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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION IN INTERDEPENDENT SALES TEAMS

Bachelor Thesis

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I have written this Bachelor thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In business-to-business selling, the growing complexity of customer relationships has pushed firms away from relying on individual salespeople toward more collaborative, team-based selling arrangements. This shift has been institutionalized through structures such as key account management (KAM), in which suppliers concentrate resources on strategically important customers and adapt internal structures and processes to support coordinated value creation (Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015). Across these arrangements, selling becomes structurally interdependent within the selling organization: members occupy different roles, are exposed to different information sources, and must coordinate information flows within the team and with other units in the selling firm so that relevant information is used effectively (Jones et al., 2005). In such contexts, coordinated customer engagement depends on the team's capacity to combine distributed inputs into a usable account-level understanding.

This structural interdependence foregrounds a knowledge-integration problem: when knowledge relevant to a specific customer account (customer needs, buying processes, technical requirements, relational history, etc.) is distributed across members and functions, the team must integrate it sufficiently to support coordinated customer engagement. Drawing on prior research, this thesis conceptualizes three mechanisms through which such integration occurs in team-selling and KAM contexts. First, structured information sharing, conducted in formal and traceable settings such as meetings and training, supports transparency and alignment across distributed contributors (Lai & Yang, 2017). Second, the quality of communication, its frequency, directionality, and modality, shapes whether knowledge is coordinated in ways that support aligned action across roles (Schultz & Evans, 2002); at cross-functional interfaces, this matters especially because selling-relevant knowledge is often experience-based and context-embedded, making its transfer dependent on interfunctional communication quality and mutual understanding (Arnett et al., 2021). Third, distributed expertise creates a “who knows what” challenge, which teams address through transactive memory systems (TMS), shared cognitive maps of expertise that enable members to locate, access, and coordinate specialized knowledge (Bachrach et al., 2017). Together, these mechanisms describe how distributed knowledge can be made collectively usable for coordinated customer engagement.

This framing clarifies how knowledge integration may occur, but it also highlights the importance of explaining how such mechanisms are enacted consistently when they require

interpersonal risk-taking in day-to-day interaction. The psychological safety literature provides a theoretically grounded construct for addressing this issue. Psychological safety is defined as a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999). Edmondson's (1999) account of team learning behavior identifies behaviors such as sharing information, asking for help, seeking feedback, and discussing errors as activities through which teams obtain and process information for learning and adaptation; critically, these behaviors involve interpersonal risk because they can expose ignorance, error, or disagreement. Reviews further emphasize that psychological safety concerns the perceived interpersonal consequences of speaking up and engaging in learning-relevant behaviors in a given context (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). This logic is directly relevant for interdependent sales teams because knowledge integration, through information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination, depends on members' willingness to contribute incomplete information, request input, challenge interpretations, and make uncertainty discussable.

While the sales and KAM literature provides valuable insights into knowledge integration mechanisms, it largely overlooks the role of team climates in enabling the interpersonal risk-taking behaviors essential for these processes in day-to-day interactions. Specifically, there is limited empirical research on how psychological safety, a climate that mitigates perceived risks of voicing uncertainty, seeking help, or discussing errors, influences knowledge integration in interdependent sales settings such as KAM and team-selling. Reviews of psychological safety scholarship highlight this as a key area for expansion, calling for more context-specific applications in high-stakes work environments, such as examinations of psychological safety in new work contexts (Edmondson & Lei, 2014, p. 41) and investigations into psychological safety across diverse organizational contexts (Newman et al., 2017, p. 532). Yet the intersection of psychological safety with sales-specific challenges, such as distributed expertise and cross-functional knowledge transfer, remains underexplored.

The aim of this thesis is to examine how psychological safety enables knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams. Psychological safety is positioned as an enabling condition for interpersonal risk-taking behaviors such as voice, help-seeking, feedback-seeking, and error discussion, through which information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination are enacted in routine team interaction (Edmondson, 1999). Enabling is understood here as a facilitative condition: PS lowers the perceived interpersonal cost of

risk-taking behaviors, making those behaviors more likely to occur, though their enactment may be constrained rather than made impossible when PS is low. The study develops this theoretical account and examines it through qualitative empirical research, contributing both to the sales teamwork literature and to practice through managerial implications for fostering knowledge integration in interdependent selling contexts.

