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The Conditions of Courage: Psychological Safety as a  
Mediator and Follower Characteristics as Moderators in  
the Leadership-Courage Relationship

Dissertation presented to Universidade Católica  
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Psychology in  
Business and Economics

By

João Pedro Ferreira Moura da Paz

Faculty of Human Sciences

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## **Abstract**

Workplace social courage has gained growing attention in organizational research for its role in enabling ethical behaviour, constructive voice, and resilience in the face of interpersonal risks. Employees frequently encounter situations where speaking up or resisting conformity may carry social or professional costs. Understanding the conditions that encourage such courage is therefore both theoretically significant and practically relevant.

This study examines whether transformational leadership predicts workplace social courage indirectly through psychological safety and whether this process interacts with follower characteristics, namely active engagement and independent thinking. The study aims to clarify how contextual and personal characteristics interact to shape courageous behaviour.

Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 117 employees. Participants completed measures of transformation, leadership, psychological safety, workplace social courage, active engagement, and independent thinking, as well as socio-demographic information. Statistical analysis was done using PROCESS Model 17, controlling for age and gender.

Results showed that transformational leadership positively predicted psychological safety, which in turn predicted workplace social courage. The indirect effect was significant, while the direct effect of transformational leadership on workplace social courage was non-significant, indicating full mediation. Independent thinking moderated the psychological safety and courage relationship, with the effect strongest when independent thinking was low. Active engagement did not significantly moderate the relationship.

These findings highlight psychological safety as a key pathway through which transformation and leadership foster workplace social courage. They emphasize the importance of considering follower characteristics, as the role of psychological safety proved especially critical for individuals with lower independent thinking.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Workplace Social Courage, Psychological Safety, Followership, Moderated Mediation

## Resumo

A coragem social no local de trabalho tem sido mais investigada pelo seu papel em possibilitar comportamentos éticos, vozes construtivas e resiliência diante de riscos interpessoais. Os funcionários frequentemente se deparam com situações em que se manifestar ou resistir à conformidade pode acarretar custos sociais ou profissionais. Compreender as condições que incentivam essa coragem é, portanto, teoricamente significativo e praticamente relevante.

Este estudo examina se a liderança transformacional prevê indiretamente a coragem social no local de trabalho por meio da segurança psicológica e se esse processo interage com as características dos seguidores, ou seja, o envolvimento ativo e o pensamento independente. O estudo visa esclarecer como as características contextuais e pessoais interagem para moldar o comportamento corajoso.

Utilizando um desenho de pesquisa transversal, foram recolhidos dados de 117 funcionários. Os participantes preencheram questionários sobre transformação, liderança, segurança psicológica, coragem social no local de trabalho, envolvimento ativo e pensamento independente, além de fornecerem informações sociodemográficas. A análise estatística foi realizada utilizando o PROCESS Model 17, controlando por idade e gênero.

Os resultados mostraram que a liderança transformacional previu positivamente a segurança psicológica, que por sua vez previu a coragem social no local de trabalho. O efeito indireto foi significativo, enquanto o efeito direto foi insignificante, indicando mediação total. O pensamento independente moderou a ligação entre segurança psicológica e coragem, com o efeito mais forte quando o pensamento independente era baixo. O envolvimento ativo não moderou significativamente a relação.

Essas descobertas destacam a segurança psicológica como um caminho fundamental através do qual a transformação e a liderança promovem a coragem social no local de trabalho. Elas enfatizam a importância de considerar as características dos seguidores, já que o papel da segurança psicológica se mostrou especialmente crítico para indivíduos com menor pensamento independente.

**Palavras-chave:** Liderança Transformacional, Coragem Social no Local de Trabalho, Segurança Psicológica, Seguimento, Mediação Moderada

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### **List of Abbreviations and Symbols**

TL – Transformational Leadership

WSC – Workplace Social Courage

PS – Psychological Safety

IT – Independent Thinking

AE – Active Engagement

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

In today's increasingly complex, uncertain and ethically demanding work environments, courage in the workplace has become not only a moral imperative but a strategic asset. Workplace Social Courage refers to voluntary, prosocial actions that involve interpersonal or professional risk, such as speaking up against misconduct, defending unpopular ideas, or challenging authority (Howard et al., 2017; Rate et al., 2007). Unlike other forms of positive workplace behaviour, courage entails risk and intentionality, making it particularly sensitive to contextual and psychological factors (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Koerner, 2014). Despite its growing relevance, workplace social courage remains underexplored, particularly in terms of the leadership and psychological mechanisms that enable it.

One promising avenue of inquiry lies in the role of transformational leadership. Defined by idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration, transformational leadership has consistently been linked to a wide array of positive organisational outcomes, including innovation, job involvement, and employee voice (Bass, 1985; Dvir et al., 2002; Detert & Bruno, 2017; Hariri et al., 2024). Transformational leaders promote vision and trust, encouraging employees to transcend self-interest for collective goals (Suryadi et al., 2024). However, whether transformational leadership directly elicits courageous behaviour remains debatable. Courage, by definition, involves confronting the potential for negative consequences, and even under strong leadership, employees may refrain from courageous actions if the perceived risks remain high (Howard & Holmes, 2020; Morrison, 2023).

This underscores the importance of Psychological Safety as a mediating mechanism. Psychological safety refers to a shared belief that one can express oneself without fear of retribution or embarrassment (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to engage in interpersonal risk-taking, including voicing concerns or challenging norms (Frazier et al., 2017; Carmeli et al., 2009). Transformational leadership has been shown to foster psychological safety through inclusive, participatory, and non-punitive behaviours (Newbhard & Edmondson, 2009; Rego et al., 2021), which in turn may lower the interpersonal costs associated with courageous behaviour. As such, psychological safety may serve as a crucial explanatory link between leadership and courage.

However, leadership and climate do not affect all individuals uniformly. Employees vary in their motivational and cognitive orientations, particularly in how they engage with leaders and navigate interpersonal risk. Kelley's Followership model identifies two key dimensions, Active Engagement and Independent Thinking, that shape how individuals respond to leadership and workplace environments. Active engagement reflects the extent to which individuals contribute with initiative and effort, while independent thinking captures their ability to think critically and act autonomously (Carsten et al., 2010; Kelley, 1992; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Despite growing interest in leadership and followership interactions, few studies have examined how these dimensions interact to predict complex, high-risk behaviours like workplace social courage. Prior research has established that transformational leadership indirectly promotes creativity and innovation through psychological safety (e.g Hariri, 2024; Xu et al., 2022), but less is known about whether this pathway applies to courage, a behaviour that involves higher potential costs. Moreover, the role of follower characteristics as conditions in this process remains under-theorised.

Studying these relationships is both theoretically and practically important. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of how leadership effectiveness is shaped not only by behaviour but also by the interplay of follower characteristics and psychological context (Bandura, 1986; Tett & Burnett, 2003). Practically, cultivating workplace courage is essential for ethical decision-making, innovation, and organizational change (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Morrison, 2023). By identifying when for whom leadership promotes courage, this research provides actionable insights for leaders, managers, human resource professionals, and organizational designers aiming to foster resilient, ethically sound workplaces.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Workplace Courage and Transformational Leadership**

Workplace courage is understood as a purposeful and deliberate behaviour that occurs when individuals face risks, whether professional, social, or emotional, to uphold moral, ethical, or organizational values (Detert & Bruno, 2017). It is often seen as voluntary actions involving the recognition of threats, such as reputational harm or retaliation, yet choosing to proceed because of the moral or organisational advantages. These actions can include confronting unethical behaviour, reporting safety issues, challenging weak leadership, or defending colleagues being mistreated (Detert & Bruno, 2017). Scholars emphasise that courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to act despite fear, a conceptualization that resonates with Aristotelian review of courage as the mean between cowardice and recklessness, guided by moral clarity and practical wisdom (Aristotle, trans, 2009). Modern theorists extend this virtue ethics tradition by situating courage within frameworks of moral psychology, particularly Rest's (1986) Four-Component Model, which posits that moral recognition judgment, motivation, and character are necessary for principled action. Within this view, workplace courage is the enactment of moral identity and alignment of behaviour with one's self-concept as a moral actor (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

The literature widely confirms that courage provides numerous organisational benefits. Courageous behaviours shape employees' personal identities, which can influence their likelihood of engaging in certain actions (Koener, 2014). Specifically, social courage is strongly associated with prosocial rule-breaking and organisational citizenship behaviours, even when controlling for conscientiousness (Howard et al., 2017). It positively impacts employees' willingness to voice opinions, overall life satisfaction, and reduces stress, depression, and anxiety. Additionally, it can lead to a decline in counterproductive work behaviours (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Howard & Alipour, 2014; Howard & Holmes, 2019; Magnano et al., 2017; Mert & Koksall, 2022; Santisi et al., 2020). Research has also shown that workplace social courage strengthens organisational identification and enhances innovative work behaviour, particularly when supported by risk intelligence and leadership (Magnano et al., 2022; Bektas et al., 2025).

