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Coworking environment and creative performance: The mediating role of psychological safety

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Abstract
The concept of the workplace has undergone continuous transformation over time. From traditional office-based settings, it shifted with the rise of digitalization and further evolved into remote work arrangements. In this progression, the workplace is increasingly viewed as a comprehensive and flexible construct. At the same time, the outcomes of workplace design have become more complex, influenced by a diverse range of interrelated variables. The emergence of coworking places was a milestone in the trend of workplace studies. Coworking space is an umbrella term that incorporates people from different fields, different genders, different age groups, different educational qualifications and creating a community effect and translating the synergic effect into different valuable outcomes. By underpinning this idea current study delves into the query how coworking space environment steering creative outcomes through psychological safety as a mediating variable. An empirical analysis was employed with the data collected from 260 coworking occupants. And the results confirm that psychological safety generating a mediating effect in the context of coworking spaces enhancing creative performance.

Keywords: Coworking spaces, creative performance, physical environment, psychological safety, social environment

Introduction
Coworking spaces have emerged as a significant trend in the modern work environment, offering shared workspaces that cater to a diverse range of professionals, including freelancers, entrepreneurs, and employees from various sectors. The evolution of co-working spaces reflects broader changes in the world of work, such as increased remote working and the need for flexible work arrangements. The basic idea of coworking spaces is to provide workplaces at affordable rates, including amenities like workstations, meeting rooms, cafeterias, and private offices. The concept of coworking is grounded in the philosophy of community and collaboration, emphasizing how a supportive environment combined with an appealing physical design can influence and enhance employee outcomes.

Coworking advanced as a response to people wanting more freedom and connection in how they work. Instead of being tied to a traditional office or working alone at home, coworking spaces offer a flexible setup with shared resources and a built-in community, making work more collaborative and less isolating. They are membership-based environments that bring together individuals from multiple occupational backgrounds, promoting a sense of community and collaboration. These spaces are not just physical environments but also social infrastructures that facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge, leading to innovation. Long recognized as a critical challenge, the absence of coworkers' support negatively impacts employees' productivity, performance, and overall satisfaction. Consequently, the need for a supportive and interactive workplace has been evident for many years.

The coworking environment seeks to address and disentangle this problem by providing an appropriate and well-structured environment that creates a sense of community and paves the way for collaboration and knowledge sharing. Coworking spaces upgraded from simply providing a workplace to a space for networking and social interaction, which promoted well-being (Ciccarelli, 2023) [10] improvements in work-life balance enhanced collaborative learning.

(Bednář *et al*., 2023) [3] and value creation (Goermar *et al*., 2021) [20], and it resulted in improved work performance and satisfaction. Coworking spaces play a vital role by making the occupants socially connected and making them feel free to share ideas and comfortable to seek advice from coworkers through the knowledge exchange and discussions, resulting in the generation of creative and different outcomes (Rodríguez-Ruiz *et al*., 2024) [34]. Psychological safety refers to people feeling comfortable speaking up, sharing ideas, or admitting mistakes without worrying about being judged, embarrassed, rejected, or punished (Edmondson, 1999) [14].

Investigating psychological safety within coworking environments is relevant for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to extending organizational behavior and workplace studies into non-traditional work arrangements, offering insights into how collaborative spaces shape creativity. From a practical standpoint, the findings can guide managers, space designers, and policymakers in creating co-working environments that foster trust, openness, and innovation. In a time when flexible and hybrid work models are increasingly dominant, understanding these dynamics is crucial for sustaining employee well-being and maximizing creative outcomes.

- **Statement of the problem**

From the growing research in the area of workplace development we can understand the physical environment has impact on employees in different ways like improving productivity, performance and overall wellbeing. A supportive physical environment in the workplace fosters improved collaboration, engagement, job satisfaction and creativity. When we are taking the concept of environment that is social environment, it will enhance networking, collaboration and a sense of community. Coworking spaces emerged to turnout it physical and social atmosphere into valuable outcomes. By considering this idea this study concentrated on investigating how the coworking environment (both physical and social) influencing on enhancing creative performance by incorporating the mediating effect of psychological safety.

