

Leadership Communication Beyond Relational Mediation: Proposing the Leadership Communication Process Model

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Abstract

Leadership communication has been linked to workplace respect and employee outcomes, yet the theoretical claim that it produces effects through relational quality rather than directly has not been systematically tested. Using survey data from 1,521 U.S. employees aged 24 to 35, this study found that the indirect pathway was supported: leadership communication predicted autonomous respect and respectful engagement; both respect forms predicted psychological safety, with respectful engagement showing a stronger association; and the full serial chain through psychological safety, meaningful work, and job satisfaction predicted reduced turnover intention. But, contrary to theory, leadership communication also had significant direct associations with all four retention-relevant outcomes. Prior research examining well-being and engagement outcomes found no such direct effects, suggesting that leadership communication's direct role may depend on the outcome domain. We propose the Leadership Communication Process Model (LCPM) to account for this pattern. The model distinguishes a relational function of leadership communication, operating through relational quality, from an informational/sensemaking function, operating directly on evaluative judgments, and formalizes the outcome-domain dependency as a testable hypothesis.

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leadership communication, respect, psychological safety, meaningful work, job satisfaction, turnover intention

Introduction

Workers aged 24 to 35—projected to comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2030 (Deloitte Global, 2025)—report weaker employer attachment and greater emphasis on purpose and well-being than their older counterparts, prioritize learning and growth, and frequently maintain side work alongside their primary jobs (de Cervens et al., 2023; Deloitte Global, 2025; Novak Leadership Institute, 2026). These conditions place the communicative dynamics of retention-relevant outcomes at a pressing point for organizational communication scholarship and position this cohort as a strong test case for mechanisms connecting leadership communication to retention. Research has linked leadership communication to workplace respect and retention, and respect—both autonomous respect, the leader-conferred recognition of employees' contributions, and respectful engagement, the climate of mutual dignity among peers—has been associated with engagement, well-being, and reduced turnover intentions (Willett et al., 2026; LaGree et al., 2023; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Meta-analytic evidence documents psychological safety as a robust correlate of satisfaction, commitment, and learning (Frazier et al., 2017), and meaningful work as strongly associated with engagement, satisfaction, and reduced withdrawal (Allan et al., 2019). Yet the integrated process through which leadership communication produces these retention-relevant outcomes has not been tested end-to-end.

Hertzsch et al. (2012) proposed an integrative process model of leadership communication that offers one such account. The framework specifies a four-stage process in which leader and follower competence resources (Stage 1) and behavioral selections (Stage 2) produce communication and relational-quality outcomes (Stage 3), which in turn produce organizational outcomes (Stage 4). The framework's central prediction is that leadership communication shapes organizational outcomes through Stage 3 relational quality—not directly. From the framework, Schneider et al. (2015) generated the Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire (PLCQ), a six-item instrument that has accumulated a decade of empirical use across organizational and cultural contexts. Yet the framework itself has never been systematically tested: studies employing the PLCQ used it to measure leadership communication in service of specific research questions—one (Willett et al., 2026) also grounded its model in the framework's account—but none was designed to evaluate the four-stage theory itself. Taken together, that accumulated evidence now makes such an evaluation possible—and it reveals a pattern the framework does not anticipate. Across studies, leadership communication shows persistent direct associations with retention-relevant outcomes, especially job satisfaction (Delgado, 2021; Heuss & Datta, 2023; Silva et al., 2024). Willett et al. (2026), by contrast, examined well-being and engagement outcomes and found no direct effects, suggesting the framework's completeness may

depend on the outcome domain. This combination—a precise mechanistic claim, an established instrument, and an accumulated empirical pattern awaiting explanation—makes the framework both testable and worth testing.

The purpose of this study is to test the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework for retention-relevant outcomes and extend it. The study makes three contributions of ascending theoretical reach. Empirically, it offers the first integrated test of the framework's four-stage architecture, using a partial mediation structural model that tests both the indirect pathway the framework predicts and the direct associations it does not. As a theoretical extension, it specifies psychological safety as one mechanism bridging Stage 3 relational quality to Stage 4 motivational outcomes—a link the framework leaves unspecified. As the primary theoretical contribution, and drawing on the accumulated PLCQ evidence and the current study's results, it proposes the Leadership Communication Process Model (LCPM), which accommodates both direct and indirect effects of leadership communication by distinguishing a relational function (operating through relational quality to outcomes) and an informational/sensemaking function (operating more directly on evaluative judgments).

The article proceeds as follows. The next section develops the theoretical framework, introduces the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework and its extension, reviews the focal constructs, and develops seven hypotheses. The method section describes the survey of 1,521 U.S. employees aged 24 to 35 and the structural equation modeling analytic approach. Results present hypothesis tests. The article concludes with theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This study tests the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework for retention-relevant outcomes, extends it with psychological safety as a mechanism connecting relational quality to motivational outcomes, and evaluates its completeness prediction. Drawing on Job Demands–Resources theory to specify the indirect pathway (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Tummers & Bakker, 2021), the study traces how leadership communication relates to turnover intention through dual respect pathways (autonomous respect and respectful engagement), psychological safety, meaningful work, and job satisfaction (see Figure 1). Because participants were drawn from diverse organizations rather than nested within identified teams, all constructs—including psychological safety and respectful engagement, which are theoretically defined as team-level phenomena—are operationalized here as individual employees' perceptions of their local workgroup. This design permits tests of associations among individual employees' perceptions of their workgroups. It does not permit claims about team-level processes, which emerge through interaction among team members and require team-nested data to assess.

Leadership Communication

Leadership communication refers to the interpersonal communicative behaviors and interactions between leaders and followers, encompassing both competence-based

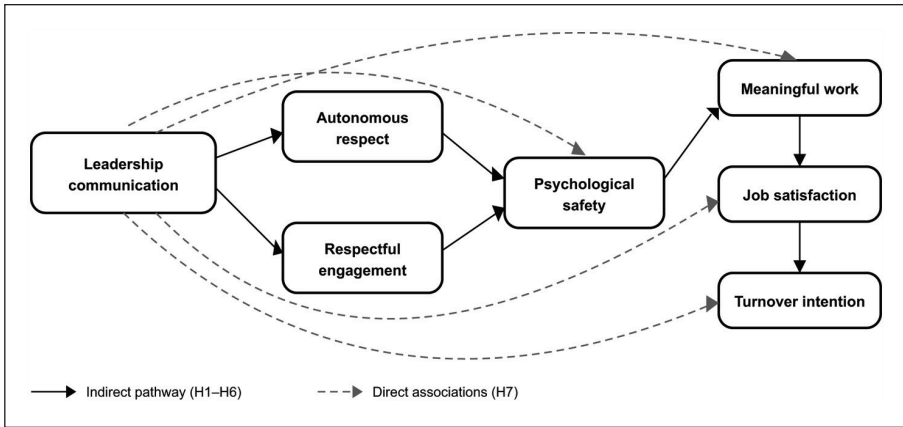


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

elements (knowledge and motivation) and process-based elements (what happens in the interaction and what it produces; Schneider et al., 2015). It is distinct from leadership style in that it focuses on the communication process itself rather than broader behavioral patterns like visioning or contingent reward.

Building on the interpersonal communication competence tradition (Jablin et al., 1994; Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984), Hertzsch et al. (2012) synthesized a four-stage process model specifying how leadership communication produces organizational outcomes. The four stages are:

Stage 1 — Competence resources. Both leader and follower bring cognitive and conative communication resources (knowledge, motivation, behavioral skills).

Stage 2 — Behavioral selection. Resources are filtered through motivational and contextual factors, producing behavior that may be selected deliberately or automatically.

Stage 3 — Communication outcomes. The interaction produces proximal outcomes: shared meaning, uncertainty reduction, communication satisfaction, and mutual competence attributions. These feed into leadership relationship quality, which the framework links explicitly to LMX dimensions of affect, loyalty, respect, and engagement.

Stage 4 — Organizational outcomes. Relational quality drives distal results: job satisfaction, commitment, extra-role behavior, and organizational success.

The framework's central prediction is that leadership communication should not have strong direct effects on Stage 4 outcomes; instead, its effects should be mediated through Stage 3 relational quality.

Schneider et al. (2015) operationalized the framework into the Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire (PLCQ), a six-item instrument measuring followers' perceptions of leader communication. Although the PLCQ is empirically unidimensional, its items span relational aspects of communication (e.g., openness, communication quality) and informational aspects (e.g., shared meaning, uncertainty reduction) that help employees interpret what their work means and how it fits organizational purpose—the interpretive work that sensemaking scholarship identifies as central to organizing (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). The framework routes all of these through relational quality rather than specifying pathways that bypass it. This architecture raises a question the literature has not addressed: whether informational and relational facets of leadership communication might follow distinct pathways to outcomes.