When examining how courage and social courage influence employees at work, it is crucial to understand what factors trigger and shape these behaviours. In essence, the antecedents of workplace courage are multifaceted and have been linked to personality traits,

job characteristics, leadership culture, and demographic features. Howard & Cogswell (2019) delineated five antecedent categories: personality, job characteristics, leadership, culture, and demographic traits. Among these, leadership is especially salient because it directly shapes the context in which employees decide whether to act courageously. Leaders' influence to social climate determines norms for voicing dissent, and signals whether courageous acts will be supported or punished. (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999). In this sense, leadership functions not only as a source of direction but also as a contextual enabler that can either encourage or inhibit workplace courage. From the perspective of appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), leaders influence how employees appraise risks and their own efficacy in handling them, thereby affecting whether courage will be enacted. Leaders' influence is therefore both motivational and contextual, amplifying or dampening the expression of social courage.

The centrality of leadership is also reflected in broader organisational theories. Transformational leadership, for instance, empowers and inspires employees to transcend self-interests (Bass & Riggio, 2006), while authentic leadership fosters transparency at trusts, enabling openness (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumba et al., 2008). Relational perspectives further stress that leadership emerges through. Exchanges between leaders and followers shape climates of psychological safety where employees feel able to take risks (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Nembhard & Edmonson, 2006). Given the strong theoretical and empirical grounding, this study focuses on leadership as the key antecedent of workplace social courage. This study specifically focuses on leadership as the antecedent that influences workplace courage.

Antonakis et al. (2018) described leadership as a goal-oriented influence process happening within a specific time and relational setting, where a leader's actions affect organisational results through psychological factors like engagement, motivation, and trust. Bass & Avolio (2004), with the Full-Range Leadership Model, confirmed that leadership is multidimensional and encompasses both transactional and transformational aspects. This understanding has led to the prominence of transformational leadership, which has become one of the most extensively researched and influential leadership styles in modern organisations.

Operationalized by Bass (1985), transformational leadership is characterised by its ability to inspire and develop followers both professionally and personally, guiding them

toward a shared vision and purpose. Bass identified four interconnected behavioural dimensions that define this leadership style: idealised influence (leaders serving as moral role models), inspirational motivation (communicating a compelling and meaningful vision), intellectual stimulation (promoting innovation and critical thinking), and individualised consideration (providing attentive mentorship and personalised growth). These behaviours have been confirmed through psychometric tools like the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which has shown factorial consistency across various cultures and industries (e.g Antonakis et al., 2003; Batista-Foguet et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

Colbert and Witt (2009) empirically showed that leadership styles focused on goals help facilitate the expression of subordinates' conscientiousness. Other researchers argue that leadership plays a key role in fostering courageous behaviours in the workplace (Dermitas et al., 2013; Hannah et al., 2017; Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007; Sekerka et al., 2009). When highlighting positive leadership qualities, proactive and prosocial behaviours emerge, which also encompass courageous actions (Hannah et al., 2011; Waldman et al., 2006; Zhu et al., 2004).

The leader is seen as a role model by most employees. Ogunfowora et al. (2021) highlight that leader role modelling encourages employees to speak up against unethical behaviour, even at personal risk, a vital trait in an era with many corporate scandals. Additionally, when leaders practice individualised consideration, it significantly boosts other transformational leadership elements, such as inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. These practices help build greater trust, shared purpose, and psychological engagement among employees (Khan et al., 2022).

Following this, the first hypothesis is:

H1: Transformational Leadership is positively associated to workplace social courage.

### **The mediator role of Psychological Safety**

While recent studies indicate that transformational leadership can promote psychological engagement among employees (Khan et al., 2022) and is a key factor in promoting courageous behaviours at work (e.g., Hannah et al., 2017), it does not operate in isolation. For these interactions to occur, a workplace context must be present where the leader influences followers through psychological processes. As demonstrated by Detert & Burris (2007), specific behaviours- such as openness to change and willingness to act- are

often required to encourage routine voice, which are foundational to workplace courage (Detert & Bruno, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to consider other factors, like psychological safety, which are crucial for fostering courageous behaviours in followers.

The idea of psychological safety, first introduced by Kahn (1990) and expanded by Edmondson (1999), pertains to how individuals perceive the potential outcomes of engaging in interpersonal risks within a specific setting. This includes speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or admitting mistakes. Kahn's (1990) original work positioned psychological safety as one of three conditions for personal engagement, alongside meaningfulness and availability. He argued that when people feel safe, they are more likely to invest their full selves into work roles. Edmondson (1999) later conceptualised psychological safety as a shared team belief that interpersonal risk taking is acceptable, laying the groundwork for decades of Organisational Research. She stressed that psychological safety is not about being kind or avoiding conflict, but about cultivating a new environment where employees can be vulnerable, open, and honest without fearing rejection, humiliation, or punishment.

The theoretical roots of psychological safety are connected to several broader traditions. From a social learning perspective (Bandura, 1977), individuals assessed the likely consequences of voicing concerns and admitting mistakes based on observing how others are treated in similar situations. Leaders who react positively create a climate of silence, while supportive reactions foster safety. From social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), psychological safety can be understood as a reciprocal dynamic: when organisations and leaders signal respect, inclusiveness, and fairness, employees reciprocate by engaging openly in ways that might otherwise feel risky. Relatedly, relational and cultural theory (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Miller, 2014) suggests that trust and mutual respect within relationships are essential for growth and connection, offering another explanation of how psychological safety facilitates honest interaction. Psychological safety is also consistent with broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) which posits that positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires and build enduring resources. When employees feel safe, they are more likely to explore, innovate, and take risks that support learning and adaptation.

In her landmark research on hospital teams, Edmondson (1999) showed that psychologically safe teams tend to report medical errors more often because they feel comfortable speaking up. This openness to report errors indicates that a psychologically safe

environment promotes learning. Additionally, when team members have positive relationships with their leaders, they are more likely to see their workplace as psychologically safe (Detert & Burris, 2007). This aligns with group dynamics literature, which consistently shows that trust and safety are essential for learning behaviours and performance (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schein, 1993).

Throughout the literature, psychological safety is recognised as a mediator between several variables. For instance, in Lin et al. (2020), psychological safety is a positive link between helping behaviour and job involvement, indicating that a more psychologically safe workplace and increased helping behaviour lead to higher job involvement (Lin et al., 2020). It also mediates the relationship between both ethical leadership (Tu et al., 2019) and leader humility (Hu et al., 2018) in fostering team creativity. A recent meta-analysis by Frazier et al. (2017) confirmed that psychological safety predicts voice engagement and performance, demonstrating its central role in organisational functioning. Moreover, psychological safety is not only associated with performance outcomes but is also central to fostering inclusion and diversity, since employees from marginalised groups are less likely to speak up in environments that feel unsafe (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). In this sense, psychological safety acts as a foundational condition that amplifies the effects of leadership on courageous and pro-social behaviour.

Because workplace social courage involves deliberate engagement in interpersonal risks, its link with psychological safety is conceptually clear. Social courage requires moral conviction and a perception that the environment will tolerate decent mistakes and open expression. Transformational leadership helps create these conditions through trust, role modelling, and inspiration. But psychological safety is the mechanism that translates these leader behaviours into employees' willingness to act courageously. If followers are more willing to report mistakes, learn from them, display helping behaviours when a psychologically safe environment exists at work, and have a leader who inspires teamwork towards a common goal, it is hypothesised the following:

H2: Psychological Safety mediates the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Workplace Social Courage.

