PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND TEAM COMMUNICATION AS FACTORS OF DIGITAL EDUCATION PROJECT SUCCESS

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Abstract

Digital education projects combine technological change with organisational and human processes. Their success therefore depends not only on budgets, schedules and technical implementation, but also on how project participants communicate, raise concerns and respond to uncertainty. This paper examines psychological safety and team communication as interrelated organisational factors that can contribute to digital education project success. Psychological safety is considered as a team climate in which members can ask questions, admit mistakes, propose alternatives and communicate risks without fear of humiliation or negative interpersonal consequences. Team communication is considered as the mechanism through which project information, feedback and emerging risks are exchanged. The paper uses a conceptual analysis of the literature rather than primary empirical data. The paper proposes a management framework in which psychological safety supports open communication, while effective communication improves coordination and contributes to project success. The discussion is relevant to educational institutions implementing learning platforms, digital assessment, student information systems and other technology-enabled projects.

Keywords

psychological safety; team communication; digital education; project success; project management; educational technology.

1. Introduction

Digitalisation has changed the way educational institutions plan, deliver and evaluate educational services. Learning management systems, digital assessment platforms, student information systems and online resources increasingly form part of the education ecosystem. OECD describes a digital education ecosystem as a combination of technological infrastructure, digital tools, organisational governance and the people who make these systems meaningful in practice. Therefore, digital transformation cannot be reduced to purchasing devices or installing software. It requires coordinated organisational action and the active participation of teachers, administrators, project managers and other stakeholders.

Digital education projects are particularly sensitive to human factors. A technically appropriate platform can still produce weak outcomes if users do not understand the purpose of the change, if information is not shared on time, or if project participants avoid reporting problems. In project environments, uncertainty is normal: requirements change, technical problems emerge, deadlines are adjusted and different stakeholders may have conflicting expectations. The quality of communication under such conditions becomes a management issue rather than merely a social preference.

Psychological safety provides a useful perspective for understanding this issue. Edmondson (1999) conceptualised psychological safety as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. In a project team, this may be reflected in the willingness to ask for clarification, report an error, disagree respectfully with a proposed solution, or tell a manager that a planned activity may not work. When these

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behaviours are discouraged, project information may become incomplete or delayed. When they are encouraged, managers can obtain earlier signals about risks and implementation problems.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between psychological safety, team communication and digital education project success and to develop a conceptual management framework suitable for further empirical research. The paper distinguishes the proposed relationships from effects that would require empirical testing.

2. Theoretical Background

Psychological safety is relevant to project management because projects require continuous learning and adjustment. Team members often possess information that managers do not have, particularly information about practical implementation. If employees fear blame or negative evaluation, they may withhold information until a problem becomes serious. Psychological safety does not mean the absence of standards or accountability. Rather, it creates conditions in which people can communicate difficult information while remaining responsible for their tasks.

Team communication is the second central element. In digital education projects, communication includes formal meetings, task tracking, progress reporting, user feedback, technical support, informal clarification and communication between project teams and institutional leadership. Communication quality has several dimensions: clarity, timeliness, completeness, accessibility and feedback. A project team may have frequent meetings but still communicate poorly if members do not feel able to express disagreement or if decisions are not documented.

The connection between the two concepts can be explained through the information-sharing mechanism. Psychological safety may create the behavioural conditions for communication, while communication provides the operational channel through which project information becomes available for coordination. In this sense, psychological safety can be viewed as an enabling condition and team communication as a process mechanism.

Project success should also be considered broadly. Traditional measures include time, cost and scope. In digital education, however, success may additionally include user adoption, usability, stakeholder satisfaction, continuity of service, learning-process integration and the sustainability of the implemented solution. OECD emphasises that digital transformation requires coherent governance, digital competences, interoperability and effective use of technology rather than infrastructure alone.

3. Digital Education Projects and Human Factors

Digital education projects usually involve multiple groups: institutional leaders, project managers, teachers, IT specialists, administrative staff, students and sometimes external technology providers. Their interests and knowledge differ. A teacher may identify usability problems that a software developer does not see. An administrator may understand reporting requirements that are invisible to a technical team. Students may identify barriers to access that were not considered during planning.

This diversity creates a coordination challenge. Project management mechanisms such as schedules, risk registers and task allocation remain necessary, but they cannot replace open communication. A risk register is useful only when team members are willing to report risks. A project meeting is useful only when relevant information is discussed. A feedback system is useful only when users believe their feedback can lead to improvement.

For this reason, digital education project management should integrate technical, organisational and human dimensions. The project manager's role includes establishing communication routines, clarifying responsibilities, encouraging evidence-based discussion and creating an environment in which problems

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can be reported early. This approach is consistent with the broader view of digital education as a hybrid human-technology ecosystem.

4. Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework contains three principal constructs: psychological safety, team communication and digital education project success. Psychological safety is positioned as an antecedent of team communication. Team communication is positioned as a process mechanism that may contribute to project success. Project success is conceptualised as a multidimensional outcome including delivery performance, stakeholder acceptance, operational usability and sustainability.

The conceptual logic is straightforward. When team members feel safe to speak, the probability of sharing concerns, asking questions and providing feedback may increase. Better information exchange can improve coordination, reduce misunderstanding and support earlier identification of project risks. These processes can, in turn, contribute to more effective project decisions.

The framework should be tested empirically in future studies. Possible measures could include established psychological safety scales, multidimensional communication measures and project success indicators adapted to educational technology projects. Future research may also examine whether team size, leadership style, digital competence, organisational culture or fear of negative evaluation changes the strength of these relationships.

5. Managerial Implications

Managers of digital education projects should treat communication climate as part of project governance. First, project meetings should allow participants to raise implementation problems without turning every problem into an individual blame issue. Second, managers should distinguish between an honest report of a problem and poor performance. Third, feedback channels should have visible follow-up so employees can see that communication produces action. Fourth, project decisions should be documented and communicated to affected stakeholders.

Training is another practical implication. Project teams may benefit from training in constructive feedback, conflict management, digital collaboration and risk communication. Team leaders can also model psychologically safe behaviour by acknowledging uncertainty, asking for alternative views and admitting their own mistakes when appropriate.

At the institutional level, digital education projects should include human-factor indicators alongside technical milestones. For example, project monitoring can include response time to user feedback, participation in review meetings, unresolved communication issues and stakeholder satisfaction. Such indicators do not replace traditional project metrics; they complement them.

6. Conclusion

Digital education project success is not determined by technology alone. The effectiveness of digital systems depends on how people coordinate, learn and respond to problems during implementation. Psychological safety can provide an organisational climate that supports open communication, while team communication can translate that climate into practical information exchange and coordination.

The proposed framework is conceptual and should not be interpreted as empirical proof. Its contribution is to connect a human-factor concept from organisational behaviour with the management of digital education projects. Future empirical research can test the proposed relationships in schools, universities and education technology projects and can identify the organisational conditions under which communication most strongly contributes to successful digital transformation.

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