Seven studies have employed the PLCQ across diverse contexts (Willett et al, 2026; Delgado, 2021; Erben et al., 2019; Heuss & Datta, 2023; Orłowski, 2024; Silva et al., 2024; Sutiyatno, 2022). None was designed as a test of the four-stage framework itself: six used the instrument to measure leadership communication in service of their own research questions, and one (Willett et al, 2026) additionally grounded its model in the framework's theoretical account, in the well-being domain. Considered together, however, their findings bear directly on the framework's central prediction—and largely conform to its core logic. Willett et al. (2026) grounded its model in the framework, adding occupational resilience as a bridging mechanism in a structural model of 1,512 U.S. working adults and found no direct association between leadership communication and flourishing or engagement; its effects operated through autonomous respect ($\beta = .824$) and respectful engagement ($\beta = .290$) into the motivational pathway. One unexpected direct effect emerged—a small negative association between leadership communication and occupational resilience ($\beta = -.144$)—though the focal Stage 4 outcomes remained free of direct effects. Sutiyatno (2022) found parallel mediation through quality of work-life in a small Indonesian banking sample, with leadership communication showing both direct ($\beta = .46$) and indirect ($\beta = .42$) associations with job satisfaction. Silva et al. (2024) found null mediation through perceived leadership effectiveness—a Stage 4 outcome rather than a Stage 3 relational construct—consistent with the framework's prediction that relational quality, not effectiveness judgments, carries communication's indirect effects; a direct association between leadership communication and turnover intention remained ($\rho = -.34$). Across studies, relational constructs consistently produce the strongest effects (Erben et al., 2019; Heuss & Datta, 2023).

However, the accumulated evidence also reveals a pattern the framework does not fully explain. The most replicated finding in the PLCQ literature is a moderate-to-large direct association between leadership communication and job satisfaction that persists across all seven studies and diverse organizational and cultural contexts ($r = .30$ – $.58$ across samples, including U.S. university staff [$r = .58$; Delgado, 2021], German remote workers [$r = .50$; Orłowski, 2024], and Swiss hospital physicians, where leadership communication variables explained 31% of satisfaction variance [Heuss & Datta, 2023]). Direct associations with other outcomes (well-being, turnover

intention, amotivation) are weaker but consistently in the predicted direction (Delgado, 2021; Heuss & Datta, 2023; Silva et al., 2024). These direct associations are difficult to reconcile with the framework's complete mediation prediction.

The PLCQ's facet heterogeneity suggests a theoretical possibility: If informational facets (shared meaning, uncertainty reduction) shape how employees interpret their work and its purpose, they may produce outcomes through pathways that bypass relational quality—pathways present as Stage 3 communication results but not separately tested in empirical work. This would be especially consequential for retention-relevant outcomes such as meaningful work and job satisfaction, which involve evaluative judgments about work itself—judgments that informational communication may shape directly, without requiring relational mediation. The current study tests whether leadership communication's association with turnover intention operates entirely through respect, as the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework predicts, or also has direct associations with retention-relevant outcomes that the relational pathway does not capture.

Respect: Autonomous Respect and Respectful Engagement

Hertzsch et al.'s (2012) framework predicts that leadership communication produces relational quality. We operationalize this through two forms of respect that prior research has linked to leadership communication (Willett et al, 2026; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017): autonomous respect, leader-conferred recognition of employees' specific achievements and contributions (Tyler & Blader, 2002), and respectful engagement, the baseline dignity and consideration afforded to all organizational members through peer-to-peer interactions (Carmeli et al., 2015; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017).

Across diverse field samples, autonomous respect has been linked to cooperative and engagement outcomes: As a component of social identity, it predicted supervisor-rated extrarole behavior among U.S. employees (Blader & Tyler, 2009); it predicted organizational identification and, indirectly, work engagement and OCB among Chinese hospitality workers ($\beta = .21$; Zhang et al., 2017); across three Dutch volunteer samples ($N = 507$), it predicted affective and normative commitment and indirectly predicted intention to remain (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007); and among early-career U.S. employees, it predicted occupational resilience more strongly than respectful engagement did, alongside direct associations with job satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement (LaGree et al., 2023). In the context of retention, autonomous respect satisfies status needs and reduces fear that speaking up or taking risks will damage standing with leaders (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). Willett et al. (2026) found that respectful engagement showed large correlations with leadership communication ($r = .62$) and strong associations with flourishing ($\beta = .377$), while van Quaquebeke and Eckloff (2010) demonstrated that respectful engagement was a better predictor of trust and organizational identification than autonomous respect.

The two respect pathways are expected to diverge at psychological safety. Respectful engagement should more strongly predict psychological safety than autonomous respect for three conceptual reasons. First, psychological safety concerns

interpersonal risk in peer interactions, making respectful engagement more proximal than autonomous respect to the climate outcome. Second, peer relationships constitute the daily social fabric of work, while individual recognition tends to be episodic, suggesting continuous peer respect produces more stable psychological safety perceptions (Colbert et al., 2016). Third, meta-analytic evidence shows supportive work context (which includes peer respect) predicts psychological safety more strongly ($\hat{\rho} \approx .49-.51$) than positive leader relations ($\hat{\rho} \approx .39$; Frazier et al., 2017), supporting the expectation that team-level resources matter more than dyadic resources for team climate.

Psychological Safety

The Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework predicts that relational quality produces motivational outcomes but does not specify the mechanism through which dyadic relational experiences translate into conditions that support meaningful work. We propose and test psychological safety as one such mechanism. Psychological safety is a team climate characterized by shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking—that employees can speak up, share ideas, admit mistakes, and take risks without fear of negative consequences (A. Edmondson, 1999; A. C. Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). It shares the interpersonal-climate domain with respectful engagement but names a distinct feature: whereas respectful engagement describes expressed regard in interactions, psychological safety describes a belief about their consequences. Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates robust associations with engagement ($\hat{\rho} \approx .45$), satisfaction ($\hat{\rho} \approx .53$), and learning behaviors ($\hat{\rho} \approx .52$; Frazier et al., 2017), and empirical studies link psychological safety to retention across diverse contexts (Kirk-Brown & Van Dijk, 2016; Kruzich et al., 2014; Naz, 2025). We measure psychological safety as employees' perceptions of interpersonal risk-taking safety in their immediate workgroup (A. Edmondson, 1999).

Psychological safety functions as the convergence point where both respect pathways relate to motivational outcomes. Safe climates allow the exploration, questioning, and reflection through which employees develop perceptions of purpose and growth (Steger et al., 2012). This positions psychological safety as a precondition for meaningful work rather than as a parallel mechanism—a sequential relationship that distinguishes this model from specifications treating safety and meaning as independent resources.

Meaningful Work, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover Intention

The motivational pathway through which Stage 3 relational quality produces Stage 4 retention outcomes draws on Job Demands–Resources theory: resources operate through motivational mechanisms to reduce withdrawal (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, JD-R has been criticized for treating “supervisor support” as an undifferentiated resource—a systematic review of 139 JD-R studies found that 41% treated leadership itself as a job resource rather than specifying the behaviors through which leaders produce resources (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The current study positions

leadership communication as the behavioral antecedent that generates respect as a resource, tracing its effects through the motivational pathway of meaningful work, job satisfaction, and turnover intention.

Meaningful work represents a subjective assessment that one's work achieves purposeful, valuable, or worthwhile goals (Allan et al., 2019; Steger et al., 2012). Meta-analytic estimates show large associations with engagement ($\rho = .74$), satisfaction ($\rho = .74$), and negative associations with withdrawal intentions ($\rho = -.49$; Allan et al., 2019). Burghardt and Möller (2023) identified psychological safety as a facilitator of meaningful work in their systematic review.

Job satisfaction represents an employee's overall evaluative judgment about their job (Cammann et al., 1983) and serves as one of the most robust attitudinal predictors of retention, with meta-analytic associations with turnover intention in the $\rho = -.44$ to $-.60$ range (Griffeth et al., 2000; Tett & Meyer, 1993). The model distinguishes meaningful work as a phenomenological experience of purpose from job satisfaction as an evaluative judgment about one's job, following theoretical frames that position meaning as antecedent to broader job attitudes (Allan et al., 2019; Rosso et al., 2010).

Turnover intention—employees' conscious willingness to leave their organization—is the most proximal cognitive antecedent of actual quitting and validly predicts turnover behavior over short and long periods (Bothma & Roodt, 2013; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

The sequential logic completes the model. Psychological safety supports the development of meaningful work, meaningful work shapes evaluative judgments about the job (satisfaction), and job satisfaction reduces intentions to leave. This sequential chain—rather than parallel effects of safety and meaning on retention—is central to the motivational pathway.