## **Followership**

Leadership has been a focus in literature for decades and remains central in organisations, as noted in Almeida et al. (2023). While psychological safety highlights the

contextual conditions that enable workplace social courage, not all individuals respond to these enabling conditions in the same way. As Ganu (2018) observes, many employees remained silent even in organisations that promote openness and ethical voice, often due to relational fears or self-protective concerns. This variability suggests that contextual factors such as leadership and psychological safety, while necessary, may not be sufficient to explain when and why employees choose to act courageously.

To address this limitation, recent scholarship emphasises the need to integrate follower characteristics into leadership models (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Traditional leadership theories placed leaders at the centre of influence. (e.g Bass & Riggio, 2006; Fiedler, 1967; Fleishman, 1953; House, 1971; Stogdill, 1948), but this leader-centric approach has been increasingly criticised as incomplete (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership outcomes are co-created, shaped not only by leaders' actions but also by followers' interpretations, responses and dispositions (Carsten et al., 2010).

Followership theory challenges traditional notions of followers as passive recipients of influence. Instead, followers are understood as active agents who interpret leader signals, provide feedback and co-create organisational realities (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Carsten et al. (2010) found that followers' constructions of their own roles, whether passive, proactive or co-producing, significantly affect how leadership is enacted and perceived. This reconceptualization reflects the broader shift towards relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006), which emphasises that leadership arises from social interactions rather than from the traits or behaviours of individuals in isolation. Such perspectives are especially relevant when examining phenomena like workplace social courage, which involves voicing dissent, providing constructive criticism or resisting unethical practices despite personal risks (Howard et al., 2017).

Among the most influential frameworks in followership research is Kelley's (1992) model, which identifies two orthogonal dimensions. Active Engagement and Independent Thinking. Active engagement is the extent to which followers demonstrate initiative, responsibility and participation in organisational life. Highly active engagement followers actively contribute ideas, seek involvement, and take ownership of outcomes, while low active engagement followers tend to withdraw or remain passive. Regarding independent thinking, it is the degree to which followers think critically and exercise judgment. Highly independent thinking followers evaluate information independently, challenge assumptions,

and resist conformity pressures. Low independent thinking followers rely on authority and group consensus without reflection. Kelley emphasises that exemplary followers who both actively engage in independent thinking are crucial for effective organisational functioning, as they contribute with energy while simultaneously maintaining critical judgement.

Framing active engagement and needed independent thinking as moderators integrates well with broader leadership theory. Contingency perspectives (e.g Fiedler, 1967; Yukl, 2010) argue that leadership effectiveness depends on interactions between leader behaviour, situational factors, and follower traits. Similarly, interactionist models of job performance (Tett & Burnett, 2003) posit that outcomes arise from the dynamic interplay of situational cues and personal dispositions. Applied here, transformation, leadership and psychological safety provide situational enablers, while active engagement and independent thinking represent whether those cues translate into workplace social courage. This approach also resonates with substitutes-for-leadership theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978), which suggests that certain follower characteristics can either enhance or diminish the effects of leadership. High active engagement and independent thinking can magnify leadership effectiveness, while low levels of active engagement and independent thinking may attenuate it.

Taken together, the integration of active engagement and independent thinking as moderate provides a more nuanced understanding of leadership processes. It highlights that courageous behaviour in the workplace that does not stem solely from leader behaviours or contextual supports, but from the interaction of these factors with follower dispositions. In this sense, active engagement and in the thinking act as boundary conditions determining whether transmission leadership in psychological safety are sufficient to elicit workplace social courage.

Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: The relationship between Transformational Leadership and Workplace Social Courage is moderated by Active Engagement in such a way that the relationship is stronger when levels of Active Engagement are higher.

H4: The relationship between Transformational Leadership and Workplace Social Courage is moderated by Independent Thinking in such a way that the relationship is stronger when levels of Independent Thinking are higher.

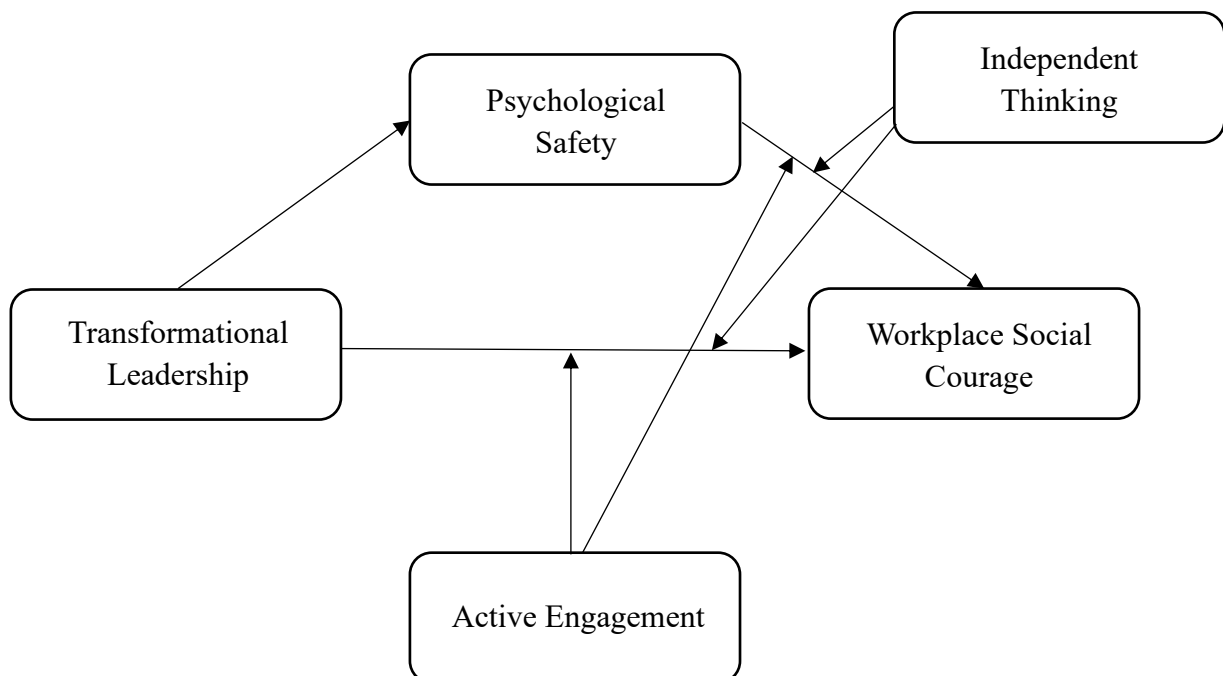
H5: The relationship between Psychological Safety and Workplace Social Courage is moderated by Active Engagement in such a way that the relationship is stronger when levels of Active Engagement are higher.

H6: The relationship between Psychological Safety and Workplace Social Courage is moderated by Independent Thinking in such a way that the relationship is stronger when levels of Independent Thinking are higher.

Finally, integrating mediation and moderation perspectives, it is also expected that the indirect effect of transformational leadership through psychological safety is contingent on follower characteristics. Thus, the mediation role of psychological safety is conditional on active engagement and independent thinking

H7: The indirect effect of Transformational Leadership on Workplace Social Courage is moderated by Active Engagement and Independent Thinking.

### Figure 1. Research Model



## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

233 participants started the survey to which 117 responded in full. Of these participants, 29 (24.8%) were male, 85 (75.5%) female, and 3 preferred not to answer. The respondents were aged between 21 and 62 years ( $M=41$ ,  $SD=12.54$ ). More than half of the participants (53%) had a bachelor's degree, while 22.2% had a high school degree and 18.8% had a master's degree. On average, the participants had been working at their current employer for 16 years ( $SD=10.9$ ) and had been working with the same supervisor for 7 years ( $SD=6.2$ ).

### 2.2 Measures

To explore the relationships among workplace courage, transformational leadership, psychological safety, and followership, this study used a quantitative survey composed of well-established, validated instruments. The survey consisted of four main sections, each corresponding to one of the core constructs, and concluded with general demographic questions.

