsible leadership serves as a stimulant for enhanced involvement of employees, which in turn leads to better productivity, job satisfaction, and overall organization success and its workforce.

H₁. Socially responsible leadership is related to job engagement.

Socially responsible Leadership and Psychological Safety

The idea that someone can communicate and express themselves freely and voice opinions without fear of negative consequences like retaliation is known as psychological safety (Liu et al., 2023). People feel more comfortable being themselves and sharing their opinions in a setting that promotes psychological safety (McClintock & Fainstad, 2022). Psychological safety and socially responsible leadership are positively correlated (Kyambade et al., 2023). Leaders who demonstrate socially responsible behavior also improve psychological safety, which further boosts their efficacy as leaders. In order to foster employee happiness, engagement, creativity, and well-being, psychological safety is essential (Wang et al., 2022). Workers are more likely to put in their best efforts, collaborate well, and take calculated risks that lead to organizational success when they feel

psychologically safe. Psychological safety in the workplace is positively impacted by socially responsible leadership, which is exemplified by leaders who show concern, care, and support for their followers (Kyambade et al., 2023). Socially responsible leaders build relationships based on trust and encourage honest communication, creating a climate in which workers freely share thoughts and worries without fear of the consequences (Kyambade et al., 2023). Workers have a higher probability of communicating openly and honestly when they believe that their leaders are approachable, sympathetic, and encouraging. This improves psychological safety. Socially responsible managers create a supportive work atmosphere where staff members feel valued, respected, and appreciated. They provide direction, tools, and support to help staff members overcome challenges and meet their goals. Leaders that are socially responsible foster an atmosphere that supports workers to take chances, voice opinions, and participate in making decision by showing compassion and support, which eventually increases psychological safety (Singh, 2023). There is a direct correlation between workers' will to risk taking, opinion voicing and psychological safety. When workers feel safe psychologically, the more likely they are to take initiative, communicate creative ideas, and question accepted conventions without worrying about unfavorable outcomes (Singh, 2023). By reassuring staff members that their managers genuinely care about their success and well-being, this strategy improves psychological safety. Workers are comfortable making errors, growing from them, and getting advice on how to get better. Establishing a psychologically safe environment at work is greatly aided by socially responsible leadership (Kyambade et al., 2023). In general, leadership style that is responsible socially greatly contributes to the promotion of psychological safety by fostering an environment that values inclusivity, empathy, trust, support, and a dedication to lifelong learning. Employees are more likely to communicate freely, take calculated risks, share ideas, work well together, and put their all into the success of the company when they feel psychologically safe. Socially responsible leaders who foster psychological safety improve engagement of employees, well-being, and overall performance of the organization (Kyambade et al., 2023). They also contribute to a positive work environment.

H₂. Socially responsible leadership relates to psychological safety.

Psychological Safety and Job Engagement

Within organizations, Engagement at work and psychological safety are closely related concepts and have a notable impact on the performance of individuals and teams (Sjöblom et al., 2022). Increased job satisfaction, employee engagement, and overall success of the organization are more likely to be seen in organizations that promote psychological safety as a top priority (Kyambade et al., 2023). People are more likely to actively participate in their roles when they feel secure psychologically in the environment where they work, which is why psychological safety is crucial in promoting job engagement (Singh, 2023). In addition, psychological safety empowers people to experiment and take chances without worrying about failing or suffering unfavorable outcomes (Liu et al., 2023). It creates a culture in which staff members are comfortable making suggestions, questioning the status quo, and taking creative risks. This ability to take chances encourages participation by giving people a feeling of independence and empowerment, which in turn promotes creativity. In teams and organizations, psychological safety also fosters a sense of inclusivity and support. People's bonds with the work and the organization are strengthened when they sense acceptance, respect, and value. By creating a happy work atmosphere, lowering stress levels, and improving general well-being, this sense of belonging encourages job engagement (Puranitee et al., 2022). In the workplace, psychological safety reduces anxiety and fear. A calm and happy work environment is created when people feel free to express themselves, share thoughts, and voice concerns with no fear of repercussions. Lower levels of anxiety and fear allow workers to focus more on their work rather than worrying about unfavorable consequences, which raises job engagement (Zampetakis, 2023). Similarly, developing relationships and trust are essential components of psychological safety. A foundation of trust is built by employees who feel psychologically safe both in teams and throughout the company. Through

the development of strong bonds, efficient communication, and a spirit of support and unity, trust raises employee engagement at work. When trust is present, workers are more likely to go above and beyond and work well together (Kyambade et al., 2023). All things considered, psychological safety is essential for fostering work engagement. Through the cultivation of an atmosphere that is marked by open communication, trust, teamwork, and support, organizations can establish a secure haven where workers are motivated to give their all to their work, leading to increased worker engagement.