Hypotheses

The study tests seven hypotheses derived from the above theoretical framework. H1 to H3 test the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework's prediction that leadership communication produces relational quality (respect) and examine whether the two forms of respect differentially predict psychological safety. H4 to H5 test the full serial pathway integrating the framework's predictions with the proposed psychological safety mechanism. H6 tests the sequential logic of the extension. H7 tests the framework's completeness—whether communication has direct associations with retention-relevant outcomes beyond its indirect effects through respect.

H1: Leadership communication will have a positive indirect effect on psychological safety through autonomous respect.

H2: Leadership communication will have a positive indirect effect on psychological safety through respectful engagement.

H3: Respectful engagement will have a stronger association with psychological safety than autonomous respect ($\beta_{RE \rightarrow PS} > \beta_{AR \rightarrow PS}$).

H4: Leadership communication will have a negative indirect effect on turnover intention through the serial pathway: autonomous respect → psychological safety → meaningful work → job satisfaction.

H5: Leadership communication will have a negative indirect effect on turnover intention through the serial pathway: respectful engagement → psychological safety → meaningful work → job satisfaction.

H6: Psychological safety and meaningful work will operate sequentially, such that psychological safety has an indirect effect on turnover intention through meaningful work → job satisfaction.

H7: Leadership communication will have direct associations with retention-relevant outcomes (psychological safety, meaningful work, job satisfaction, and turnover intention) beyond its indirect effects through respect.

Method

An online survey was administered through Prolific to test the hypotheses. Data were collected between May 29 and 31, 2025. The survey was open to U.S. residents ages 24 to 35 who speak English as their primary language and are employed full time in a company of more than 10 employees. The latter criterion sought to exclude participants who worked in businesses that have less formal communication practices than larger organizations (Krishna, 2026). Participants were asked to read information about the study and consent to participate before completing the survey. The survey instrument included additional measures beyond the seven focal constructs reported in this study; median completion time was 25.08 min, and participants were compensated \$4.50 through Prolific. Of 1,602 survey completions, 81 were excluded based on: age outside the 24 to 35 range ($n = 11$), residence outside the United States ($n = 3$), primary language other than English ($n = 8$), employment status other than full-time ($n = 13$), failure to provide consent ($n = 14$), missing company size response ($n = 1$), organization size fewer than 10 employees ($n = 2$), or completion time outside acceptable bounds ($n = 29$; <5 min, suggesting inattentive responding, or >77 min, representing three standard deviations above the median completion time of 25.08 min and suggesting interrupted or distracted responding). Primary study variables were set as forced-response items; no retained participant had more than 20% missing data. The final sample consisted of 1,521 participants. The study was approved by a Midwestern university institutional review board.

Participants

The sample consisted of 1,521 full-time employees aged 24–35 ($M = 29.88$, $SD = 3.35$) working in organizations with 10 or more employees across the United States. Age distribution: 28.5% ($n = 434$) aged 24 to 27, 34.2% ($n = 520$) aged 28 to 31, and 37.3% ($n = 567$) aged 32 to 35. The sample included 43.8% male participants ($n =$

666), 53.9% female participants ($n = 820$), 0.9% transgender participants ($n = 14$), 1.2% who identified as other ($n = 19$), and 0.1% who preferred not to specify gender ($n = 2$). Racial and ethnic composition: 66.4% identified as White or Caucasian ($n = 1,010$), 22.1% as Black or African American ($n = 336$), 9.0% as Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin ($n = 137$), 7.8% as Asian ($n = 119$), 1.2% as American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native ($n = 19$), 0.3% as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ($n = 4$), 0.7% as other ($n = 11$), and 0.1% preferred not to specify ethnicity ($n = 1$). Note that participants could select multiple racial/ethnic categories, resulting in percentages that sum to more than 100. In terms of education, 46.4% of participants ($n = 706$) reported bachelor's degree, 30.2% ($n = 459$) reported graduate or professional degree, 9.3% ($n = 141$) reported some college but no degree, 7.8% ($n = 118$) reported high school diploma or general education development (GED), and 6.4% ($n = 97$) reported associates or technical degree.

As for the organization size, 31.8% of participants ($n = 484$) reported working in organizations with 1,000 or more employees, 28.9% ($n = 439$) reported working in organizations with 50 to 249 employees, 24.8% ($n = 377$) with 250 to 999, 11.2% ($n = 171$) with 10 to 49, and 3.3% ($n = 50$) reported they didn't know the number of employees in their organization. More than half of participants ($n = 866$, 56.9%) reported that they supervise people at work; 43.1% reported that they do not. The most prevalent industries that participants reported working in were knowledge work (28.1%, $n = 428$; e.g., computer science, business/financial, legal), healthcare and education (24.7%, $n = 375$; e.g., hospital, school, counseling/psychology), other (23.3%, $n = 355$; e.g., construction, agriculture, sales), service & operation (15.3%, $n = 233$; e.g., retail, transportation, administrative), creative and technical work (4.3%, $n = 66$; e.g., arts, engineering), and public and social work (4.2%, $n = 64$; e.g., government/public affairs).

Measures

Unless otherwise specified, all responses were collected on five-point Likert-type scales from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; designated items were reverse-scored consistent with original instruments.

Leadership Communication. Leadership communication was assessed with the six-item Perceived Leadership Communication Questionnaire, other-rating version (PLCQ-OR; Schneider et al., 2015), which captures employees' perceptions of their immediate leader's communication (e.g., "My boss/supervisor and I can speak openly with each other"). $M = 3.86$, $SD = .81$, $\alpha = .91$, $\omega = .91$.

Autonomous Respect. Autonomous respect was measured with a six-item scale indexing leader recognition of individualized contributions (e.g., "My boss/supervisor values what I contribute to work"; Tyler & Blader, 2002). $M = 4.23$, $SD = .73$, $\alpha = .94$, $\omega = .94$.

Respectful Engagement. Respectful engagement was assessed using a nine-item measure of generalized respect among coworkers (e.g., “The people I work with express appreciation and respect for each other’s contribution to the organization”; Carmeli et al., 2015). Items used a five-point response format reflecting characteristic level (1 = *not at all characteristic*, 5 = *very characteristic*). $M = 3.96$, $SD = .73$, $\alpha = .93$, $\omega = .93$.

Psychological Safety. Psychological safety was measured with A. Edmondson’s (1999) seven-item team scale assessing perceived safety of interpersonal risk-taking (e.g., “It is safe to take a risk in this team”). Items were parceled into three indicators using balanced parceling (see Data Analysis; Table S1). $M = 3.78$, $SD = .72$, $\alpha = .82$, $\omega = .81$.

Meaningful Work. Meaningful work was assessed using the 10-item Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012), comprising Positive Meaning, Meaning-Making Through Work, and Greater-Good Motivations subscales (e.g., “I have found a meaningful career”). Items were parceled into three indicators corresponding to the theoretical subdimensions (see Data Analysis; Table S1). $M = 3.81$, $SD = .93$, $\alpha = .96$, $\omega = .96$.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction was assessed with the three-item Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire Job Satisfaction subscale (Cammann et al., 1983), capturing global assessment of satisfaction, workplace liking, and job liking. Following the compatibility principle, a global job-satisfaction measure is aligned with the breadth of our criterion (turnover intention) and is therefore preferable to facet measures for our aims (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Harrison et al., 2006; Schleicher et al., 2011). $M = 4.06$, $SD = .94$, $\alpha = .95$, $\omega = .95$.

Turnover Intention. Turnover intention was measured with Roodt’s (2004) six-item scale indexing job-leaving cognitions and plans (e.g., “I often think about quitting my job”), including one reverse-coded retention item. Items were parceled into three indicators using balanced parceling (see Data Analysis; Table S1). $M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.11$, $\alpha = .92$, $\omega = .93$.

Data Analysis

The study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized serial mediation model. Analyses were conducted using the lavaan package version 0.6-20 (Rosseel, 2012) in R. The analytic strategy proceeded in three stages: (a) measurement model evaluation, (b) structural model testing, and (c) hypothesis evaluation including indirect effects and pathway comparisons (Kline, 2016).

Parceling. Three constructs (psychological safety, meaningful work, and turnover intention) were parceled into three indicators each following Little (2013). Psychological safety and turnover intention used balanced parceling based on item loadings from initial single-factor CFAs, pairing stronger and weaker indicators

and distributing reverse-coded items across parcels to minimize wording-direction clustering. This distributed item-level measurement error across indicators and reduced the influence of idiosyncratic item variance on structural estimates, while retaining the full content domain of each construct. Meaningful work was parceled by theoretical subdimension (Positive Meaning, Meaning-Making Through Work, Greater-Good Motivations), preserving the scale's conceptual structure while reducing indicators to a level consistent with model complexity. The initial measurement model without parceling demonstrated acceptable fit ($\chi^2(1013) = 5707.958, p < .001, CFI = .930, TLI = .925, RMSEA = .053, SRMR = .041$); parceling improved fit substantially ($\chi^2(474) = 2050.079, p < .001, CFI = .969, TLI = .965, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = .031$). Parcel composition, item loadings, and psychometric properties are detailed in Table S1; future work can extend these tests using fully item-level structural specifications (Kline, 2016; Little, 2013).