- **Review of literature and hypotheses development**

The basic idea of coworking spaces emerged in the year 1990, and the first formal coworking space was in San Francisco, founded by Brad Neuberg and incorporated in the year 2005 (Oswald & Zhao, 2021) [30]. As a continuation of workplace studies, the researchers concentrated on exploring how the new concept of workplace apart from the conventional office-based and home-based working that is, coworking spaces shapes the outcomes of employees. Here the researcher is explaining the previous studies that gave way to the basic idea of the paper.

Coworking space environment and creative performance

Coworking spaces providing an inspiring work environment in terms of atmosphere and interior at an affordable rate will be a better option for the employees, and the ergonomic factors and diversity of members are also attracting the tenants (Weijs-Perrée *et al*., 2019) [36]. They consider components such as location, accessibility, affordability, adaptability to user needs, and opportunity to balance work and socialization while selecting coworking spaces (Frenkel & Buchnik, 2025) [17]. CWS is not merely about providing office space; through maintaining and concentrating on its configuration and operations, it could be a creative hub (Cheah & Ho, 2019) [8]. The physical layout, spatial arrangements, and characteristics such as flexibility, openness, privacy, lighting & ventilation, and the amenities provided significantly affect the creative performance of occupants.

CWS are social environments which aid social support (Gerdenitsch *et al*., 2016) [19]. CWS are an aid of community development and enables social interaction and networking through which knowledge is circulated, and unique ideas and innovative behaviors are generated (Kraus *et al*., 2022 [23], Rese *et al*., 2022) [32].

CWS are superior to traditional offices through providing a well-designed aesthetic work environment by considering ergonomics; they also offer services like child care and skill and knowledge development programs. CWS can also balance the work and family needs by providing flexibility in timing and eliminating distractions from family roles (Ciccarelli, 2023) [10]. Creative & lively atmosphere and cost reduction are the main motivators attracting people to CWS, empowering the precarious employees by making them a part of a well-expertise professional economy; the knowledge spillovers by physical and social proximity aid the process. And the literature underpinning that the physical and social environment will foster deep interrelations, communications, collaboration, networking, and vertical and horizontal knowledge flows by providing open work stations, common cafeterias, and shared tables and concluding that CWS is meant to foster the well-being of inmates and pave the way for creative outcomes, improved productivity and performance, and a better work life.

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): There is a significant relationship between coworking space environment and creative performance

Coworking space environment and psychological safety

Coworking spaces are identified as accelerators of entrepreneurship by enabling synergy, collaboration and networking among the inmates (Orel *et al*., 2022) [29]. Psychological safety, defined as a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999) [14], has emerged as a key antecedent of creative performance. When employees feel safe to voice ideas, admit mistakes, and challenge the status quo without fear of negative consequences, they are more likely to engage in the learning behaviors necessary for creativity and innovation (Edmondson, 1999) [14]. Meta-analytic evidence confirms a positive link between psychological safety and innovative behaviors, highlighting its role in fostering idea generation, knowledge sharing, and experimentation (Frazier *et al*., 2017; Zhu *et al*., 2022). Recent studies also demonstrate that psychological safety mediates the effects of social relationships and leadership styles on creativity, showing that workplace friendliness, positive affective climate, and supportive leadership enhance innovation primarily by creating a psychologically safe environment (Dhir & Vallabh, 2025) [12]. In practice, psychological safety allows employees to communicate openly, take risks, and learn from failure, thereby transforming supportive climates into tangible creative outcomes.

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): There is a significant relationship between coworking space environment and psychological safety.

Psychological Safety and Creative performance

Theoretical perspectives such as the componential theory of creativity and social exchange theory suggest that psychologically safe environments encourage voice, experimentation, and intrinsic motivation, thereby fostering creativity (Amabile, 2016; Newman *et al*., 2017) [1, 27]. Empirical studies consistently show that teams with higher psychological safety engage more in information sharing, collaborative learning, and innovative behavior, while leadership style, organizational culture, and contextual factors act as moderators of this relationship (Carmeli *et al*., 2010; Frazier *et al*., 2017) [7]. With workplaces increasingly adopting hybrid and virtual models, recent literature also emphasizes the importance of examining how dispersed work arrangements influence the psychological safety-creativity link (Newman *et al*., 2017) [27].

Hypothesis 3 (H_3): There is a significant relationship between psychological safety and creative performance in coworking spaces.