H₃. Psychological safety relates to job engagement.

Psychological Safety's Mediating Role

Socially responsible leadership fosters open communication and trust amongst team members. Employees can feel more comfortable expressing their opinions, exchanging ideas, and having open and honest conversations when there is trust and open communication. Psychological safety facilitates employees' self-expression and increases their level of job engagement (Liu et al., 2023). Socially responsible leaders improve psychological safety by fostering a positive work environment. Trust and psychological safety are fostered within a team when workers believe that their leaders are empathetic and helpful (Kyambade et al., 2023). A Leadership style that is responsible socially is a contributor of psychological safety that allows people to voice own opinions and ideas and this increases motivation and job engagement (Kyambade et al., 2023). This leadership style gives workers the freedom to make their own decisions, which empowers them. When paired with psychological safety, this empowerment gives workers the freedom to own their work, decisions, hence contribute to team successes. Psychological safety fosters employee confidence to take initiative, which in turn fosters employee engagement and a sense of responsibility (Zampetakis, 2023). Leaders that are socially responsible place a high value on supporting their team members' development. They provide opportunities for learning and advancement, as well as mentorship and guidance. When this advice is paired with psychological safety, it creates an environment where workers are inspired to grow and reach their full potential (Liu et al., 2023). Socially responsible leaders create a culture that promotes psychological safety and increases employee engagement. Workers have a feeling of safety, support, and empowerment to give their best effort, which raises job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the goals of the company (Liu et al., 2023). Socially responsible leaders have the ability to greatly impact the degree of job engagement in their teams by understanding and promoting psychological safety (Kyambade et al., 2023). According to psychological safety's mediating role, the development of a psychologically secure workplace has an indirect effect on employee engagement as a result of socially responsible leadership. Socially responsible managers create an environment of trust and support, which empowers staff members to take chances and express themselves freely. As a result, workers experience higher levels of job engagement (Liu et al., 2023). Psychological safety acts as a bridge between engaged employees and socially responsible leadership. Workers are likely to become deeply engaged in their job when they consider their leaders to be socially responsible and provide a psychologically safe environment (Singh, 2023). To sum up, socially responsible leadership can foster a workplace that is psychologically safe, which can have a positive outcome on employee engagement. Employee engagement with tasks is increased when they feel that there is a safe space for them to voice their opinions and ideas (Liu et al., 2023). Companies that prioritize a psychologically safe environment and foster a leadership style with traits that are socially responsible will see higher levels of employee engagement, which will improve output and overall organizational success (Kyambade et al., 2023).

H₄. The link between socially responsible leadership and job engagement is mediated by Psychological safety.

Methods

Data Collection and Sampling

Data was collected from full-time employees in Uganda's public universities was used to analyze the study model. Since public universities predominate in Uganda's higher education sector, they were selected. There are nine public universities in Uganda, according to the Ministry of Education in Uganda. Only three well-known public universities in Uganda's central region (i.e. Makerere University, Makerere University Business School and Kyambogo University) where these variables are present were selected for the study in 2023. Given the size of the population and the researchers' limited resources, convenience sampling approach was selected for this study because it is frequently employed in situations where randomization is impractical. 250 questionnaires were sent to the universities under study. There were only 214 valid forms (responses) collected, yielding an 85.6% response rate.

Measures

There were two sections to the survey: one had 26 items covering latent variables, and the other had 5 questions covering the research sample characteristics. For the purpose of achieving the highest possible response rate, the questionnaire was written in English. A 10-item (codes: SRL1–SRL10) scale that was modified from (Dugan, 2015) was used to evaluate socially responsible leadership. As an illustration, consider the statements, "My supervisor gets along with employees very well" and "My supervisor expresses concern about employee's daily life." The job engagement scale had five items (codes: JE1–JE5) and was derived from Kong (2009). For example, "I find my work fulfilling and meaningful" and "I enjoy what I do". Psychological safety was evaluated using a five-item modified from (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006) scale (codes: PS1–PS5). For instance, "When I'm working, I don't always have to be cautious." and "Many kinds of potential threats exist at work." Lastly, A questionnaire with a Likert scale of five was used to measure the variables, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree.

Data Analysis

Our study used Warp PLS software version 7.0 and the smart PLS 4 (SEM) technique to validate the research hypotheses and analyze the measurement and structural model.