Measurement Model. Maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors was used to account for potential non-normality (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). Missing data were handled using full information maximum likelihood (FIML; Enders, 2010). Model fit was evaluated following Hu and Bentler (1999) and Little (2013): CFI and TLI above .95 indicating excellent fit (above .90 acceptable); RMSEA and SRMR below .06 indicating excellent fit (below .08 acceptable). Inspection of modification indices identified four within-construct residual covariances warranted by content overlap: respectful engagement items 1 to 2, 5 to 6, 8 to 9, and turnover intention parcels 2 to 3. The final measurement model demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2(470) = 1649.198, p < .001, CFI = .977, TLI = .975, RMSEA = .037, SRMR = .027$). All factor loadings were significant and substantial (standardized loadings ranged from .693 to .968; see Table 1). Convergent validity was supported by AVE values exceeding .50 for all constructs, and composite reliability ranged from .791 to .950 (Table 2). Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratio; all values were below .90, with the highest value (.855) between leadership communication and autonomous respect—expected given their theoretically proximal relationship (Table 2). Common method variance was assessed via an unmeasured latent method construct (ULMC); fit changes were negligible ($\Delta CFI = .000, \Delta RMSEA = -.001$), and the implied shared method variance was 6.0% (Williams et al., 2010). While these results suggest that method variance does not substantially account for the observed structural relationships, common-source bias inherent in single-wave self-report designs cannot be fully eliminated through post hoc statistical tests (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Structural Model. The primary structural model specifies partial mediation: seven paths comprising the mediation chain (LC to AR, LC to RE, AR to PS, RE to PS, PS to MW, MW to JS, JS to TI) plus four direct paths from leadership communication to each downstream endogenous variable (LC to PS, LC to MW, LC to JS, LC to TI). This specification tests the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework's indirect pathway (H1–H6) while simultaneously testing the framework's completeness by estimating direct associations that the framework predicts should be absent (H7). A nested complete mediation model omitting the four direct paths was estimated for comparison; a $\Delta\chi^2$

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Standardized Factor Loadings.

Construct/Item	λ	SE	z	p	Std. λ	R ²
Leadership Communication (LC)						
LeadComm1	.700	0.025	28.379	<.001	.787	.619
LeadComm2	.761	0.022	33.819	<.001	.725	.526
LeadComm3	.834	0.025	32.774	<.001	.823	.677
LeadComm4	.768	0.025	31.005	<.001	.827	.685
LeadComm5	.825	0.025	33.001	<.001	.829	.687
LeadComm6	.742	0.027	27.995	<.001	.773	.597
Autonomous Respect (AR)						
Earned_1	.665	0.026	25.916	<.001	.855	.731
Earned_2	.729	0.025	28.945	<.001	.852	.727
Earned_3	.730	0.026	28.591	<.001	.882	.777
Earned_4	.627	0.026	24.352	<.001	.800	.641
Earned_5	.762	0.025	30.458	<.001	.866	.750
Earned_6	.753	0.026	29.244	<.001	.893	.797
Respectful Engagement (RE)						
Owed_1 ^a	.695	0.022	31.232	<.001	.773	.598
Owed_2 ^a	.739	0.023	32.021	<.001	.798	.638
Owed_3	.757	0.023	33.141	<.001	.824	.679
Owed_4	.702	0.026	27.078	<.001	.763	.582
Owed_5 ^b	.715	0.024	29.382	<.001	.799	.638
Owed_6 ^b	.722	0.025	29.140	<.001	.823	.678
Owed_7	.799	0.024	33.137	<.001	.822	.675
Owed_8 ^c	.656	0.027	24.057	<.001	.695	.483
Owed_9 ^c	.558	0.026	21.235	<.001	.693	.480
Psychological Safety (PS)^d						
PSp1 (Items 2, 7)	.555	0.025	22.392	<.001	.691	.477
PSp2 (Items 1r, 4)	.668	0.021	31.223	<.001	.775	.601
PSp3 (Items 3r, 5r, 6)	.683	0.022	30.483	<.001	.773	.598
Meaningful Work (MW)^d						
MWp1 (Positive Meaning)	.939	0.022	43.283	<.001	.968	.937
MWp2 (Meaning-Making)	.948	0.022	43.764	<.001	.910	.828
MWp3 (Greater Good)	.808	0.025	31.907	<.001	.843	.711
Job Satisfaction (JS)						
satisfaction_1	.923	0.027	34.756	<.001	.920	.846
satisfaction_2	.897	0.027	32.781	<.001	.920	.847
satisfaction_3	.926	0.027	34.398	<.001	.946	.895

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Construct/Item	λ	SE	z	p	Std. λ	R ²
Turnover Intention (TI) ^d						
Tlp1 (Items 1, 6r)	.950	0.024	39.133	<.001	.898	.807
Tlp2 ^e (Items 2, 3)	1.093	0.022	49.731	<.001	.883	.779
Tlp3 ^e (Items 4, 5)	1.058	0.022	47.674	<.001	.838	.703

Note. $N = 1,521$. Factor loadings are from the confirmatory factor analysis (measurement model) evaluated prior to specification of structural paths. λ = unstandardized factor loading; SE = robust standard error; Std. λ = standardized factor loading; R² = proportion of item variance explained by the factor. All latent variables were standardized (variance = 1.00). Model fit: $\chi^2(470) = 1,649.198$, $p < .001$, CFI = .977, TLI = .975, RMSEA = .037 [90% CI: 0.035, 0.040], SRMR = .027.

^aCorrelated residual: Owed_1 $\leftrightarrow$ Owed_2 ($r = .284$, $p < .001$).

^bCorrelated residual: Owed_5 $\leftrightarrow$ Owed_6 ($r = .240$, $p < .001$).

^cCorrelated residual: Owed_8 $\leftrightarrow$ Owed_9 ($r = .260$, $p < .001$).

^dItems were parceled to reduce model complexity. See Table S1 for complete parcel composition and Method section for parceling rationale.

^eCorrelated residual: Tlp2 $\leftrightarrow$ Tlp3 ($r = .561$, $p < .001$).

test evaluates whether the direct paths significantly improve model fit. The structural model was estimated using maximum likelihood estimation with bootstrap standard errors (5,000 resamples) to generate bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals for path coefficients and indirect effects (Hayes, 2018). The pathway comparison (H3) was tested using a planned contrast implemented as a model constraint with bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (5,000 resamples), reporting ΔB (RE – AR; Hayes, 2018; Rosseel, 2012). To gauge multicollinearity, VIFs were computed on standardized factor scores; alternative specifications confirmed coefficient stability (Table S2; Grewal et al., 2004). Unless noted otherwise, statistical inferences are drawn from unstandardized coefficients (B) and their BCa 95% bootstrap confidence intervals; standardized coefficients (β) are reported for comparability. Model fit was evaluated using the same criteria as the measurement model.

Hypothesis Testing. Indirect effects (H1, H2, H4, H5, H6) were calculated using the product of coefficients method, with significance determined by bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals that do not contain zero. The pathway comparison (H3) was tested using the planned contrast described above. H7 was evaluated in two ways: (a) individual significance of each direct path coefficient (LC to PS, LC to MW, LC to JS, LC to TI) in the partial mediation model and (b) the $\Delta\chi^2$ test comparing partial and complete mediation models as an omnibus test of whether the direct paths collectively improve fit. All significance tests used $\alpha = .05$.

Results

Tables 2 to 5 present descriptive statistics, correlations, path coefficients, indirect effects, and hypothesis testing results. Figure 2 displays the partial mediation structural model with standardized path coefficients.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Correlations Among Study Variables.