Mediating effect of psychological safety

By underpinning the social exchange theory psychological safety is the critical link between workplace relationships and innovation (Carmeli*et al*., 2010) [7]. Creating a climate of support and friendliness is not enough organizations must also foster an environment where employees feel safe to take risks and share new ideas (Dhir & Vallabh, 2025) [12]. Coworking environments, characterized by shared physical and social spaces, have been shown to enhance collaboration, knowledge exchange, and opportunities for creative engagement. However, these benefits often materialize only when individuals perceive the environment as psychologically safe. Psychological safety acts as a critical mediator, enabling members of coworking spaces to take interpersonal risks such as sharing unconventional ideas, seeking feedback, or experimenting with new approaches without fear of judgment or failure (Edmondson, 1999) [14]. Prior research demonstrates that supportive workplace climates and social relationships positively influence creativity and innovation through psychological safety, highlighting it as the mechanism that transforms structural and relational features of the environment into creative outcomes (Frazier *et al*., 2017; Dhir & Vallabh, 2025) [12]. In coworking contexts, the presence of friendliness, trust, and an affective climate fosters psychological safety, which in turn encourages open communication, collaboration, and innovative. Thus, psychological safety serves as the bridge linking the enabling features of coworking environments to enhanced creative performance, making it a pivotal construct in understanding how such spaces promote innovation.

Hypothesis 4 (H_4): There is a significant mediating effect of psychological safety in the relationship between coworking space environment and creative performance.

Objective of the study

To examine the role of coworking space environment on creative performance and the mediating role of psychological safety.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between coworking environment and creative performance, with psychological safety as a mediating variable. This design also enables the application of statistical techniques such as mediation analysis and structural equation modeling to test both direct and indirect effects.

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to participants working in coworking environments in Kerala. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select respondents, resulting in a sample of 260 coworking space workers. The sample size was determined based on the 26 survey items, following the guideline of 10 respondents per item (Hair JF, Hult GTM, Ringle CM & Sarstedt M, 2016) [21].

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The physical environment was measured using five items that assessed the functionality and conduciveness of the coworking space, Dr. Barry P Haynes, 2007 [22]; Roskams, Michael, and Haynes, Barry, 2019 [35]; Lee & Brand, 2005 [24]. Social environment was measured using eight items adapted from Cheah and Ho (2019) [8]. These items assessed interpersonal relationships, community support, and collaborative atmosphere within coworking spaces. Psychological safety was measured using five items adapted from Edmondson (1999) [14] and Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton (2010) [7]. Creative performance was measured using eight items adapted from Chen *et al*. (2015) [9].

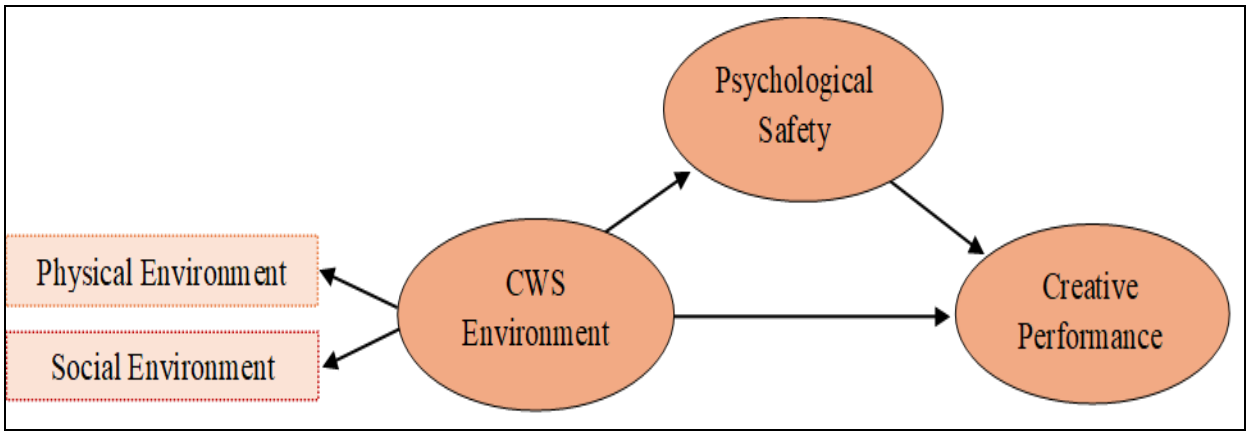

Fig 1: Conceptual Model

- **Analysis and Discussion**

The study examines how coworking environments influence creative performance, with psychological safety acting as a mediating factor. Building on the theoretical framework and hypotheses, this part evaluates the measurement and structural models using statistical techniques. The coworking environment is conceptualized as a higher-order construct, incorporating both physical and social dimensions, which together shape occupants' perceptions and experiences. Reliability and validity of the constructs are first assessed to ensure robustness, followed by structural equation modelling to test the hypothesized relationships. Through this approach, the analysis provides empirical evidence on the direct and indirect effects of coworking environments on creativity, highlighting the pivotal role of psychological safety in translating supportive conditions into innovative outcomes.