Results

Participant's Characteristics

The 214 participants in our study were 95 (44.4%) women and 119 (55.6%) men. Of the respondents, 119 (54.7%) were younger than 45, and 06 (2.8%) were between 56 and 65 years old. Moreover, 214 out of them (72%), held an undergraduate degree. In addition, 19 workers (08.9%) had an experience of less than two years, 154 workers (71.9%) had two to five years, and 41 workers (19.2%) had ten to ten years.

Descriptive Statistics

The loadings of items were computed and varied from 0.607 to 0.881, as shown in Table 1. According to Hair et al. (2019), Values of factor loading that exceed 0.5 are deemed appropriate. Additionally, Table 2 displays the mean scores of psychological safety, job engagement, and socially responsible leadership as reported by staff members at public universities.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	Item Loading	p-Value **
Socially responsible Leadership	3.11	0.899		
SRL1	2.93	1.314	(0.607)	0.012
SRL2	3.05	1.189	(0.668)	0.006
SRL3	3.22	1.079	(0.687)	0.008
SRL4	3.04	1.232	(0.681)	0.006
SRL5	3.03	1.138	(0.781)	0.005
SRL6	3.02	1.128	(0.627)	0.010
SRL7	3.16	1.388	(0.782)	0.005
SRL8	3.16	1.286	(0.750)	0.008
SRL9	3.26	1.285	(0.721)	0.011
SRL10	3.31	1.311	(0.613)	0.010
Job Engagement	3.47	1.045		
JE1	3.35	1.210	(0.881)	<0.001
JE2	3.51	1.281	(0.825)	<0.001
JE3	3.45	1.226	(0.764)	<0.001
JE4	3.49	1.111	(0.659)	<0.001
JE5	3.58	1.225	(0.762)	<0.001
Psychological Safety	3.59	0.93		
PS1	3.39	1.182	(0.724)	<0.001
PS2	3.49	1.225	(0.717)	<0.001
PS3	3.70	1.182	(0.713)	<0.001
PS4	3.78	1.125	(0.708)	<0.001
PS5	3.58	1.027	(0.622)	<0.001

* Mean score: "Low: 1.00 to 2.34, Average (Moderate): 2.35 to 3.67, High: 3.68 to 5.00". ** p value for items loading.

Reliability and Validity

As seen in Table 2, every variable has composite reliability values higher than 0.7 and values of Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.7. Moreover, the scales' validity is verified by applying the criteria of (Hair et al., 2020) since the AVE values are greater than 0.5.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

Construct	SRL	JE	PS
Composite reliability (CR)	0.899	0.879	0.911
Cronbach's alpha	0.901	0.862	0.854
AVE	0.661	0.712	0.700

Furthermore, according to Franke & Sarstedt (2019), "each latent variable's AVE value must be greater than the highest common value, and the relationship between two latent variables must be significantly less than unity, in order to demonstrate discriminant validity." Thus, as indicated in Table 3, the study model's discriminant validity is attained.

Table 3: Results of Discriminant Validity

Construct	SRL	JE	PS
SRL - Socially responsible leadership	0.752	1	
JE - Job engagement	0.596	0.817	1
PS - Psychological safety	0.647	0.644	0.809

Additionally, the HTMM validity was computed (refer to Table 4), and every value was lower than 0.85, suggesting that it is the best.