Variable	M	SD	α	(ω)	AVE	CR	I	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Leadership Communication (LC)	3.86	0.81	.91	.91	.632	.911	—						
2. Autonomous Respect (AR)	4.23	0.73	.94	.94	.737	.944	.86***	—					
3. Respectful Engagement (RE)	3.96	0.73	.93	.93	.606	.932	.64***	.55***	—				
4. Psychological Safety (PS)	3.78	0.72	.82	.81	.559	.791	.74***	.74***	.85***	—			
5. Meaningful Work (MW)	3.81	0.93	.96	.96	.825	.934	.49***	.49***	.56***	.66***	—		
6. Job Satisfaction (JS)	4.06	0.94	.95	.95	.863	.950	.41***	.40***	.47***	.55***	.83***	—	
7. Turnover Intention (TI)	2.34	1.11	.92	.93	.763	.906	-.32***	-.32***	-.37***	-.44***	-.66***	-.80***	—

Note. N = 1,521. All correlations are between latent variables. All scales range from 1 to 5; higher TI indicates greater turnover intention. McDonald's omega (ω) is reported alongside Cronbach's alpha as a more appropriate reliability estimate for SEM models (Dunn et al., 2014). AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability. AVE values exceeded .50 for all constructs and CR values exceeded .79, supporting convergent validity and reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratio; all values were below .90 (highest = .855 between LC and AR).

***p < .001.

Table 3. Direct Effects in the Partial Mediation Structural Model.

Path	B	SE	β (std.all)	z	p	95% CI
Predictors of Autonomous Respect ($R^2 = .741$)						
LC $\rightarrow$ AR	1.692	0.087	.861***	19.51	<.001	[1.529, 1.876]
Predictors of Respectful Engagement ($R^2 = .417$)						
LC $\rightarrow$ RE	0.846	0.060	.646***	14.19	<.001	[0.736, 0.969]
Predictors of Psychological Safety ($R^2 = .748$)						
AR $\rightarrow$ PS	0.220	0.062	.217***	3.53	<.001	[0.108, 0.349]
RE $\rightarrow$ PS	0.903	0.104	.593***	8.68	<.001	[0.728, 1.142]
LC $\rightarrow$ PS	0.315	0.133	.158*	2.37	.018	[0.068, 0.591]
Predictors of Meaningful Work ($R^2 = .398$)						
PS $\rightarrow$ MW	0.241	0.037	.372***	6.50	<.001	[0.169, 0.313]
LC $\rightarrow$ MW	0.395	0.085	.306***	4.67	<.001	[0.216, 0.547]
Predictors of Job Satisfaction ($R^2 = .716$)						
MW $\rightarrow$ JS	0.994	0.054	.683***	18.38	<.001	[0.889, 1.099]
LC $\rightarrow$ JS	0.454	0.059	.242***	7.72	<.001	[0.346, 0.577]
Predictors of Turnover Intention ($R^2 = .636$)						
JS $\rightarrow$ TI	-0.667	0.043	-.756***	-15.59	<.001	[-0.755, -0.586]
LC $\rightarrow$ TI	-0.104	0.051	-.063*	-2.04	.042	[-0.207, -0.006]

Note. $N = 1,521$. LC = Leadership Communication; AR = Autonomous Respect; RE = Respectful Engagement; PS = Psychological Safety; MW = Meaningful Work; JS = Job Satisfaction; TI = Turnover Intention. B = unstandardized path coefficient; SE = bootstrap standard error (5,000 resamples); β = standardized path coefficient; CI = bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrap confidence interval. The model includes seven paths comprising the mediation chain (LC $\rightarrow$ AR, LC $\rightarrow$ RE, AR $\rightarrow$ PS, RE $\rightarrow$ PS, PS $\rightarrow$ MW, MW $\rightarrow$ JS, JS $\rightarrow$ TI) plus four direct paths from leadership communication to each downstream endogenous variable (LC $\rightarrow$ PS, LC $\rightarrow$ MW, LC $\rightarrow$ JS, LC $\rightarrow$ TI), specifying partial mediation. Model fit: $\chi^2(480) = 1,914.01$, $p < .001$, CFI = .968, TLI = .965, RMSEA = .044 [90% CI: 0.042, 0.046], SRMR = .044. CIs and SEs pertain to unstandardized B; β is reported for comparability. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Model Comparison

The partial mediation model (11 paths: 7 mediation-chain paths + 4 direct LC paths) demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2(480) = 1914.01$, $p < .001$, CFI = .968, TLI = .965, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = .044). The nested complete mediation model omitting the four direct paths from leadership communication showed acceptable but inferior fit ($\chi^2(484) = 2140.464$, $p < .001$, CFI = .963, TLI = .960, RMSEA = .047, SRMR = .072). The $\Delta\chi^2$ test confirmed that the partial mediation model fit significantly better ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 226.46$, $p < .001$), indicating that leadership communication has significant direct associations with retention-relevant outcomes beyond its indirect effects through respect. All subsequent results are reported from the partial mediation model.

Table 4. Indirect Effects in the Partial Mediation Structural Model.

Pathway	Hypothesis	B	SE	β	z	p	95% CI
Leadership Communication $\rightarrow$ Psychological Safety							
LC $\rightarrow$ AR $\rightarrow$ PS	H1	0.372	0.106	.187***	3.51	<.001	[0.183, 0.594]
LC $\rightarrow$ RE $\rightarrow$ PS	H2	0.763	0.088	.383***	8.68	<.001	[0.623, 0.965]
Leadership Communication $\rightarrow$ Meaningful Work							
LC $\rightarrow$ AR $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW	—	0.090	0.031	.070**	2.89	.004	[0.038, 0.161]
LC $\rightarrow$ RE $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW	—	0.184	0.041	.143***	4.50	<.001	[0.116, 0.274]
LC $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW	—	0.076	0.036	.059*	2.10	.036	[0.016, 0.157]
Leadership Communication $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction							
LC $\rightarrow$ AR $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	—	0.089	0.031	.047**	2.88	.004	[0.037, 0.159]
LC $\rightarrow$ RE $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	—	0.183	0.042	.097***	4.36	<.001	[0.112, 0.276]
LC $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	—	0.075	0.036	.040*	2.09	.037	[0.016, 0.154]
LC $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	—	0.393	0.083	.209***	4.73	<.001	[0.210, 0.538]
Leadership Communication $\rightarrow$ Turnover Intention							
LC $\rightarrow$ AR $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	H4	-0.059	0.021	-.036**	-2.82	.005	[-0.107, -0.025]
$\rightarrow$ TI							
LC $\rightarrow$ RE $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	H5	-0.122	0.029	-.074***	-4.26	<.001	[-0.186, -0.074]
$\rightarrow$ TI							
LC $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ TI	—	-0.050	0.024	-.030*	-2.09	.036	[-0.103, -0.010]
LC $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ TI	—	-0.262	0.057	-.158***	-4.60	<.001	[-0.365, -0.141]
LC $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ TI	—	-0.303	0.042	-.183***	-7.18	<.001	[-0.394, -0.227]
Autonomous Respect $\rightarrow$ Outcomes (Within-Chain Effects)							
AR $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW	—	0.053	0.018	.081**	2.87	.004	[0.022, 0.094]
AR $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS	—	0.053	0.018	.055**	2.86	.004	[0.022, 0.094]
AR $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ MW $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ TI	—	-0.035	0.013	-.042**	-2.80	.005	[-0.063, -0.014]

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Pathway	Hypothesis	B	SE	β	z	p	95% CI
Respectful Engagement → Outcomes (Within-Chain Effects)							
RE → PS → MW	—	0.217	0.051	.221***	4.29	<.001	[0.131, 0.328]
RE → PS → MW → JS	—	0.216	0.052	.151***	4.15	<.001	[0.127, 0.331]
RE → PS → MW → JS → TI	—	-0.144	0.036	-.114***	-4.04	<.001	[-0.225, -0.083]
Psychological Safety → Outcomes (Within-Chain Effects)							
PS → MW → JS	—	0.239	0.040	.254***	6.01	<.001	[0.162, 0.317]
PS → MW → JS → TI	H6	-0.160	0.028	-.192***	-5.76	<.001	[-0.215, -0.106]
Meaningful Work → Outcomes (Within-Chain Effects)							
MW → JS → TI	—	-0.663	0.048	-.516***	-13.92	<.001	[-0.759, -0.573]

Note. N = 1,521. LC = Leadership Communication; AR = Autonomous Respect; RE = Respectful Engagement; PS = Psychological Safety; MW = Meaningful Work; JS = Job Satisfaction; TI = Turnover Intention. B = unstandardized indirect effect; SE = bootstrap standard error (5,000 resamples); β = standardized indirect effect; CI = bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrap confidence interval. All indirect effects tested using the product of coefficients method. Indirect pathways through leadership communication's direct paths (LC→PS, LC→MW, LC→JS) are reported alongside the original respect-mediated pathways. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results.