The model (Figure 1) explains how the coworking environment impacts on the creative performance of the occupants. The underpinning concept behind coworking spaces are the cooperative and community synergy, so psychological safety is incorporated as a mediating variable as it is a characteristic of a supportive team. The coworking space environment is considered as a second order construct made up of physical and social environment.

- **Measurement Model Analysis**

As an initial procedure, the psychometric properties of the scale and the robustness of the data were assessed.

Higher-Order Construct Modeling: A notable modeling innovation in this framework is the inclusion of Coworking Environment (CW_ENV) as a Reflective-Reflective second-order construct. CWE was modeled at the top of the structural model, specified by two lower-order dimensions: Social Environment (SOC_ENV) and Physical Environment (PHY_ENV). This hierarchical component modeling strategy allowed the analysis to capture CWE as a broader, multidimensional latent construct rather than treating its dimensions in isolation.

The measurement model-1 (Figure 2) demonstrates that CW_ENV, as a higher-order construct, exhibits strong reliability (α=0.870; rho_c=0.893) even though the AVE (0.394) is below the conventional 0.50 threshold. This shortfall is not problematic because CWE is a second-order construct, where evaluation should rely on indicator weights and significance of PHY_ENV and SOC_ENV rather than traditional reflective validity indices. Both PHY_ENV and SOC_ENV loadings onto CW_ENV were substantial (e.g., PHY_ENV ≈ 0.774-.810; SOC_ENV ≈ .725-.767 across indicators), supporting their role as defining components.