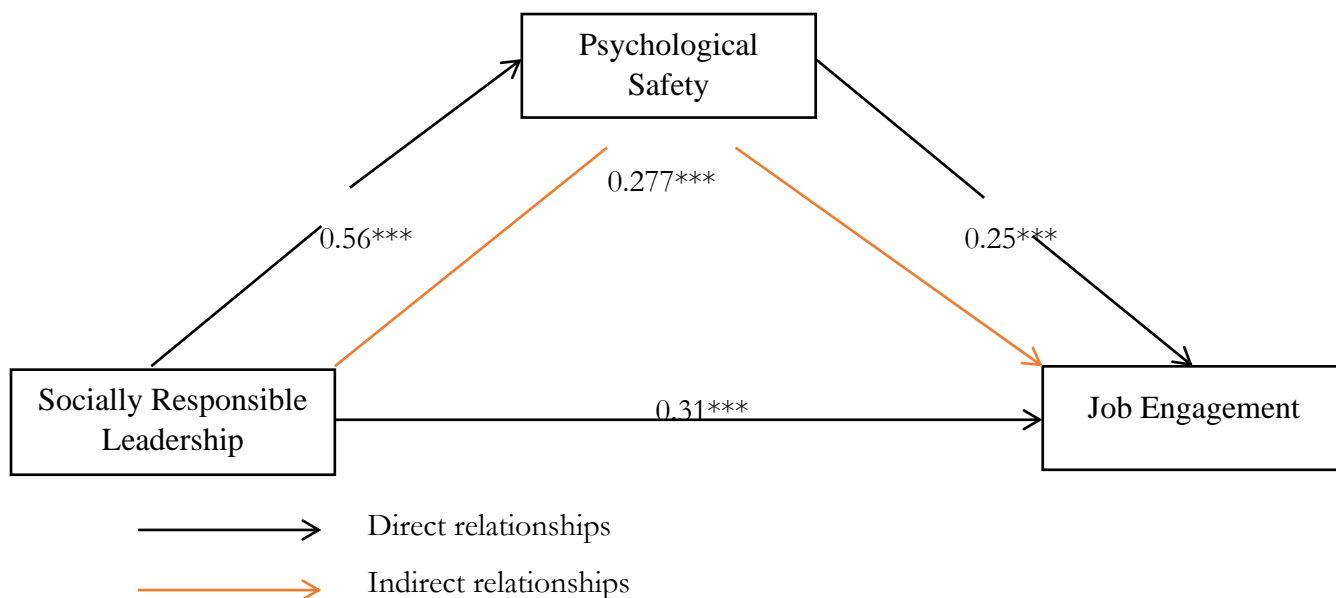
Table 4. Validity of HTMM

<i>HTMT Ratios</i>	PS	SRL	JE
PS	1		
SRL	0.354	1	
JE	0.436	0.588	1

Ultimately, Kock's (2017) Ten-point model fit and quality index requirements were all met by the current study.

Structural Models for Testing Hypotheses

Measurements of the path coefficient (β), p-value, and R-square (R2) were taken to confirm the structural model used in this investigation. The results of the hypothesis test (refer to Figure 2 and Table 5) showed that there was a positive relationship between psychological safety ($\beta = 0.56, p < 0.01$) and job engagement ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.01$) and socially responsible leadership. This implies that job engagement and psychological safety are likely to be high when socially conscious leadership emerges. H1 and H2 are therefore supported. Furthermore, a positive correlation ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$) has been observed between job engagement and psychological safety. This suggests that when psychological safety is high, employee job engagement tends to be high as well. Thus, H3 is approved.



*Figure 2: Conceptual Model Results (***) 0.1 significance)*

Table 5: The Analysis of Mediation

Hypothesis	A-Path	B-Path	Indirect Effect	SE	t-value	Bootstrapping	Confidence Interval	Decision
H4	0.560	0.250	0.277	0.037	3.479	95% (LL) 0.061	95% (UL) 0.201	Supported Mediation

Moreover, Figure 1 illustrates how 60% of the psychological safety variance were explained by socially responsible leadership ($R^2 = 0.60$). Additionally, 57% of the employee job engagement variance was explained by psychological safety and socially responsible leadership ($R^2 = 0.57$). Furthermore, indirect influence was examined in order to evaluate psychological safety's purpose as a mediating variable (refer to Table 6). The results of the "bootstrapping analysis" showed that the indirect effect standard $\beta = 0.277$ ($0.560 * 0.250$) was noteworthy for psychological safety, with a t-value of 3.489. Furthermore, there was mediation since the indirect effect of 0.277, or (LL = 0.061, UL = 0.201), "the 95% Bootstrapped Confidence Interval", did not pass through the middle zero. Therefore, it can be said that there is a statistically substantial psychological safety mediation effect in the link between socially responsible leadership and job engagement. H4 is therefore supported.

Table 6: Model Fit and Quality Measurements

Items	Calculation	Criteria	Decision
APC - Average path coefficient	0.462, $p < 0.001$	$P < 0.05$	Accepted
ARS - Average R-square	0.578, $p < 0.001$	$P < 0.05$	Accepted
AARS - Average adjusted R-square	0.576, $p < 0.001$	$P < 0.05$	Accepted
AVIF - Average block VIF	3.580	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Accepted
AFVIF - Average full collinearity VIF	2.534	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Accepted
GoF - Tonenhaus GoF	0.610	Small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36	Accepted
SPR - Sympons paradox ratio	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1	Accepted
RSCR - R-square contribution ratio	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1	Accepted
SSR - Statistical suppression ratio	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Accepted
NLBCDR - Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Accepted