To address this aim, the author identified the following research tasks:

- Review the psychological safety construct and its role in enabling team learning behaviors;
- Conceptualize sales teams as interdependent work units and identify their knowledge-integration challenges;
- Specify the knowledge integration mechanisms relevant to team-selling contexts and explain their connection to psychological safety;
- Introduce and justify the research methodology;
- Conduct semi-structured interviews and analyze the collected data;
- Discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and develop managerial implications and directions for future research.

While the theoretical framework necessarily draws on multiple literatures to specify the mechanisms under examination, the empirical focus remains bounded to how PS enables knowledge integration through three mechanisms in two specific sales team contexts.

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 develops the theoretical foundation by introducing psychological safety in work teams (Section 1.1), conceptualizing sales teams as interdependent work units (Section 1.2), and specifying knowledge-integration mechanisms in team selling and their connection to psychological safety (Section 1.3). Chapter 2 presents the qualitative methodology, including research design, empirical setting, data sources, and analytic approach, followed by the findings and discussion. The conclusion summarizes theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

Keywords**:** psychological safety; interdependent sales teams; knowledge integration; interpretive alignment; transactive memory systems.

1. Theoretical Framework on Psychological Safety in Sales Teams

1.1. Psychological Safety in Work Teams

Psychological safety has emerged as a foundational construct in organizational research over the past two decades, recognized as essential for understanding how teams learn, adapt, and innovate (Newman et al., 2017). The concept, initially introduced by organizational scholars in the 1960s to explain organizational change, was revitalized in the 1990s and has since become central to understanding team effectiveness and organizational learning (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). This section examines the theoretical development of psychological safety, its conceptual boundaries, the conditions that enable its development, and its primary outcomes, with particular emphasis on its role in enabling learning behaviors and information sharing.

The historical development of psychological safety as a construct reveals how the concept has evolved and gained prominence in organizational research. Schein and Bennis (1965, as cited in Edmondson & Lei, 2014) first introduced psychological safety in the context of organizational change, arguing that it was essential for making people feel secure and capable of changing their behavior in response to shifting organizational challenges. Later, Kahn (1990) revitalized research on psychological safety by examining personal engagement at work, proposing that psychological safety affects individuals' willingness to "employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Critically, Kahn described psychological safety as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708) and argued that it is supported by trusting interpersonal relationships and by group dynamics that create flexibility to try and even fail without fear of negative consequences.

However, it was Edmondson's (1999) empirical operationalization at the team level that transformed psychological safety into a central construct for organizational research. Edmondson defined team psychological safety as a "shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (p. 354). Psychological safety is fundamentally about the perceived interpersonal consequences of speaking up, asking for help, admitting errors, or challenging the status quo (Edmondson, 1999). In any group setting, these behaviors carry inherent social risks; one might be perceived as incompetent, disruptive, or difficult. When individuals perceive these interpersonal risks as high, they engage in self-protective behaviors, withholding information, hiding errors, and avoiding questions that might expose knowledge gaps (Edmondson, 1999, pp. 351–352). Conversely, when psychological safety is high, the perceived interpersonal threat is low, and individuals are liberated to engage in the very

behaviors that enable learning and adaptation (Edmondson, 1999). Critically, psychological safety is a team-level phenomenon, not an individual trait. It reflects a shared belief about the norms of interaction within the group, an emergent property of the team that transcends the individual personalities of its members (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). By measuring psychological safety as a shared team-level belief and testing its relationship to team learning behavior and performance, Edmondson provided the theoretical and methodological foundation upon which contemporary research has been built (Newman et al., 2017).

In this thesis, psychological safety is treated as an enabling condition for the interpersonal risk-taking behaviors (e.g., information sharing, help-seeking, feedback-seeking, and error discussion) through which, as Section 1.3 will argue, knowledge integration is enacted in interdependent sales teams. This focus reflects the core mechanism identified in the literature: psychological safety reduces the perceived interpersonal threat associated with vulnerability, thereby enabling team members to engage in the candid communication and knowledge exchange necessary for effective collaboration (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017).

The conceptual boundaries of psychological safety merit careful attention, as the construct is sometimes confused with related but distinct phenomena (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological safety is fundamentally different from interpersonal trust. Trust typically refers to a dyadic belief about another specific person's reliability and benevolence; one can trust a particular colleague while not feeling psychologically safe in the broader team if the group's norms are punitive toward dissent or vulnerability (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Similarly, psychological safety is not synonymous with cohesiveness or interpersonal liking (Edmondson, 1999). A team can be highly cohesive in its social bonds yet have low psychological safety if the norms discourage questioning or disagreement. Furthermore, psychological safety is not synonymous with a permissive or merely “nice” team climate. Rather, it concerns whether members feel able to voice concerns, admit mistakes, ask for help, and challenge ideas without fear of negative interpersonal consequences (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Table 1 summarizes these distinctions, illustrating how psychological safety differs from three constructs with which it is commonly confused.