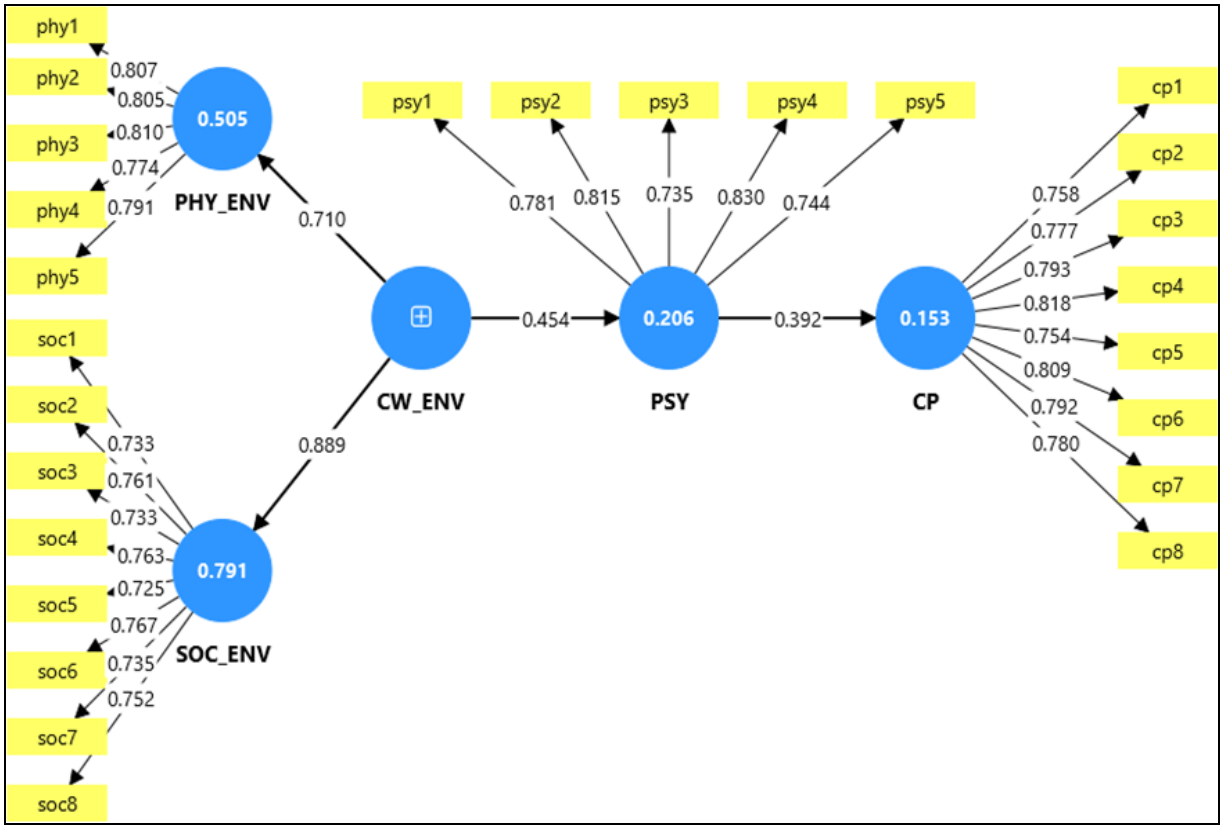

Fig 2: Measurement model-Stage 1

Table 1: Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	AVE
CP	0.911	0.917	0.928	0.617
CW_ENV	0.870	0.872	0.893	0.394
PHY_ENV	0.857	0.857	0.897	0.636
PSY	0.841	0.852	0.887	0.612
SOC_ENV	0.886	0.887	0.909	0.557