Hypothesis	Results	Supported
Indirect Effects: Leadership Communication → Psychological Safety		
H1: Leadership communication will have a positive indirect effect on psychological safety through autonomous respect.	LC had a significant positive indirect effect on PS through AR ($B = 0.372$, $SE = 0.106$, 95% CI [0.183, 0.594], $\beta = .187$, $p < .001$).	Yes
H2: Leadership communication will have a positive indirect effect on psychological safety through respectful engagement.	LC had a significant positive indirect effect on PS through RE ($B = 0.763$, $SE = 0.088$, 95% CI [0.623, 0.965], $\beta = .383$, $p < .001$).	Yes
Pathway Comparison		
H3: Respectful engagement will have a stronger association with psychological safety than autonomous respect ($\beta_{RE \rightarrow PS} > \beta_{AR \rightarrow PS}$).	RE → PS was significantly stronger than AR → PS ($\Delta B = 0.683$, 95% BCa CI [0.480, 0.904]; $\Delta \beta = .376$; $\beta_{RE} = .593$ vs. $\beta_{AR} = .217$).	Yes
Indirect Effects: Leadership Communication → Turnover Intention		
H4: Leadership communication will have a negative indirect effect on turnover intention through the serial pathway: autonomous respect → psychological safety → meaningful work → job satisfaction.	LC had a significant negative indirect effect on TI through AR → PS → MVV → JS ($B = -0.059$, $SE = 0.021$, 95% CI [-0.107, -0.025], $\beta = -.036$, $p = .005$).	Yes
H5: Leadership communication will have a negative indirect effect on turnover intention through the serial pathway: respectful engagement → psychological safety → meaningful work → job satisfaction.	LC had a significant negative indirect effect on TI through RE → PS → MVV → JS ($B = -0.122$, $SE = 0.029$, 95% CI [-0.186, -0.074], $\beta = -.074$, $p < .001$).	Yes

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Hypothesis	Results	Supported
Sequential Mechanism H6: Psychological safety and meaningful work will operate sequentially, such that psychological safety has an indirect effect on turnover intention through meaningful work → job satisfaction. Direct Effects: Completeness Test H7: Leadership communication will have direct associations with retention-relevant outcomes (psychological safety, meaningful work, job satisfaction, and turnover intention) beyond its indirect effects through respect.	PS had a significant negative indirect effect on TI through MW → JS ($B = -0.160$, $SE = 0.028$, 95% CI $[-0.215, -0.106]$, $\beta = -.192$, $p < .001$). All four direct paths were significant: LC → PS ($B = 0.315$, 95% CI $[0.068, 0.591]$, $\beta = .158$, $p = .018$); LC → MW ($B = 0.395$, 95% CI $[0.216, 0.547]$, $\beta = .306$, $p < .001$); LC → JS ($B = 0.454$, 95% CI $[0.346, 0.577]$, $\beta = .242$, $p < .001$); LC → TI ($B = -0.104$, 95% CI $[-0.207, -0.006]$, $\beta = -.063$, $p = .042$). Omnibus model comparison: $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 226.46$, $p < .001$.	Yes Yes
Downstream Route Comparisons (RE route vs. AR route; not formally hypothesized) LC → MW LC → JS LC → TI	RE route significantly larger than AR route ($\Delta B = 0.094$, 95% BCa CI $[0.038, 0.173]$; $\Delta\beta = .073$; $p = .007$). RE route significantly larger than AR route ($\Delta B = 0.094$, 95% BCa CI $[0.037, 0.175]$; $\Delta\beta = .050$; $p = .008$). RE route significantly larger than AR route ($\Delta B = -0.062$, 95% BCa CI $[-0.117, -0.025]$; $\Delta\beta = -.038$; $p = .008$).	— — —

Note. $N = 1,521$. Unstandardized coefficients (B) are accompanied by bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) 95% bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples; standardized coefficients (β) are reported for comparability. H3 compares the direct paths RE → PS versus AR → PS in the partial mediation model. Downstream route comparisons test whether the LC-level indirect effect through the RE route is significantly larger in magnitude than through the AR route at each downstream outcome; these differences propagate from the H3 finding at psychological safety. Contrast estimates were obtained from a model with the same measurement and structural form as the SEM; CFI, TLI, and RMSEA matched the SEM within rounding, and SRMR differed trivially (SEM .044 vs. contrast model .045). Direct path coefficients are reported in Table 3; full indirect effects are reported in Table 4.

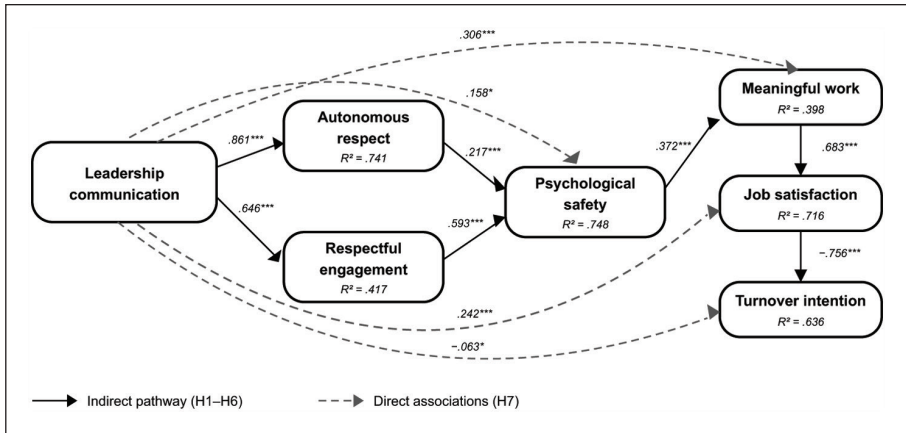


Figure 2. Estimated structural model.

Note. Values are standardized path coefficients. R^2 values are shown inside each endogenous variable. $N = 1,521$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Structural Model

All mediation-chain paths were significant in predicted directions (Table 3). Leadership communication was strongly associated with autonomous respect ($\beta = .861$) and respectful engagement ($\beta = .646$). Both respect forms were positively associated with psychological safety (AR: $\beta = .217$; RE: $\beta = .593$). Psychological safety predicted meaningful work ($\beta = .372$), meaningful work predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = .683$), and job satisfaction negatively predicted turnover intention ($\beta = -.756$).

The four direct paths from leadership communication were also significant. Leadership communication had direct associations with psychological safety ($\beta = .158$), meaningful work ($\beta = .306$), job satisfaction ($\beta = .242$), and turnover intention ($\beta = -.063$) beyond its indirect effects through respect (Table 3).

The model explained substantial variance in all endogenous variables: autonomous respect ($R^2 = .741$), respectful engagement ($R^2 = .417$), psychological safety ($R^2 = .748$), meaningful work ($R^2 = .398$), job satisfaction ($R^2 = .716$), and turnover intention ($R^2 = .636$).

Hypothesis Testing

Indirect Effects Through Respect to Psychological Safety (H1, H2). Leadership communication had significant positive indirect effects on psychological safety through both autonomous respect ($\beta = .187$, $B = 0.372$, BCa 95% CI [0.183, 0.594]; H1 supported) and respectful engagement ($\beta = .383$, $B = 0.763$, BCa 95% CI [0.623, 0.965]; H2 supported), with BCa 95% bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero (Table 4).

Pathway Comparison (H3). A planned contrast confirmed that respectful engagement had a significantly stronger association with psychological safety than autonomous respect ($\Delta B = 0.683$, 95% BCa CI [0.480, 0.904]; $\Delta\beta = .376$; $\beta_{RE} = .593$ vs. $\beta_{AR} = .217$; H3 supported).

Serial Indirect Effects on Turnover Intention (H4, H5). Leadership communication had significant negative indirect effects on turnover intention through the full serial chain via autonomous respect $\rightarrow$ psychological safety $\rightarrow$ meaningful work $\rightarrow$ job satisfaction ($\beta = -.036$, $B = -0.059$, BCa 95% CI [-0.107, -0.025]; H4 supported) and via respectful engagement $\rightarrow$ psychological safety $\rightarrow$ meaningful work $\rightarrow$ job satisfaction ($\beta = -.074$, $B = -0.122$, BCa 95% CI [-0.186, -0.074]; H5 supported).

Sequential Mechanism (H6). Psychological safety had a significant negative indirect effect on turnover intention through the meaningful work $\rightarrow$ job satisfaction sequence ($\beta = -.192$, $B = -0.160$, BCa 95% CI [-0.215, -0.106]; H6 supported), confirming that psychological safety and meaningful work operate sequentially in the model.

Direct Associations Beyond the Indirect Pathway (H7). The four direct paths from leadership communication to retention-relevant outcomes were all significant, supporting H7. Leadership communication had direct associations with psychological safety ($\beta = .158$, $B = 0.315$, BCa 95% CI [0.068, 0.591]), meaningful work ($\beta = .306$, $B = 0.395$, BCa 95% CI [0.216, 0.547]), job satisfaction ($\beta = .242$, $B = 0.454$, BCa 95% CI [0.346, 0.577]), and turnover intention ($\beta = -.063$, $B = -0.104$, BCa 95% CI [-0.207, -0.006]). The $\Delta\chi^2$ test provided omnibus confirmation that these direct paths collectively improved model fit (reported above in Model Comparison). The inclusion of direct paths attenuated the indirect pathway: the path from psychological safety to meaningful work decreased from $\beta = .661$ in the complete mediation model to $\beta = .372$ in the partial mediation model.