**Workplace Social Courage Scale.** Workplace courage was assessed using the 11-item Workplace Social Courage Scale developed by Howard et al. (2017). This scale measures employees' willingness to engage in prosocial behaviours that involve personal risk in a workplace context, such as speaking up or defending others (e.g., "At the risk of my colleague not liking me, I would say when he/she was doing something against company policy."). Responses are given on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree, 7 – Strongly Agree). The scale demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

**Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).** Following previous research (e.g. Cole et al., 2006) Transformational leadership was measured using the 20-item version of the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Bass & Avolio, 1995). This version focuses on transformational leadership components, including idealized influence (e.g. "I am proud of my leader"), inspirational motivation (e.g. "My leader emphasizes the collective mission"), intellectual stimulation (e.g. "My leader re-examines assumptions"), and individualized consideration (e.g. "My leader focuses on my strengths"). Participants respond based on how frequently their leader exhibits each behaviour. Responses are given on a 7-point Likert-type

scale (1 – Strongly Disagree, 5 – Strongly Agree). The scale showed good reliability ( $\alpha=0.97$ ).

**Psychological Safety Scale.** Psychological safety was assessed using the 7-item scale developed by Edmondson (1999). This instrument evaluates the degree to which team members feel safe to take interpersonal risks, voice concerns, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences (e.g. “Overall, it’s safe to take a risk in my team.”). Responses are given on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 – Strongly Disagree, 7 – Strongly Agree). The scale showed good reliability ( $\alpha=0.72$ ).

**Kelley Followership Questionnaire.** Followership was measured using the 20-item version of the *Kelley Followership Questionnaire* (Kelley, 1992). The scale captures two primary dimensions: critical thinking (e.g. “I think independently and advocate new ideas that will contribute significantly to the goals of management or the organisation.”), showing good reliability ( $\alpha=0.74$ ) and active engagement (e.g. “My enthusiasm usually spreads and energizes my co-workers.”), showing good reliability ( $\alpha=0.86$ ). Responses are given on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – Rarely, 7 – Almost Always).

Following Brislin’s procedure (Brislin, 1976), all scales were adapted to a Portuguese version, using the same semantics and arrangement to cover the whole meaning of each instrument.

### **2.3 Data Collection Procedures**

The survey was developed and administered using Qualtrics, an online survey platform that allowed for structured question formatting and secure data collection. Before distribution, the survey was pilot tested with a small group of participants ( $n=6$ ) to ensure clarity, functionality, and content validity. After validation, the final version of the survey was distributed through multiple digital channels, including email, direct messaging apps, social media platforms, and shareable web links, from February 2025 to July 2025. A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods was employed to recruit participants. Initially, the survey was shared with the personal and professional networks, who were also encouraged to forward the survey to others within their own networks, thereby expanding the participant pool. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the survey.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics (version 30). Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations) and Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the strength of their bivariate associations.

To examine the hypothesized moderated and mediated relationships, conditional process analyses were conducted using Hayes's PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2015), more specifically, Model 17. This model estimates a mediation model in which the indirect effect of the independent variable (TL) on the dependent variable (WSC), through the mediator (PS) is moderated by Active Engagement (AE) and Independent Thinking (IT) on both relationships between TL and WSC; and PS and WSC. Age, gender, and education were included as covariates in the model. Moderated mediation was evaluated by examining the conditional indirect effects of TL on WSC through PS at different values of the moderators and by testing the index of moderated mediation. Significance threshold of  $p < 0.05$  was used for all statistical.

### 3. Results

#### Correlational Analysis

**Table 1.** Mean, Min, Max, Standard Deviation and Correlations

| Variables | Mean | SD    | Min  | Max  | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5    | 6   | 7 |
|-----------|------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-----|---|
| 1. TL     | 3.41 | 0.51  | 2.25 | 4.75 | —     |       |       |       |      |     |   |
| 2. WSC    | 4.83 | 0.81  | 2.55 | 6.73 | .23*  | —     |       |       |      |     |   |
| 3. PS     | 4.24 | 1.00  | 1.57 | 6.00 | .50** | .32** | —     |       |      |     |   |
| 4. IT     | 3.60 | 0.47  | 2.40 | 4.60 | .17   | .39** | .17   | —     |      |     |   |
| 5. AE     | 3.46 | 0.45  | 2.27 | 4.60 | .41** | .40** | .35** | .62** | —    |     |   |
| 6. Age    | 41   | 12.54 | 21   | 64   | .01   | .24*  | -.07  | .14   | .19* | —   |   |
| 7. Gender | —    | .53   | —    | —    | .03   | .14   | .09   | -.05  | -.05 | .01 | — |

Note: TL Transformational Leadership; WSC Workplace Social Courage; PS Psychological Safety; IT Independent Thinking; AE Active Engagement.

\* $p < .01$  \*\* $p < .001$

Transformational Leadership was positively and significantly correlated with Workplace Social Courage ( $r = .23$ ,  $p = .01$ ), suggesting that higher perceptions of transformational leadership were associated with greater workplace courage, as well as with Psychological Safety ( $r = .50$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Psychological Safety was also significantly and positively related to Workplace Social Courage ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that employees who perceived a safer psychological environment reported more courageous behaviour at work.

Independent Thinking shows a strong and significant correlation with Active Engagement ( $r = .62$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and was also positively associated with Workplace Social Courage ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). AE was significantly and positively correlated with TL ( $r = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), PS ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and WSC ( $r = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

As for social demographic variables, age was negatively associated with WSC ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p = .01$ ), indicating that younger individuals reported higher levels of workplace courage, while gender was non significant.

## Moderated Mediation

To test Hypothesis 2, which predicted that Psychological Safety would mediate the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Workplace Social Courage, it was first estimated the mediation model. As shown in Table 2 and 3, Transformational Leadership significantly predicted Psychological Safety ( $B = .53$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but it did not predict Workplace Social Courage, thus rejecting H1. Also, at mean SD, there is a full mediation (95% CI [.01, .25]), confirming H2.

**Table 2.** Mediation Model predicting Psychological Safety and Workplace Social Courage

| Predictor                   | Psychological Safety |           |          |          |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                             | <i>B</i>             | <i>SE</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Transformational Leadership | .53                  | .09       | 6.17     | .001     |
| Age                         | -.01                 | .01       | -.90     | .37      |
| Gender                      | .15                  | .17       | .88      | .38      |

| Predictor                   | Workplace Social Courage |           |          |          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                             | <i>B</i>                 | <i>SE</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Transformational Leadership | -.42                     | .49       | -.90     | .39      |

**Table 3.** Conditional Effects at Independent Thinking and Active Engagement

| Independent Thinking | Active Engagement | Conditional effects at Independent Thinking and Active Engagement |               |                 |                 |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                      |                   | <i>effect</i>                                                     | <i>BootSE</i> | <i>BootLLCI</i> | <i>BootULCI</i> |
| -1.00                | -1.00             | .18                                                               | .10           | -.10            | .34             |
|                      | 0                 | .24                                                               | .10           | .42             | .43             |
|                      | +1.00             | .33                                                               | .15           | .98             | .69             |
| 0                    | -1.00             | .08                                                               | .08           | -.13            | .20             |
|                      | 0                 | .13                                                               | .06           | .01             | .25             |
|                      | +1.00             | .22                                                               | .11           | .07             | .49             |
| +1.00                | -1.00             | -.51                                                              | .11           | -.34            | .12             |
|                      | 0                 | .03                                                               | .08           | -.19            | .13             |
|                      | +1.00             | .08                                                               | .08           | -.06            | .28             |

Hypothesis 3 proposed that Active Engagement would moderate the direct effect of Transformational Leadership on Workplace Social Courage. As shown in Table 3, the interaction between Transformational Leadership and Active Engagement was not significant ( $B = -.17$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .11$ ), indicating that the effect of Transformational Leadership on Workplace Social Courage does not vary by Active Engagement. On the other hand, it is shown that the interaction between Transformational Leadership and Independent Thinking approached significance ( $B = .28$ ,  $p = .052$ ). Although approaching significance, both H3 and H4 are rejected.

