

Does a forgiving leader foster employees' psychological safety via their respect for the leader? It depends on employees' belief in a just world¹

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Abstract

Encouraging employees to take risks, assume mistakes, and contribute their ideas and suggestions in a timely and candid way is paramount. Such a candor is only possible if employees feel psychologically safe, which depends significantly on leader *forgiveness* (i.e., *disposition to forgive*), we advance. A vignette-based experiment and a three-wave field study support our hypothesized model. First, leader-expressed forgiveness (i.e., leader forgiveness as perceived by employees) predicts employees' psychological safety, both directly and via the employees' respect for the leader. Second, employees' belief in a just world (BJW) operate as a boundary condition, in that the mediated relationship is stronger for employees with a weak BJW, the lowest level of respect for the leader emerging when employees with a weak BJW deal with an unforgiving leader. As the consequences of forgiveness in workplaces are under-investigated, we contribute to

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understanding the consequences of leader forgivingness for a crucial employee outcome (i.e., psychological safety). Through adopting a between-person (i.e., leader-employee) lens for the relationship between forgiveness and BJW, we also bring a more nuanced perspective about the complex relationship between the two variables.

Keywords: leader forgivingness; employee belief in a just world; employee respect for the leader; employee psychological safety