Additional Indirect Effects. Intermediate indirect effects were significant at each downstream stage: leadership communication to meaningful work through autonomous respect $\rightarrow$ psychological safety ($\beta = .070$) and through respectful engagement $\rightarrow$ psychological safety ($\beta = .143$); leadership communication to job satisfaction through the AR serial pathway ($\beta = .047$) and the RE serial pathway ($\beta = .097$). Within the serial chain, psychological safety had a positive indirect effect on job satisfaction through meaningful work ($\beta = .254$) and meaningful work had a negative indirect effect on turnover intention through job satisfaction ($\beta = -.516$). Full indirect effects are reported in Table 4.

Pathway Comparison at Downstream Outcomes. Route comparisons at meaningful work, job satisfaction, and turnover intention showed the respectful engagement pathway was consistently larger in magnitude than the autonomous respect pathway, with the differences reaching significance at every downstream stage (MW: $\Delta B = 0.094$, BCa 95% CI [0.038, 0.173], $\Delta\beta = .073$; JS: $\Delta B = 0.094$, BCa 95% CI [0.037, 0.175],

$\Delta\beta = .050$; TI: $\Delta B = -0.062$, BCa 95% CI $[-0.117, -0.025]$, $\Delta\beta = -.038$; Table 5). These propagated differences are downstream consequences of the H3 finding at psychological safety, indicating that the upstream divergence between the two respect pathways carries through the full serial chain to retention-relevant outcomes.

Summary

All seven hypotheses were supported. Leadership communication had significant indirect effects on psychological safety through both autonomous respect (H1) and respectful engagement (H2), and respectful engagement showed a significantly stronger association with psychological safety than autonomous respect (H3). Both full serial pathways from leadership communication to turnover intention were significant (H4, H5), and psychological safety and meaningful work operated sequentially (H6). Leadership communication also had significant direct associations with all four retention-relevant outcomes beyond its indirect effects through respect (H7), with the strongest direct paths to meaningful work and job satisfaction. The $\Delta\chi^2$ test confirmed that the partial mediation model fit significantly better than the complete mediation model. Downstream route comparisons additionally revealed that the respectful engagement pathway was significantly stronger than the autonomous respect pathway at meaningful work, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, indicating that the upstream divergence at psychological safety carries through to all downstream retention-relevant outcomes.

Discussion

This study tested and extended Hertzsch et al.'s (2012) integrative framework of leadership communication in the context of retention-relevant outcomes. Three contributions follow, of ascending theoretical reach: an integrated test of the framework, psychological safety as a bridging mechanism, and the Leadership Communication Process Model (LCPM). We take them in turn.

Theoretical Implications

Confirming the Framework. First, the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework's core architecture held. Leadership communication was positively associated with both autonomous respect ($\beta = .861$) and respectful engagement ($\beta = .646$); both respect forms predicted psychological safety (H1, H2 supported); and the full serial chain from leadership communication to turnover intention was significant via both autonomous respect (H4) and respectful engagement (H5), confirming that the framework's Stage 3 $\rightarrow$ Stage 4 sequence holds end-to-end for retention-relevant outcomes. These results are consistent with the accumulated PLCQ evidence linking leadership communication to job satisfaction across contexts (Delgado, 2021; Erben et al., 2019; Heuss & Datta, 2023; Orłowski, 2024; Silva et al., 2024; Sutiyo, 2022), and they support the PLCQ (Schneider et al., 2015) as a valid operationalization of the framework's Stage 1 to 2 communication construct.

Extending the Framework: Psychological Safety as a Bridging Mechanism. Second, Hertzsch et al. (2012) predict that relational quality produces motivational outcomes but leave the connecting mechanism unspecified. We proposed psychological safety as one such mechanism to fill that gap, and the data supported the proposal: both respect forms predicted psychological safety, and psychological safety had a significant sequential indirect effect on turnover intention through meaningful work and job satisfaction (H6 supported), confirming the JD-R motivational pathway as the mechanism running within the Stage 3 → Stage 4 transition. Positioning leadership communication as the behavioral antecedent that produces respect as a resource also responds to calls in the JD-R literature to move beyond treating leadership as undifferentiated support (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Respectful engagement had a significantly stronger association with psychological safety than autonomous respect (H3 supported), consistent with the argument that behavioral warmth and dignity in interaction are more proximal to a shared climate of interpersonal risk than status-based recognition of competence. Because psychological safety operates at a different level of analysis than Stage 3 relational quality—team climate rather than dyadic experience—and draws on a different theoretical lineage (A. Edmondson, 1999; A. C. Edmondson & Bransby, 2023), it is best understood as a downstream consequence of relational quality that enables the motivational pathway, not as a form of relational quality. Psychological safety is the first bridging mechanism between Stage 3 and Stage 4 to be tested in this framework. The LCPM we propose below treats it as one viable bridge rather than the bridge: additional mechanisms—trust in the leader, organizational identification, affective commitment to the leader—remain to be tested, particularly for the autonomous respect pathway, which is dyadic rather than climate-level.

Challenging Completeness and Proposing the Leadership Communication Process Model. Third, the framework's complete mediation prediction did not hold. Leadership communication retained significant direct associations with psychological safety, meaningful work ($\beta = .306$), job satisfaction ($\beta = .242$), and turnover intention beyond its indirect effects through respect (H7 supported); the $\Delta\chi^2$ test confirmed that the partial mediation model fit significantly better than the complete mediation model. Including the direct paths attenuated the psychological safety → meaningful work coefficient from $\beta = .661$ in the complete mediation model to $\beta \approx .372$ in the partial mediation model, indicating that the complete mediation specification attributed variance to the indirect pathway that is better accounted for by direct communication effects. The relational pathway received clear empirical support: Leadership communication predicted retention-relevant outcomes through relational quality, as the framework proposes. The direct effects, however, fall outside the framework's account, raising a question: What explains leadership communication's associations with outcomes that bypass relational quality?

The LCPM is our answer (see Figure 3). We developed the LCPM in response to a pattern of direct effects replicated across studies employing the PLCQ. In building the model, we returned to a distinction present in the framework's theoretical foundations

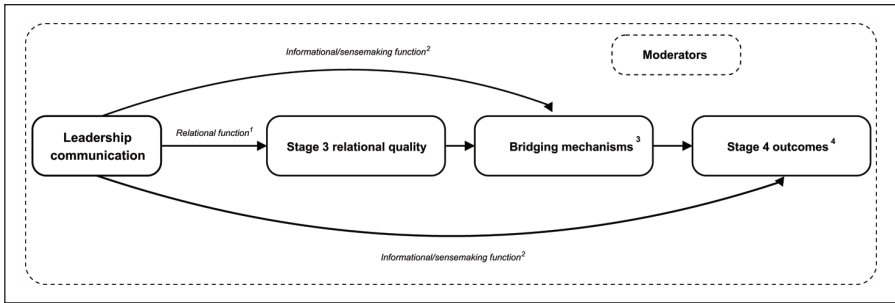


Figure 3. Leadership communication process model (LCPM).

Note. Construct examples populating each class are enumerated in Table 6. Superscripts indicate the path each moderator class is theorized to influence: ¹ relational function (leadership communication → Stage 3 relational quality); ² informational/sensemaking function (leadership communication → bridging mechanisms and Stage 4 outcomes, direct); ³ bridging transition (Stage 3 → Stage 4 via bridging mechanisms); ⁴ outcome-domain weighting (which Stage 4 outcomes dominate).

but lost in its empirical operationalization: leadership communication contains both relational and informational content. We propose that these constitute two distinct functions. A *relational function* builds respect, trust, and connection and operates through relational quality to outcomes, consistent with Hertzsch et al.'s (2012) prediction. An *informational/sensemaking function* articulates purpose, frames significance, clarifies goals, and reduces ambiguity, and operates more directly on evaluative judgments. We label this second function *informational/sensemaking* to reflect the two joined operations of the informational facets identified earlier: transmitting content that reduces uncertainty and helping employees construct what their work means. For economy, we refer to it hereafter as the informational function; the shorthand always denotes the full informational/sensemaking function. The PLCQ's six items reflect both functions: openness, communication quality, and communicative motivation are primarily relational, while shared meaning, uncertainty reduction, and communication skills applied to problem-solving dialogue are primarily informational/sensemaking. The instrument was not designed to separate the two functions. But the content of its six items — spanning openness and communication quality on one side, shared meaning and uncertainty reduction on the other — suggests that employees draw on both when they rate leader communication. The informational function is consistent with the direct associations observed in this study—most cleanly those with meaningful work and job satisfaction, which are evaluative judgments about work itself that explicit communication about purpose and direction can shape without a relational intermediary. The smaller direct associations with psychological safety and turnover intention fit the informational function less cleanly and remain theoretically open.