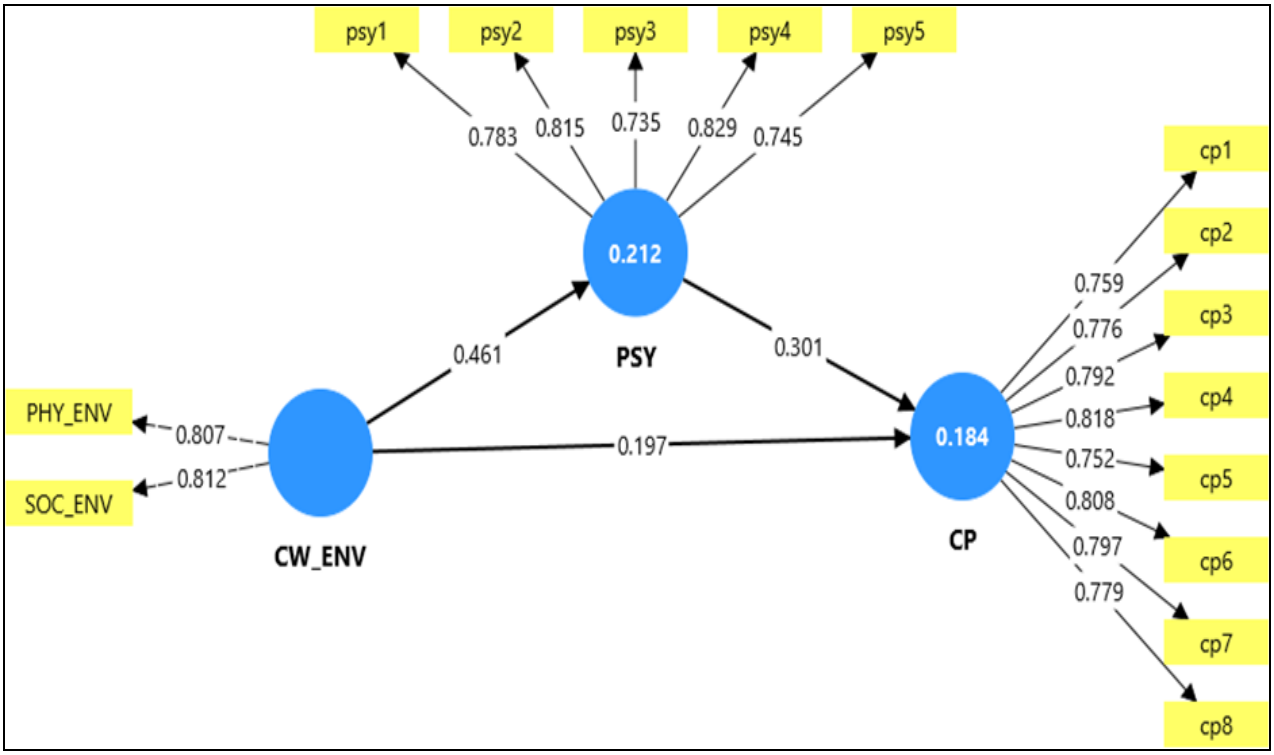

Fig 3: Measurement model-Stage 2 Reflecting latent constructs

Construct reliability and validity: Table 2 explains Creative Performance (CP) shows very strong reliability with Cronbach's alpha=0.911, rho_a=0.917, and rho_c=.928, all well above the 0.70 benchmark. Psychological Safety (PSY) also meets the standards, with α=0.841, rho_c=0.887, and AVE=0.612, suggesting that items converge well on the latent variable. Interestingly, Coworking Environment (CW_ENV) presents weaker Cronbach's alpha and rho_a (.473 each) yet still achieves an acceptable composite reliability (rho_c=0.792) and a satisfactory AVE (0.655). This indicates that while the internal consistency among items may be limited, the overall construct explains a good portion of its indicators' variance and remains psychometrically valid.

Table 2: Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	(rho_a)	(rho_c)	AVE
CP	0.911	0.917	0.928	0.617
CW_ENV	0.473	0.473	0.792	0.655
PSY	0.841	0.852	0.887	0.612

All three constructs-CP (0.617), CW_ENV (0.655), and PSY 0(.612) exceed the recommended threshold, providing evidence that the majority of variance in observed indicators is captured by their respective latent constructs. This result confirms that each construct is well represented by its items and supports the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 3: Discriminant validity-HTMT-Matrix

	CP	CW_ENV	PSY
CP			
CW_ENV	0.503		
PSY	0.435	0.723	

From Table 3, The HTMT ratios show that discriminant validity is acceptable. For instance, CP-CW_ENV (0.503), CP-PSY (.435), and CW _ ENV-PSY (.723) all remain below the conservative 0.85 cut-off. Similarly, the Fornell-Larcker criterion indicates that each construct's AVE square root is greater than its correlations with other constructs reinforcing discriminant validity. These findings suggest that CP, CW_ENV, and PSY measure conceptually distinct aspects of the coworking and creative performance framework.

Table 4: Discriminant validity-Fornell-Larcker criterion

	CP	CW_ENV	PSY
CP	0.785		
CW_ENV	0.336	0.809	
PSY	0.392	0.461	0.782

Model Fit: (Table 5) the measurement model demonstrates acceptable global fit. The SRMR is .059, which is below the recommended cut-off of .08, indicating a good model fit. Other indices also support the model's adequacy: d_ULS=0.422, d_G=0.134 and NFI=0.881. The chi-square statistic is significant (210.488), which is common in larger samples, but the other indices togetherstates that the model reproduces the data well. Taken together, the model demonstrates both measurement adequacy and structural soundness.

Table 5: Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.059	0.059
d_ULS	0.422	0.422
d_G	0.134	0.134
Chi-square	210.488	210.488
NFI	0.881	0.881

- **Structural Model Analysis**

The hypothesized structural model (figure 4) was assessed using PLS-SEM. The results indicate that Coworking Environment (CW_ENV) significantly predicts

Psychological Safety (PSY) (β=0.461, *t*=9.016, *p*<.001). This relationship carries a medium-to-large effect size (f^2=0.269), highlighting the critical role of the coworking environment in shaping individuals' perceptions of interpersonal safety. Furthermore, PSY significantly predicts Creative Performance (CP) (β=0.301, *t*=5.291, *p*<.001), with a small-to-medium effect size (f^2=0.087). This suggests that psychological safety enables individuals to engage in risk-taking, voice novel ideas, and experiment in ways that enhance creativity. In addition, CW_ENV exerts a positive direct effect on CP (β=0.197, *t*=3.115, *p*=.002), although with a relatively small effect size (f^2=0.038). Thus, coworking environments influence creativity not only indirectly through PSY but also directly.