Discussion

This study looked into how employees in public universities felt about socially responsible leadership and how that affected their engagement at work. We also looked into how the link between job engagement and socially responsible leadership is mediated by psychological safety. According to previous research (Dong & Zhong, 2022), a vital resource for work engagement is thought to be leadership in organizations such as public universities. The results of this study demonstrated that insights of socially responsible leadership enhanced employee engagement at work. Socially responsible leaders provide clear knowledge of roles and expectations, so staff members know exactly what their responsibilities are and how their work affects the goals of the company. Employee sense of purpose is strengthened and job engagement is greatly increased when workers perceive that their roles are aligned with larger goals and have a clear understanding of them (Bailey et al., 2017).

The results also demonstrated that psychological safety was positively impacted by perceptions of socially responsible leadership, which is in line with previous study of Kyambade et al., (2023) that asserted that leadership style that is socially responsible has an influence on psychological safety. Socially responsible managers, on the one hand, create a safe atmosphere in which staff members are motivated to take measured chances, so creating a psychologically safe culture. They foster a feedback culture that is centered on development and advancement as opposed to culpability or penalty by offering constructive criticism and recognizing the contributions of their staff (Waldman et al., 2020). Conversely, socially responsible leadership fosters an environment of open and honest communication, where people feel comfortable voicing ideas, worries, and opinions. A culture where employees communicate freely facilitates the formation of relationships at work because it increases the likelihood that individuals will converse meaningfully and build relationships based on common goals or interests (Croes & Antheunis, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings showed a positive link between psychological safety and job engagement, which is in line with the earlier study of Ge, (2020) who found a positive correlation between the two. A relaxed and pleasurable work environment results from employees feeling free to express themselves, share ideas, and bring up problems without fear of repercussions. Workers' fear and anxiety are lessened because they can focus on their work rather than worrying about possible bad outcomes (Raja et al., 2020). Coworkers who are more likely to be cooperative, share information, and work well as a cohesive team increases workplace engagement because they foster a feeling of solidarity and common goal (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021).

Additionally, in line with previous studies, the results showed that the relationship between socially responsible leadership and job engagement is mediated by psychological safety (Basit, 2021). Socially responsible leadership fosters a psychologically safe atmosphere at work that allows workers to voice distinct views, ideas, boosts motivation and job engagement. Increased employee engagement is anticipated to lead to better overall success of organizations (universities) that value psychological safety and encourage socially responsible leadership qualities (Kyambade et al., 2023). To guarantee sustainability, creativity, and innovation in higher education, public universities are encouraged by the shift in the dominant leadership style to concentrate on a model that is more value-oriented that emphasizes the role and prospects of numerous stakeholders (Al-Mansoori & Koç, 2019). According to Kyambade et al. (2023), university administrators are interested in ethical and sustainable leadership techniques, such as "socially responsible leadership," which could directly affect staff and customers' engagement in sustainable behaviors. However, in contrast, practitioners might view the socially responsible leadership paradigm as too challenging to implement due to current economic pressures. Socially responsible leadership, however, possibly still viewed as unrealistic, unachievable, or exaggerated in today's fiercely competitive setting, despite the fact that taking into account people's deep needs (social, moral, spiritual, and affective) such as workers, clients, and customers results in sustained, long-term organizational performance (Kyambade et al., 2023).

Conclusions & Implications

Theoretical Implications

By emphasizing the crucial roles that psychological safety and the leadership style that responsible socially play in promoting positive social interactions at work, the current study contributes to the understanding of theory on social exchange. It broadens the definition of theory to encompass interpersonal interactions, support systems, and emotional bonds in work environments in addition to the conventional focus on monetary exchanges. Traditionally, the study of social exchange theory has concentrated on monetary transactions involving compensation, benefits, and rewards. The significance of socially responsible leadership in promoting constructive social interactions is highlighted by this study. It implies that leaders who show compassion, understanding, and support can establish a work atmosphere that promotes psychological safety for all involved. Our study is consistent with the ideologies of social exchange theory, that emphasize the part leaders play in influencing employee engagement by giving support, and fair treatment in relationships. This study suggests that psychological safety serves as mediation variable between socially responsible leadership and employee engagement in the workplace. This highlights how it's crucial to comprehend the fundamental mechanisms and procedures that, within the context of social exchange theory, connect the decisions made by leaders to the results of their subordinates. This study emphasizes how psychological safety acts as a mediator between job engagement and socially responsible leadership, enabling positive social interactions.