**Table 4.** *Moderation of the Direct Effect of Transformational Leadership on Workplace Social Courage*

| Predictor                                          | Workplace Social Courage |           |          |          |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                                                    | <i>B</i>                 | <i>SE</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Transformational Leadership                        | -.42                     | .49       | -.87     | .39      |
| Active Engagement                                  | .03                      | .49       | .07      | .95      |
| Independent Thinking                               | .64                      | .48       | 1.35     | .19      |
| Transformational Leadership x Active Engagement    | -.17                     | .11       | -1.61    | .11      |
| Transformational Leadership x Independent Thinking | -.28                     | .14       | 1.96     | .052     |
| Age                                                | .02                      | .01       | 1.46     | .02      |
| Gender                                             | .24                      | .16       | 1.51     | .13      |

To test Hypothesis 5, which predicted that Active Engagement would moderate the Psychological Safety and Workplace Social Courage relationship, as shown in Table 4, was rejected due to the interaction being not significant ( $B = .12$ ,  $p = .25$ ), suggesting no moderating effect of Active Engagement. Also, H6 proposed that Independent Thinking would moderate the relationship between Psychological Safety and Workplace Social Courage, with this relationship being stronger when Independent Thinking was high. The interaction was significant ( $B = -.25$ ,  $p = .04$ ), but only when Independent Thinking was low. Although Independent Thinking moderated the relationship, H6 is rejected since it is in the opposite direction.

**Table 5.** *Moderation of the Indirect Effects of Psychological Safety on Workplace Social Courage*

| Predictor                                   | Workplace Social Courage |           |          |          |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                                             | <i>B</i>                 | <i>SE</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Psychological Safety x Active Engagement    | .12                      | .10       | 1.17     | .25      |
| Psychological Safety x Independent Thinking | -.25                     | .12       | -2.14    | .04      |

To test Hypothesis 7, which predicted that the indirect effect of Transformational Leadership on Workplace Social Courage via Psychological Safety would be moderated by both Independent Thinking and Active Engagement. As shown in Table 3, conditional indirect effects were significant when both Independent Thinking and Active Engagement were high (*effect* = .22, 95% *CI* [.07, .49]), and at moderate Active Engagement (*effect* = .13, 95% *CI* [.00, .25]). However, when Active Engagement was low, the indirect effect was not significant, even if Independent Thinking was high.

As shown in Table 6, the index moderation mediation confirmed that the conditional indirect effect was significant for Independent Thinking (95% *CI* [.00, .29]), but not for Active Engagement (95% *CI* [-.02, .24]). Thus, Hypothesis 7 was partially supported.

**Table 6.** *Index of Moderated Mediation*

|                      | Index of Moderated Mediation |               |                 |                 |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                      | <i>Index</i>                 | <i>BootSE</i> | <i>BootLLCI</i> | <i>BootULCI</i> |
| Independent Thinking | .13                          | .07           | .001            | .29             |
| Active Engagement    | .06                          | .07           | -.02            | .24             |

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether Transformational Leadership (TL) predicts Workplace Social Courage (WSC) through Psychological Safety (PS), and whether this indirect relationship is contingent upon two moderators: Independent Thinking (IT) and Active Engagement (AE).

The results supported several elements of the proposed framework. First, TL significantly predicts PS, confirming the initial stage of the mediation process. Second, PS positively predicted WSC, highlighting the importance of this variable as an explanatory mechanism. Third, the direct path from TL to WSC was nonsignificant, suggesting that the influence of TL on WSC primarily operates through PS. In other words, there is a full mediation.

Regarding moderation, AE did not significantly alter the relationship between PS and WSC, but IT did. More specifically, the effect of PS on WSC was strongest when IT was low and diminished when IT was high. Conditional indirect effect analyses confirmed that TL predicted WSC through PS mainly at lower levels of IT.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the centrality of PS in explaining how TL translates into WSC, while also pointing to IT as a meaningful boundary condition that shapes this process.

### **Transformational Leadership and Workplace Social Courage**

The first hypothesis predicted that TL would positively predict WSC. This prediction was not supported. This finding is theoretically meaningful, as it suggests that TL does not automatically inspire employees to engage in socially courageous acts such as challenging norms, speaking up against authority, or defending unpopular ideas. Instead, leadership influences these behaviours only through the creation of conditions that enable them, particularly PS.

Much of the literature on TL has highlighted its positive influence on discretionary outcomes such as creativity (Zhang, 2010), innovative work behaviour (Putra et al., 2025), and employee voice (Detert & Burris, 2007). However, WSC may differ from these behaviours in its inherently risk-laden nature. Courage involves confronting the possibility of negative personal consequences (Rate et al., 2007), which may make it more sensitive to perceptions of safety than other discretionary behaviours. This could explain why TL did not

directly predict WSC in the present study, even though prior research has found it to predict less risky forms of extra-role behaviour.

Recent studies support this interpretation, such as Xu et al. (2022) which found that TL predicted job involvement indirectly through PS, showing that leadership's effects are often mediated by psychological climates rather than direct. Similarly, Helmy et al. (2023) demonstrated that TL predicted innovative behaviour indirectly through PS and workplace friendship. Hariri (2024) likewise identified PS as a crucial mediator in the relationship between TL and innovation. These findings suggest that TL is effective primarily because it creates enabling conditions, rather than because it directly drives courage or innovation.

From a theoretical perspective, this result aligns with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Leaders model openness, fairness, and vision, which invite reciprocation in the form of discretionary behavior. However, unless followers perceive a safe climate, they may hesitate to act on this invitation, particularly in domains involving risk such as WSC. The lack of a direct effect therefore underscores the importance of examining mediators in leadership research.

In a practical standpoint, for organisations, this means that simply promoting transformational leadership is not enough to cultivate courage. Leadership development programmes should emphasise how leaders can foster psychological safety, rather than assuming transformational leadership behaviours alone will encourage bold pro-social actions. Leaders should be trained not only in visionary communication, but also in behaviours that reduce interpersonal threat, such as listening actively, responding supportively to dissent, and inviting participation in decisions. Courageous behaviours like speaking up about misconduct or suggesting unpopular ideas will likely remain dormant unless employees feel psychologically safe.

### **Psychological Safety**

The second hypothesis, which predicted that PS would mediate the TL and WSC relationship, was supported. TL significantly predicted PS, and PS significantly predicted WSC, confirming that the influence of leadership on courage operates indirectly through psychological safety.

This finding is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) conceptualization of PS as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Transformational leaders

create safety by encouraging participation, modelling inclusiveness, and responding constructively to mistakes or dissent (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Carmeli et al., 2009). In turn, PS enables behaviours such as voice, dissent, and courage by reducing the perceived interpersonal risks (Frazier et al., 2017).

The mediation result is particularly meaningful for the construct of WSC. Courage inherently involves risk, but it is not reckless; it requires both risk and intentionality (Rate et al., 2007). PS lowers perceived risk, making courage more feasible. Without PS, employees may suppress courageous impulses, fearing negative consequences such as damaged relationships, reputational harm, or career setbacks (Detert & Bruno, 2017). By confirming PS as the mediator, this study highlights that leadership matters for courage only because it shapes perceptions of safety.

Recent research reinforces this conclusion. Xu et al. (2022) demonstrated that TL predicted job involvement through PS, moderated by traditionality. Helmy et al. (2023) found that PS mediated the relationship between TL and innovation in small enterprises. Hariri (2024) identified PS in a moderated mediation linking TL to innovative behaviors, while Putra et al. (2025) confirmed through a bibliometric review that PS is consistently central in leadership–innovation research. These studies converge on the view that PS is a core explanatory mechanism linking leadership and discretionary behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports both social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). TL signals leader support, which fosters a sense of obligation and reciprocity, increasing PS. PS reduces the psychological costs of courageous acts, conserving resources and enabling risk-taking. Thus, the mediation pathway observed here aligns with resource-based models as well as exchange-based ones. The mediation finding also refines leadership theory by emphasizing the importance of climate-level constructs. TL is not sufficient to produce outcomes unless it translates into perceptions of safety, which function at the psychological climate level. This underscores nature of leadership effects and suggests that climate is the true mechanism through which leadership operates.

Organisations aiming to foster workplace social courage should invest in building psychological safety through leadership training, team building initiatives and feedback mechanisms that reduce fear of negative consequences. Transformational leadership can serve as a tool for creating safety, but it must be enacted in a way that signals openness and

trust. For example, leaders should model vulnerability by admitting mistakes, praising courageous acts publicly and establishing norms that reward learning and feedback. These practices help normalise mistakes for the benefit of the organisation.