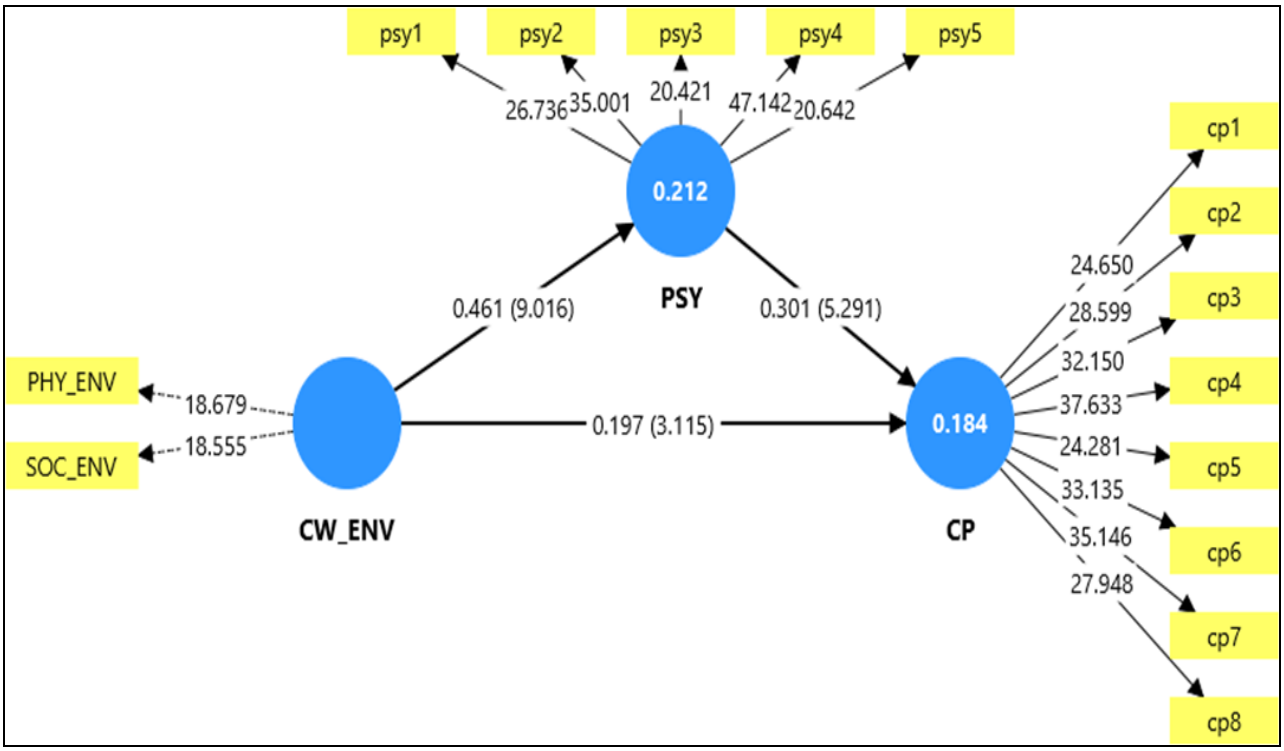

Fig 4: Structural model

The mediation analysis further revealed that CW_ENV indirectly affects CP through PSY (β=0.139, *t*=4.599, *p*<.001). The total effect of CW_ENV on CP (β=0.336) is therefore partly mediated by PSY. These findings collectively affirm that psychological safety is a critical mechanism linking coworking environments to creative performance.

Path analysis-Hypotheses testing

Coworking Environment and Creative Performance (Direct Effect)

The first hypothesis (H_1) explained there is a significant relationship between the coworking environment and creative performance in coworking atmosphere, the results confirming the significance of the relationship as β=0.197, *t*=3.115, *p*=.002, though the effect size is relatively small (f^2=0.038). This indicates that while CW_ENV exerts a direct positive effect on creativity, its influence is more modest compared to its indirect role through PSY. Hence, H_1 is supported but with a weaker magnitude.

The direct positive effect of CW_ENV on CP (β=0.197, *p*=.002) suggests that environmental conditions can independently stimulate creativity, albeit with a smaller effect size compared to the indirect mechanism through PSY. This finding resonates with the work of Dul and Ceylan (2011) [13], who argued that physical and social workplace characteristics-such as aesthetics, ergonomic support, and resource availability-contribute directly to creative outcomes. However, our results suggest that in coworking contexts, these direct effects are less pronounced unless accompanied by psychological safety. Thus, CW_ENV's role in creativity may be twofold: directly enabling idea generation through resources and layout and indirectly facilitating risk-taking and idea-sharing through climate.