As Figure 3 shows, the LCPM is a system of construct classes and moderator classes. Stage 3 relational quality, bridging mechanisms, and Stage 4 outcomes are classes that can be populated by multiple constructs—those tested here and those future research should examine. Moderators are organized by the path they affect:

moderators of the relational function, the informational function, the bridging transition, and outcome-domain weighting. What the LCPM specifies is the structure: the construct classes, the moderator classes, and the paths connecting them. It does not specify a fixed list of constructs and moderators. Table 6 enumerates the constructs populating each class—those tested in the present study, those tested in Willett et al. (2026), and those grounded in prior theory that future research could examine.

The distinction is theoretical and functional, not a measurement claim: the PLCQ is empirically unidimensional, and the six-item scale does not separate its relational and informational content. The dual-function interpretation is, however, consistent with a possible outcome-domain dependency across studies: Willett et al. (2026) tested the framework for well-being and engagement in an all-ages sample and found complete mediation through respect, whereas the current study tests retention-relevant outcomes and finds partial mediation. Silva et al. (2024) provide converging evidence: their null mediation through perceived effectiveness—a non-relational construct—is consistent with relational mediators carrying the indirect pathway, while leaving room for the direct effects the LCPM attributes to the informational function. Because the two studies differ in both outcome domain and sample composition, the pattern generates a hypothesis for future work rather than an established dependency.

Practical Implications

These implications follow from cross-sectional associations and should be read as plausibility claims, not causal claims. For organizations concerned about retention, the practical takeaway of the LCPM is that communication skill development focused only on relational warmth may be necessary but not sufficient: leaders who are warm and present but who leave employees uncertain about purpose, goals, and direction may not be providing the full range of communication their employees draw on when evaluating their work. Informational clarity about purpose and direction appears to carry independent weight.

In practice, the LCPM's informational function points to communicative behaviors distinct from relational warmth: articulating organizational purpose, connecting individual work to larger goals, clarifying priorities, and reducing ambiguity about expectations. These behaviors complement rather than substitute for relational skills, suggesting that leadership development programs may benefit from explicit attention to both functions rather than treating communication as a single undifferentiated competency.

Limitations

Several limitations bound these conclusions. Data are cross-sectional and individual-level, so the results support the framework's associational structure rather than its causal sequence; longitudinal and experimental designs would strengthen directional inferences. Psychological safety was operationalized as individual perceptions of team climate rather than as aggregated team-level scores, which limits claims about

Table 6. Leadership Communication Process Model Construct Classes: Tested and Future Directions.

Class	Tested	Proposed future directions
Stage 3 relational quality	Autonomous respect and respectful engagement (current study; Willett et al., 2026)	LMX (Heuss & Datta, 2023; Liden & Maslyn, 1998); Trust in leader (Mayer et al., 1995); Organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992)
Bridging mechanisms	Psychological safety (current study); Occupational resilience (Willett et al., 2026)	Trust in leader (Mayer et al., 1995); Affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991); Organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992); Quality of work-life (Sirgy et al., 2001; Sutiyo, 2022)
Retention-relevant (Stage 4)	Meaningful work, job satisfaction, and turnover intention (current study)	Intent to stay (Mobley, 1977); Actual turnover behavior (Bothma & Roodt, 2013); Withdrawal cognitions (Hom et al., 2012)
Well-being and engagement (Stage 4)	Flourishing at work, job engagement (Willett et al., 2026)	Burnout (Maslach et al., 2001); Thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005); Work-life balance (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011)
Other outcomes (Stage 4)	—	Affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991); Organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1988); Performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993)
Moderators	—	Relationship tenure; Cultural hierarchy norms; Team interdependence; Career stage; Task uncertainty; Organizational type

Note. “Tested” refers to constructs measured within an integrated test of the Hertzsch et al. (2012) framework. PLCQ studies that examined leadership communication outside this architecture are noted as empirical correlates of proposed future directions where applicable. Construct classes correspond to the structural elements shown in Figure 3. Trust in leader and organizational identification appear in both Stage 3 relational quality and Bridging mechanisms because they have been theorized at both dyadic-relational and climate-bridging levels of analysis; future research can disambiguate. Willett et al. (2026) refers to a published study from the same research program testing the framework for well-being and engagement outcomes.

team-level processes; multilevel designs with intact teams would allow stronger tests of psychological safety as a climate-level bridge. The H3 finding may partly reflect construct proximity at the individual level—respectful engagement and psychological safety both concern perceived interpersonal climate, whereas autonomous respect is dyadic—so designs that separate dyadic respect from climate-level psychological safety would help distinguish theoretical mechanism from measurement overlap.

The sample (aged 24–35) introduces a related caveat. Willett et al. (2026) tested the framework in an all-ages sample and found no direct leadership communication effects on focal well-being and engagement outcomes; the current study's partial mediation could reflect the retention versus well-being contrast, a cohort difference, or both. Age differences are not surprising under the Hertzsch framework, which assumes communication effectiveness is shaped by characteristics of the people in the interaction, but testing for them would extend the framework rather than test a prediction Hertzsch et al. (2012) themselves articulate. Replication of the retention model in mixed-age samples would separate the two explanations.

A third limitation concerns the Stage 3 constructs we measured: autonomous respect and respectful engagement only. Other dyadic relational constructs—trust in the leader, LMX, organizational identification—may carry communication's effects in ways we cannot separate from the direct paths we observed. Measuring these alongside respect in a replication would test whether a more fully populated Stage 3 absorbs some of the variance now visible as direct effects.

A fourth limitation concerns measurement proximity between leadership communication and autonomous respect ($\text{HTMT} = .855$), which approached the conventional .90 ceiling. Sensitivity analyses confirmed coefficient stability under alternative specifications (Table S2), but the interpretation of direct LC effects as informational rather than residual AR variance depends on clean measurement separation. Measures designed to more sharply distinguish leader communication from recognition-based respect would strengthen this interpretation.

Future Directions for Research

The LCPM's central departure from Hertzsch et al. (2012) is the claim that leadership communication has both direct and indirect effects on Stage 4 outcomes—not only the indirect effects the original framework predicts. This opens two linked research directions. The first is grounding the informational function in sensemaking scholarship: future work should develop the theoretical account of how this function shapes evaluative judgments directly and identify the specific leader behaviors driving the direct effects observed here and across the PLCQ literature. The second is testing the LCPM's outcome-domain claim: that function weights shift across outcomes, with relational pathways sufficing for well-being and engagement and informational pathways contributing additionally to retention-relevant evaluative judgments. Further domain comparisons—engagement versus retention, well-being versus performance, individual versus team outcomes—would sharpen this claim, and replication across age cohorts and tenure levels would separate outcome-domain and cohort explanations for

the partial-versus-complete-mediation contrast observed between this study and Willett et al. (2026).

We designed the LCPM to be extended (see Table 6). The bridging mechanisms class is particularly generative: extending it with dyadic mechanisms more proximal to autonomous respect would allow tests of whether dyadic relational quality engages dyadic bridges while climate-level relational quality engages climate bridges. Moderators can be organized into the classes Figure 3 identifies—relational function, informational function, bridging transition, outcome-domain weighting. Researchers can populate its construct and moderator classes with additional variables, provided each addition carries theoretical justification for the class it joins.

The PLCQ's dimensionality warrants further investigation. The PLCQ is empirically unidimensional, which the LCPM treats as a measurement question separate from the theoretical functional distinction it proposes. Exploratory factor analyses of expanded item pools, bifactor models, experimental designs that manipulate relational versus informational communication content, and diary studies tracking within-person variation could evaluate whether the relational and informational functions map onto separable PLCQ dimensions, require new measures entirely, or reflect a more integrated construct than the LCPM's functional distinction suggests.

Leadership communication operates through more than relational quality. Taken together with Willett et al. (2026), this study points to an outcome-domain dependency the LCPM is built to organize theoretically: relational pathways may suffice for some outcomes; others may draw on the informational function as well. The distinction is functional, not dimensional, and leaves room for the measurement and mechanism work future research should take up. For communication scholarship, the LCPM offers a framework to organize accumulating evidence across studies; for organizations, it names what leaders need to attend to beyond relational warmth when retention-relevant outcomes are at stake.

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Supplemental Material

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