### **Active Engagement**

The third hypothesis proposed that the relationship between transformational leadership and workplace social courage would be moderated by active engagement, such that the relationship would be stronger when active engagement was higher. This hypothesis was not supported by the data.

The interaction between transformational leadership and active engagement in predicting workplace social courage was not statistically significant ( $p=.12$ ). This suggests that while transformational leadership is positively associated with active engagement and workplace social courage individually, the strength of the relationship between transformational leadership and workplace social courage does not depend on the level of active engagement.

From the theoretical perspective, this finding highlights an important distinction between engagement and courage. While engaged employees may be more energised and proactive (Kahn, 1990), the decision to engage in socially courageous acts still hinges on perceived psychological safety and risk. Morrison (2023) argues that courage is not simply a function of motivation or energy; rather, it is fundamentally tied to perceived threats and an individual's appraisal of potential consequences. The courage in the workplace requires both intent and calculated risk-taking (Howard et al., 2017; Rate et al., 2017). Active engagement may fuel the intent, but without a perception that risk is manageable or worthwhile. Courageous behaviour may not follow.

Furthermore, active engagement is generally seen as a motivational state related to one's enthusiasm, initiative and personal responsibility (Kelley, 1992). While such states might amplify performance or citizenship behaviours, their role in predicting high-risk pro-social behaviours like workplace social courage is less straightforward. This result suggests that active engagement may influence other types of outcomes more directly, such as performance or creativity, but not necessarily risk-laden behaviours without the context, full support of safety or leadership endorsement.

In addition, it may be that active engagement operates more as a direct predictor of workplace performance than as a moderator in complex psychological processes. For example, employees with high active engagement may still be required clear cues of safety and trust in leadership before engaging in socially courageous acts, especially in hierarchical or conservative organisational cultures (Detert & Burris, 2007). This finding contributes to a more nuanced understanding of active engagement, suggesting that engagement is necessary but not sufficient for workplace social courage. While active engagement is beneficial for performance and initiative, it may not, by itself, empower employees to take social risks. Organisations should recognise that motivation alone is insufficient. Without a culture of safety and leader support, even the most engaged employees may hesitate to act courageously. Practically, the suggested HR Interventions aimed at increasing engagement (e.g through job enrichment or rewards) should fear of reprisal. Courage cannot be fully activated without both energy and security.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that active engagement would moderate the relationship between psychological safety and workplace social courage, such that the positive effect of psychological safety on workplace social courage would be stronger when active engagement was higher. This hypothesis was not supported.

The psychological safety and active engagement interaction was not significant ( $p = .283$ ), suggesting that the influence of psychological safety on workplace social courage does not vary depending on the level of active engagement. The result reinforces the idea that perceived interpersonal risk is more central to courageous behaviour than individual motivation or energy. According to Detert & Bruno (2017), individuals evaluate potential interpersonal consequences before engaging in risky pro-social behaviours. Higher levels of active engagement might motivate individuals to contribute and perform, but if the context does not feel psychologically safe, such contributions are unlikely to take a courageous form.

This aligns with Morrison's (2023) claim that workplace social courage is not merely a function of drive, but a deliberate decision to take interpersonal risks in pursuit of pro-social or ethical goals. Psychological safety, therefore, plays a critical enabling role. This finding also supports the conceptual separation between constructs such as engagement and psychological safety. While both are positive organisational states, they interact with behaviour in different ways.

Recent empirical work supports this interpretation. For instance, Buvik & Tkalich (2021) found that psychological safety predicted performance in agile teams more robustly than engagement, emphasising that safety, not just energy, underlies high-quality contributions. Similarly, Sabuhari et al. (2025) found that engagement did not moderate innovation-related outcomes as effectively as justice or safety did.

Additionally, active engagement might interact with other factors not captured in the present model, such as emotional regulation, team cohesion, or perceived organisational justice. These factors might influence whether engaged individuals feel supported enough to take social risks. Future research could explore whether active engagement exerts a stronger effect in environments where these additional psychological resources are present. Organisations should recognise that psychological safety is the primary lever to activate courage even among highly engaged employees. Interventions should prioritise creating environments of openness and low interpersonal threats. Engagement initiatives are still important, but they should not be viewed as substitutes for safety. Moreover, leaders should be cautious about expecting gracious behaviour from engaged employees if the culture penalises dissent or nonconformity.

### **Independent Thinking**

Hypothesis 4 posited that independent thinking would moderate the relationship between transmission leadership and workplace social courage, with the relationship being stronger when independent thinking was high. This hypothesis was not supported.

The interaction between transformation, leadership and independent thinking in predicting workplace social courage approached but did not reach this statistical significance ( $p=.06$ ). Although this result may suggest trends, it does not provide sufficient evidence to confirm independent thinking as a significant moderator in the transformational leadership and workplace social courage direct path.

This marginal result still offers insight and deserves theoretical consideration. Independent thinkers, as characterised by Kelley (1992) engage in critical thinking, challenge assumptions and take initiative without over-reliance on leaders. As a result, they may be less affected by the presence or absence of transformational leadership behaviours. Transformational leaders may have less influence over individuals who already possess high levels of internal drive, self-direction, and critical reasoning. From the lens of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), these individuals possess strong self-efficacy, enabling

them to regulate their actions based on internal standards rather than external guidance. This interpretation aligns with follower self theories, which argue that leadership influence is moderated by follower characteristics (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). As such, even though transformational leadership might inspire courage in more dependent or passive followers, its effects may be weaker among independent thinkers. These findings underscore the importance of understanding how individual differences in cognition and personality shape receptiveness to leadership influence. Moreover, the near-significant result opens avenues for future research, especially studies using larger samples or different methodological approaches (e.g. multilevel designs). It may also be the case that independent thinking interacts with other contextual factors, such as role clarity or organisational support, to condition the transformational leadership and workplace social courage link.

For practitioners, this suggests that leadership strategy should be tailored to follower profiles. Employees with high independent thinking may not respond as strongly to leadership influence because they already rely on internal standards. Organisations should identify such individuals through assessment tools and empower them with autonomy and responsibility, while ensuring that those lower in independent thinking receive more structured guidance and leader support. Customising leadership approaches can maximise effectiveness across different follower types.

Hypothesis 6 proposed that independent thinking moderates the relationship between psychological safety and workplace social courage, such that psychological safety would more strongly predict workplace social courage when independent thinking is higher. This hypothesis was not supported. The interaction between psychological safety and independent thinking was statistically significant ( $p = .037$ ), and the simple slope analysis confirmed that psychological safety positively predicted workplace social courage when independent thinking was low, but not when independent thinking was high.

This finding provides robust support for followership theory and trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003). According to Kelley (1992), low independent thinking individuals tend to rely more on external validation and contextual support. In their case, psychological safety acts as a crucial situational trigger that enables courageous behaviour. For high independent thinking individuals, however, internal values and convictions serve as the main drivers of action. These individuals may engage in courageous behaviours regardless of perceived safety because their motivation stems from personal beliefs rather

than external reassurance (Carsten et al., 2010). This interaction reflects the dynamic interplay between situational and dispositional factors in shaping workplace behaviour. As Bandura's (1986) Social cognitive theory suggests, behaviour results from reciprocal interactions among personal, behavioural, and environmental influences. Psychological safety may activate the behavioral intentions of individuals with low independent thinking by reducing perceived threats, while high independent thinking individuals operate more independently of environmental constraints.

Research by Xu et al., (2022) supports this perspective, showing that traditionally, similar constructs to independent thinking, moderated the link between psychological safety and job involvement. Other studies (e.g Hariri, 2014; Putra et al., 2025) have also demonstrated that individual differences moderate the effects of leadership and climate on discretionary behaviours. The present findings extend this literature by highlighting the unique role of independent thinking in shaping the conditions under which psychological safety fosters workplace social courage. Moreover, these results highlight the adaptive function of psychological safety. It appears to act as a compensatory mechanism for those who lack internal properties. In contrast, individuals high in independent thinking may rely on internalised moral frameworks, cognitive schemas or values-based reasoning to justify courageous behaviour (Hannah et al., 2011). As a result, psychological safety is more critical for those who require external validation or cues to act.