Coworking environment and psychological safety

H_2 proposed that the coworking environment (CW_ENV) would positively influence psychological safety (PSY). The analysis strongly supports this relationship (β=0.461, *t*=9.016, *p*<.001). The effect size is medium to large (f^2=0.269), indicating that coworking environments substantially shape how safe individuals feel to express themselves, take risks, and engage in interpersonal learning. Thus, H_2 is supported.

The finding that CW_ENV significantly and positively predicts PSY (β=0.461, *p*<.001) provides strong evidence for the role of context in shaping interpersonal climate. This aligns with Edmondson's (1999) [14] foundational work on psychological safety, which emphasizes that supportive environments enable individuals to voice concerns and experiment without fear of negative consequences. In coworking contexts, the blend of physical design and social community norms seems to operate similarly, reinforcing prior research that highlights the role of workspace features in fostering trust and openness (Garrett, Spreitzer, & Bacevice, 2017; Brown, 2017) [18, 4]. Our study therefore extends psychological safety theory into the coworking

setting, demonstrating that environmental cues are pivotal for cultivating climates where people feel safe to engage.

Psychological Safety and Creative Performance

H_3 predicted that psychological safety would positively influence creative performance (CP). Results confirm this prediction (β=0.301, *t*=5.291, *p*<.001), with a small-to-medium effect size (f^2=0.087). These findings suggest that when individuals perceive a climate of safety, they are more willing to contribute novel ideas and engage in creative behaviors. Therefore, H_3 is supported.

The significant positive relationship between PSY and CP (β=0.301, *p*<.001) supports H_3 and aligns with a growing body of literature linking psychological safety to creative and innovative behaviors. Prior studies have shown that when individuals feel safe, they are more likely to take risks, voice unconventional ideas, and engage in trial-and-error learning-all behaviors central to creativity (Baer & Frese, 2003) [2]. By confirming this association within coworking spaces, the present study suggests that psychological safety functions as a universal mechanism for creativity, operating across both traditional team-based settings and more fluid, collaborative environments such as coworking communities.

Mediating role of Psychological Safety (CW_ENV → PSY → CP)

The mediation analysis shows that PSY explains 41% of the total effect of CW_ENV on CP, confirming partial complementary mediation. H_4 proposed that psychological safety mediates the relationship between coworking environment and creative performance. The indirect effect is positive and significant (β=0.139, *t*=4.579, *p*<.001). The total effect of CW_ENV on CP (β=0.336) shows that 41% of this effect is transmitted through PSY (VAF=41%). This indicates partial complementary mediation, where both the direct and indirect paths are significant and aligned in direction. Therefore, H_4 is supported. This indicates that CW_ENV enhances creativity both directly and indirectly through psychological safety, with the indirect pathway accounting for a substantial portion of the effect. Importantly, the complementary mediation suggests that interventions targeting coworking environments will have their strongest impact on creativity when they simultaneously promote a climate of safety.

The findings of the study emphasize the central role of the coworking environment in shaping both psychological safety and creativity. The significant positive influence of CW_ENV on PSY underscores the importance of supportive, open, and inclusive workspaces in fostering interpersonal trust and reducing perceived risks. This finding aligns with prior studies that emphasize how collaborative environments enhance a sense of security and belonging, which is foundational for creative engagement. Psychological safety was found to significantly predict creative performance, reaffirming its mediating role in enabling employees to express novel ideas, experiment, and take intellectual risks. When individuals feel safe from negative judgment, they are more likely to demonstrate innovative thinking, thus contributing to organizational creativity. The mediation analysis further reinforces that psychological safety serves as a mechanism bridging the coworking environment and creative performance. The partial mediation indicates that while coworking settings provide structural and social enablers of creativity, psychological safety remains a pivotal psychological process through which creativity is maximized.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that coworking environments significantly enhance creative performance both directly and indirectly through psychological safety**.** The findings unveiling that supportive coworking environment fosters psychological safety, which is essential for interpersonal trust and risk-taking. By situating CW_ENV as a second-order construct, this study highlights how design and social dimensions converge to create climates that support creativity, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the coworking and organizational creativity literature. Psychological safety is a vital driver of creativity, enabling individuals to share ideas and experiment without fear of negative consequences. Coworking environments contribute to creativity not only by offering conducive physical and social conditions but also by cultivating psychological safety as a mediating pathway. Overall, the results suggest that organizations seeking to enhance creativity should invest in coworking environments that nurture psychological safety. By doing so, they can unlock employees' creative potential and sustain innovative performance.

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