Furthermore, this research focuses on public universities, proposing particular comprehensions on the use of theory (social exchange) in this arena. It highlights how crucial psychological safety and supportive social interactions are for raising employee engagement and welfare, predominantly in a university setting. The comprehension of this specific context enhances the wider significance and flexibility of theory across diverse

environments in the organization. By analyzing the psychological safety mediation on the influence of socially responsible leadership on engagement, this study provides social exchange theory with theoretical implications. It identifies intermediaries, emphasizes the value of leadership, broadens the application of the theory to non-monetary transactions, and offers context specific information. Our study adds to the knowledge of the nuances of social connections at work and how they impact overall wellbeing.

Furthermore, the effect of this leadership style on work engagement while being mediated by psychological safety has not received much attention from the developing world's education sector (Kim et al., 2021). As a result, our research broadens our understanding of the approaches to improving employee job engagement in the education sector. First, our research deepens knowledge of employee engagement and socially responsible leadership. For instance, the current study adds to the body of literature knowledge regarding the link between job engagement and psychological safety a crucial aspect of socially responsible leadership style by examining data from developing countries in addition to other countries. Education researchers have not examined the relationship (Ahmad et al., 2022). As a result, this is the first study to explore this association in Ugandan public universities and throughout Africa. Second, studies have concentrated particularly on topics such as transformational leadership (Yin et al., 2020), servant leadership (Kyambade et al., 2023), and inclusive leadership (Zeng et al., 2020). However, these styles of leadership have become routine (Nguyen et al., 2023). The study focuses on the effect of socially responsible leadership on worker engagement at Ugandan public universities, given the widespread adoption of this approach in both Western and Eastern cultures. Third, by looking at psychological safety's mediating role, our research advances the literature on socially responsible leadership and engagement at work. This makes our study unique from prior studies in that it centers on psychological states which mediate the link between employees' behaviour about work and leadership.

Our findings also contribute to literature on HR by recognizing psychological mechanisms (states) as the basic tools behind the associations concerning HR activities and job engagement. There is a dearth of research on the mediating function of psychological safety in developing nation school systems. Studying developing nations advances theoretical understanding because studies that have examined it focused more on developed countries. Finally, the high rate of employee turnover in public universities in Uganda serves as a critical indicator of staff disengagement from their work (Afrahi et al., 2022). The concept of job disengagement holds that old-style approaches to promoting job engagement, like compensation, benefits, and conventional leadership philosophies, do not considerably increase job engagement. The literature may now acknowledge the importance of a psychologically safe environment and the leadership style that is socially responsible as an effective strategy for increasing employee job engagement in the education sector, especially in university settings.

Managerial Implications

First, university staff engagement should be strengthened and promoted through the use of socially responsible leadership. More socially responsible leadership programs should be developed by universities. University leaders should mentor other leaders in socially responsible leadership practices. Furthermore, the primary objectives of managerial appointment, hiring, and training should be to identify, nurture, and enhance social responsibility of leaders in the current or future. University leaders can also prioritize integrating socially responsible leadership practices into the process of succession planning aimed at entry-level leaders. Leaders who practice social responsibility possess the authority to bring to light concealed virtues among their employees and promote higher levels of engagement at work. Given that universities need a leader to closely supervise employees' performance in the university's framework for professionals; this leadership style seems to be crucial during this situation. Second, it is recommended that appointing and hiring leaders, including department heads, faculty deans, and principals, top management should evaluate candidates' qualities using comprehensive interviews and psychological testing prior to choosing those that fulfill the standards for public

posting. Because a psychologically safe environment is a requirement for worker engagement, human resources specialists need to keep their workplace safe fostering career advancement and employment security.

Limitations

Psychological safety has proved to be a vital relational factor in the current study given that it explains most of the variance in job engagement across public universities in our research. Therefore, it might be necessary to conduct research to ascertain whether the study's findings are specific to the sample. Future studies may similarly focus on additional contextual components like Organizational design or human resources procedures that might be important in particular circumstances. Second, while employee self-reporting is a useful tool for assessing job satisfaction, more objective metrics can be used to discover more about leadership that is socially responsible. Thus, workplace participant observations could be used to collect objective data on the leadership style for future investigation. Lastly, to further improve the study's generalizability, it should be repeated in other contexts, such as private universities, tertiary institutions, secondary schools, and primary schools. This will allow for the development of managerial recommendations for improving job engagement among university staff by evaluating the level of this leadership style (socially responsible leadership) in organizations and in what way it affects employee engagement with psychological safety as mediating variable.

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