This finding has strong implications for leadership and team management. Leaders should pay particular attention to team members who exhibit lower independent thinking. These individuals may need more explicit reassurance, encouragement, and validation to act courageously. Initiatives like anonymous reporting tools, psychological safety workshops, and structured feedback systems can reduce barriers to courage for these employees. For high independent thinking employees, promoting autonomy and values-based leadership may be more effective in activating courage.

### **The Moderated Mediation Effect**

H7 predicted that the indirect effects of transformational leadership on workplace social courage through psychological safety would be moderated by both active engagement and independent thinking. Although the indices of moderated mediation did not reach statistical significance at the 95% confidence level. Conditional indirect effects were observed specifically.

Transformational leadership predicted workplace social courage via psychological safety, primarily at low and medium levels of independent thinking, specifically when active engagement was average or high. At higher levels of independent thinking, the direct effect became non-significant.

These findings are consistent with the notion that psychological safety is more impactful for followers who are less independent. This aligns with previous findings in leadership literature, such as those of Hariri (2024), who found that the indirect effect of transformational leadership on innovation is moderated by dispositional openness. Xu et al. (2022) show that psychological climates such as psychological safety had differential effects depending on individual characteristics.

From a theoretical standpoint, this moderated mediation pattern reinforces both social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and trait activation theory. Transformational leadership, by fostering psychological safety, builds a climate of trust and support for low independent thinking individuals. This climate enables the expression of discretionary behaviours such as courage. However, high independent thinking individuals may not require such enabling conditions, as their trait-based motivation overrides environmental cues. Therefore, while the indirect effect was not formally moderated in a statistical sense, the observed patterns lend theoretical support to the model.

Moreover, these findings underscore the necessity of an integrated view of leadership effectiveness. Leadership outcomes depend not only on leader behaviours and contextual climates, but also on follower dispositions. This reflects the evolving paradigm in leadership research that emphasises dynamic leader-follower interactions (Uhl-Bien et al, 2014).

The absence of a statistically significant moderated mediation index should not be interpreted as evidence of irrelevance. Rather, it indicates that the strength of the directive effect meaningfully varies across different configurations of active engagement and independent thinking, even if such variation does not reach strict thresholds of statistical confidence. Future research could explore whether curvilinear or threshold effects are at play or whether alternative moderators, such as psychological capital or organisational identification, might further illuminate the pathways through which leadership influences courage.

These findings suggest that leadership programmes should not only train leaders to foster psychological safety but also consider the psychological profiles of their teams. Personalised leadership, where leaders adapt their style to the developmental level and

dispositional characteristics of their followers, may enhance outcomes. For instance, courage development programmes may be most effective when paired with assessments of followership characteristics, enabling HR teams to identify who may need more supportive environments to act courageously. Integrating leadership and followership development strategies yields greater behavioural impact than focusing on in isolation.

Age emerged as a significant positive predictor of WSC. Older employees reported greater courage, which may reflect increased job confidence, reduced fear of sanctions, and greater stability. Ng & Feldman's (2010) meta-analysis found that older workers report higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions, factors that may embolden them to act courageously. Gender and education were nonsignificant predictors. This suggests that WSC is not strongly shaped by these demographics. Howard et al. (2017) similarly found that WSC depends more on psychological and contextual factors than on demographic variables.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study offers meaningful contributions to the literature of leadership, psychological safety, and workplace social courage, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size ( $N=117$ ) reduced the statistical power to detect subtle effects, particularly in moderation and moderated mediation analyses. It is possible that some conditional effects were underpowered and could emerge more robustly in larger samples. Future studies should aim to replicate these findings using larger and more diverse populations to enhance statistical reliability and generalization.

Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about causality. Although the data support an indirect effect of TL on WSC through PS, the direction of influence cannot be established. It is plausible that courageous employees perceive higher PS or evaluate their leaders more favourably. Longitudinal and experimental designs, such as leadership training interventions, would be better suited to clarify causal mechanisms.

Third, the exclusive reliance on self-report measures raises concerns about common method bias and social desirability. Participants may have overestimated socially valued characteristics such as courage or engagement. Although statistical controls (e.g., mean-centring) were applied to mitigate bias, future research should incorporate multi-source data, such as supervision ratings, behavioural assessments, or simulated workplace tasks designed to measure courage in action.

Moreover, while the study's findings regarding conditional effects are theoretically consistent, the evidence remains statistically tentative. Therefore, interpretations of moderation, particularly those not reaching conventional significance thresholds, should be made with caution until replicated with more robust samples.

## Conclusion

This study advances understanding of how Transformational Leadership influences Workplace Social Courage by emphasising the mediating role of Psychological Safety and the moderating role of followership characteristics, specifically Active Engagement and Independent Thinking. The findings highlight that Transformational Leadership does not directly inspire courageous behaviours; instead, its effect is primarily channelled through the creation of psychologically safe environments. Employees are more likely to speak up, challenge authority, or defend unpopular views when they feel safe to do so, confirming Edmonson's (1999) foundational claims about Psychological Safety.

Crucially, this study demonstrates that followers' characteristics shape how leadership and climate affect behaviour. The influence of Psychological Safety on Workplace Social Courage was stronger for employees low in Independent Thinking, suggesting that such individuals rely more heavily on contextual safety cues to act courageously. This highlights the relevance of followership theory (Kelley, 1992; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), which emphasises the interplay between leadership and follower attributes in driving organisational outcomes.

From a practical standpoint, the findings point to the importance of tailoring leadership development to the needs of diverse followers. Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour; to be effective, leaders must create safe climates and understand which followers need more explicit support. Interventions that develop both leadership behaviours and follower capacities (e.g, critical thinking, self-efficacy) may foster environments where courage thrives.

Future research should explore these relationships in greater depth using longitudinal designs, cross-cultural samples, and a broader range of dispositional moderators. Understanding how workplace courage develops over time, how it interacts with career stages, and how it is shaped by virtual, or hybrid work settings represents a promising agenda. By bridging leadership, followership and courage, this study contributes to a more integrated view of how individuals enact social courage at work.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Q1: Olá!

O meu nome é João Paz, e sou estudante do mestrado em Psicologia em Gestão e Economia da Universidade Católica Portuguesa. No âmbito da minha tese de mestrado, este estudo procura compreender dinâmicas de liderança no local de trabalho. Por favor, tenha em consideração que a sua participação é voluntária e anónima, e é garantida a confidencialidade dos dados. Pode interromper a qualquer momento a resposta ao questionário. O tempo estimado de resposta é de aproximadamente 7 minutos. Neste questionário não existem respostas certas nem erradas, valorizando aquilo que pensa sobre as temáticas abordadas. Caso tenha dúvidas ou deseje alguma informação sobre o estudo, não hesite em contactar através do email: s-jppaz@ucp.pt. Agradecemos a sua participação! João Pedro Paz

Aceita responder a este questionário?

☐ Sim (1)

☐ Não (2)

Q2: Atualmente tem uma Chefia direta? (Superior a quem responde diretamente)

☐ Sim (1)

☐ Não (2)

Q3 - KFQ:

Avalie as seguintes afirmações **a seu respeito**. Por favor, **não pense num contexto específico, mas em si como trabalhador em geral**, de 1= "Raramente" a 7= "Quase Sempre"

|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1 -<br>Raramente<br>(1) | 2 (2)                 | 3 (6)                 | 4 (3)                 | 5 (4)                 | 6 (7)                 | 7 - Quase<br>Sempre<br>(5) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. O trabalho ajuda-me a cumprir um objetivo social ou um sonho pessoal que é importante para mim. (1)                                                                                            | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| 2. Os meus objetivos pessoais de trabalho costumam estar alinhados com os objetivos prioritários da/s organização/ões. (2)                                                                        | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| 3. Costumo estar altamente comprometido/a e entusiasmado/a com o meu trabalho e organização e dou-lhes as minhas melhores ideias e desempenho. (3)                                                | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| 4. O meu entusiasmo costuma espalhar-se e dá energia aos meus colegas de trabalho. (4)                                                                                                            | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |
| 5. Em vez de esperar ou simplesmente aceitar o que a chefia me diz, eu identifico pessoalmente quais são as atividades mais relevantes para atingir os objetivos prioritários da organização. (5) | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      |

6. Procuro desenvolver uma competência específica em atividades críticas, de modo a tornar-me mais valioso para a chefia e para a organização. (6)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

7. Quando começo um novo trabalho ou tarefa, procuro ser bem sucedido em tarefas que são importantes para a chefia. (7)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

8. A chefia pode dar-me uma tarefa difícil sem supervisão, sabendo que a irei cumprir no prazo de entrega estabelecido com um trabalho da mais alta qualidade e que “preencherei as lacunas” se for necessário. (8)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

9. Tomo a iniciativa de procurar e concluir com êxito tarefas que vão para além do meu trabalho. (9)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

10. Quando não estou a liderar um projeto de equipa, continuo a contribuir num nível elevado, fazendo muitas vezes mais do que a minha parte. (10)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

|                                                                                                                                                                    |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 11. Penso de forma independente e defendo novas ideias que contribuirão significativamente para os objetivos da chefia ou da organização. (11)                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12. Tento resolver os problemas difíceis (técnicos ou organizacionais), em vez de procurar a chefia para o fazer por mim. (12)                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 13. Ajudo os outros colegas de trabalho, fazendo-os ficar bem vistos, mesmo quando não recebo qualquer crédito. (13)                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 14. Ajudo a chefia ou a equipa a ver tanto o potencial positivo como os riscos das ideias ou dos planos, fazendo o papel de advogado do diabo, se necessário. (14) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 15. Compreendo as necessidades, os objetivos e os constrangimentos da chefia e esforço-me por ajudá-la. (15)                                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 16. Avalio, sem receio, ativa e honestamente os meus pontos fortes e fracos. (16)                                                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

17. Tenho o hábito de refletir sobre as decisões da chefia em vez de me limitar a fazer o que me pedem. (17)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

18. Quando a chefia me pede para fazer algo que não está alinhado com a minha função ou com as minhas preferências pessoais, digo “não” em vez de “sim”. (18)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

19. Ajo de acordo com os meus próprios padrões éticos e não com os padrões da chefia ou da equipa. (19)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

20. Afirmo os meus pontos de vista sobre questões importantes, mesmo que isso possa significar um conflito com a minha equipa e represálias por parte da chefia. (20)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Q4 - MLQ:

Por favor, **pense na sua chefia atual**. Avalie em que medida cada uma destas afirmações se verifica, de 1= "De modo algum" a 5= "Frequentemente, se não sempre":

|                                                                           | 1 - De modo algum (1) | 2 - De vez em quando (2) | 3 - Às vezes (3)      | 4 - Com alguma frequência (4) | 5 - Frequentemente, se não sempre (5) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Tenho orgulho na minha chefia. (1)                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 2. A minha chefia vai para além do seu interesse próprio. (2)             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 3. A minha chefia tem o meu respeito. (3)                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 4. A minha chefia demonstra poder e confiança. (4)                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 5. A minha chefia fala de valores. (5)                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 6. A minha chefia é um modelo de padrões éticos. (6)                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 7. A minha chefia considera a moral/ética. (7)                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 8. A minha chefia enfatiza a missão coletiva. (8)                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 9. A minha chefia fala com otimismo. (9)                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 10. A minha chefia expressa confiança. (10)                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 11. A minha chefia fala entusiasticamente. (11)                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 12. A minha chefia desperta a consciência para questões importantes. (12) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/>                 |

|                                                                      |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 13. A minha<br>chefia reexamina<br>pressupostos. (13)                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 14. A minha<br>chefia procura<br>pontos de vista<br>diferentes. (14) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 15. A minha<br>chefia sugere<br>novos caminhos.<br>(15)              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 16. A minha<br>chefia sugere<br>diferentes<br>ângulos. (16)          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. A minha<br>chefia personaliza<br>a atenção. (17)                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 18. A minha<br>chefia foca os<br>meus pontos<br>fortes. (18)         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 19. A minha<br>chefia ensina e<br>orienta. (19)                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 20. A minha<br>chefia diferencia<br>entre nós. (20)                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q5 - PSS:

Por favor, pedimos que **pense na sua equipa de trabalho atual**. Avalie em que medida concorda com as seguintes afirmações, de 1= "Discordo Totalmente" a 7= "Concordo Totalmente"

|                                                                                                               | 1 -<br>Discordo<br>Totalmente<br>(1) | 2 (2)                 | 3 (3)                 | 4 (4)                 | 5 (5)                 | 6 (6)                 | 7 -<br>Concordo<br>Totalmente<br>(7) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Se alguém, na minha equipa, comete um erro, é frequentemente utilizado contra essa pessoa. (1)             | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 2. Os membros da minha equipa são capazes de levantar questões difíceis. (2)                                  | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 3. Os membros da minha equipa, às vezes, rejeitam os outros por serem diferentes. (3)                         | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 4. No geral, é seguro arriscar na minha equipa. (4)                                                           | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 5. É difícil pedir ajuda aos meus colegas de equipa. (5)                                                      | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 6. Na minha equipa, ninguém iria agir deliberadamente de forma a prejudicar os meus esforços. (6)             | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 7. No trabalho com a minha equipa, as minhas competências e talentos únicos são valorizados e utilizados. (7) | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |

Q7 - WSCS:

Relativamente ao seguinte, por favor **classifique o seu grau de concordância em efetuar os seguintes comportamentos**, de 1= "Discordo Totalmente" a 7= "Concordo Totalmente":

|                                                                                                                            | 1 -<br>Discordo<br>Totalmente<br>(1) | 2 (2)                 | 3 (3)                 | 4 (4)                 | 5 (5)                 | 6 (6)                 | 7 -<br>Concordo<br>Totalmente<br>(7) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Embora possa prejudicar a amizade com um/a colega, eu diria algo à minha chefia se um/a colega fizesse algo errado. (1) | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 2. Embora o/a meu/minha colega pudesse ficar ofendido/a, eu iria sugerir melhores formas de fazer as coisas. (2)           | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 3. Se eu não entendesse alguma coisa no trabalho, perguntaria, mesmo que considerasse a pergunta tonta. (3)                | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |
| 4. Estaria disponível para liderar um projeto que pudesse fracassar, ainda que os meus colegas pensassem mal de mim. (4)   | <input type="radio"/>                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                |

5. Não iria tolerar que um/a colega de trabalho fosse mal-educado com alguém, mesmo que isso o/a deixasse aborrecido/a. (5)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

6. Correndo o risco do/a meu/minha colega não gostar de mim, eu diria quando estivesse a fazer algo contra a política da empresa. (6)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

7. Eu daria a conhecer aos/às meus/minhas colegas de trabalho a minha preocupação com algo, mesmo se eles/as pensassem que sou demasiado negativo. (7)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

8. Mesmo que isso possa prejudicar a nossa relação, eu confrontaria um/a colega que estiver a perturbar a equipa. (8)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

9. Eu diria  
aos/às  
meus/minhas  
colegas  
quando  
cometesse um  
erro, mesmo  
que isso me  
pudesse fazer  
parecer  
incompetente.  
(9)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

10. Eu  
voluntariar-  
me-ia para  
fazer uma  
apresentação  
no trabalho,  
apesar de  
poder parecer  
atrapalhado.  
(10)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

11. Eu daria  
uma avaliação  
de  
desempenho  
honesta a um/a  
colega, embora  
possa arruinar  
completamente  
a nossa  
amizade. (11)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Q8 - Idade:

Qual a sua idade?

Q9 - Género:

Com que género se identifica?

☐ Masculino (1)

☐ Feminino (2)

☐ Prefiro Não Dizer (4)

Q10 - Educação:

Qual o seu Grau Académico? (Indique o nível mais alto que concluiu)

☐ Ensino Básico (1)

☐ Ensino Secundário (2)

☐ Licenciatura (3)

☐ Mestrado (4)

☐ Doutoramento (5)



Q11 - Tempo de Emprego:

Há quanto tempo trabalha para a sua entidade empregadora atual? (Por favor responda em nº de anos e meses)

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Q12 - Tempo c/ Chefia:

Há quanto tempo trabalha com a sua chefia direta? (Por favor responda em nº de anos e meses)

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Q13 - Comentários:

Caso queira deixar algum comentário, por favor preencha esse campo:

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