Table 1

Psychological safety distinguished from related constructs

Construct	Often confused with PS because...	How PS differs
Interpersonal trust	Both concern how safe people feel with others in the team.	Trust is a dyadic belief about a specific person's reliability; PS is a shared team-level belief about group norms. One can trust a colleague yet still feel unsafe speaking up in the broader team (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).
Team cohesiveness	Both are associated with positive team relationships and a sense of belonging.	Cohesion refers to interpersonal liking and social bonds; a highly cohesive team can still have norms that discourage dissent or questioning, resulting in low PS (Edmondson, 1999).
Low performance standards	PS may be mistakenly associated with a relaxed or permissive team atmosphere.	PS is not a relaxed or permissive climate. Rather, it reduces interpersonal threat so that members can raise concerns, ask for help, discuss mistakes, and challenge ideas in ways that support team learning and performance (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Note. PS = psychological safety.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Edmondson (1999) and Edmondson & Lei (2014).

Psychological safety operates at multiple levels of analysis, though the team level is the most prominent in the literature. Newman et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive systematic review of the psychological safety literature and identified research at three distinct levels: individual, team, and organizational. At the individual level, research examines employees' personally held perceptions of psychological safety within dyadic relationships, teams, or organizations. At the team level, which is the largest and most active research stream, psychological safety is conceptualized as a shared team climate and is typically measured by aggregating members' perceptions within the team. At the organizational level, only a limited number of studies have measured psychological safety, and these typically aggregate individual perceptions to the organizational level. Newman et al. (2017) further note that while individual perceptions of psychological safety can be aggregated to higher levels of analysis, it is questionable whether psychological safety can meaningfully be treated as an organizational-level construct in all organizations, as there

should be relatively high levels of agreement between organizational members for an organizational climate of psychological safety to exist. In general, psychological safety is likely to be more potent and meaningful at the team level, rather than the organizational level, because teams are the primary context in which members regularly interact and develop shared norms. Across these research streams, the key theoretical contribution of psychological safety is not the construct itself but the mechanism: it enables learning-relevant information behaviors under interpersonal risk (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). This thesis accordingly adopts the team level of analysis, treating psychological safety as a shared climate that shapes how members of interdependent sales teams engage in the knowledge-integrating behaviors examined in Section 1.3.

The antecedents of psychological safety, the conditions that enable it to develop, operate at both the team and organizational levels. Newman et al. (2017) identified 44 empirical studies examining the antecedents of psychological safety across different levels of analysis. Supportive leadership behaviors emerge as a critical factor in fostering psychological safety. When team leaders are inclusive, provide support and coaching, invite input, and respond constructively to questions and challenges, they model and reinforce the safety of interpersonal risk-taking (Newman et al., 2017). Beyond individual leadership behavior, supportive organizational practices also contribute significantly to psychological safety. These include mentoring programs, diversity practices, and organizational cultures that support learning and development (Newman et al., 2017). Relationship networks, and the social support and resources inherent in such networks, promote psychological safety within the team (Newman et al., 2017). In interdependent sales teams specifically, these antecedent conditions, particularly leadership behavior and the quality of interpersonal relationships, shape the climate within which members either engage or disengage from the knowledge-integrating behaviors examined in this thesis.

The primary and most consequential outcome of psychological safety is the cultivation of team learning behavior (Newman et al., 2017). Edmondson (1999) operationalized team learning behavior as a set of specific, observable actions including "seeking feedback, sharing information, asking for help, talking about errors, and experimenting" (p. 351). These behaviors are inherently risky; they involve admitting ignorance, exposing potential incompetence, or challenging the status quo (Edmondson, 1999). In her multimethod field study of 51 work teams in a manufacturing company, Edmondson found that team psychological safety was significantly associated with learning

behavior, whereas team efficacy (the team's confidence in its ability to perform) was not, when controlling for psychological safety. Importantly, learning behavior mediated the relationship between psychological safety and team performance, meaning that psychological safety operates through enabling these learning behaviors rather than directly (Edmondson, 1999). Subsequent research summarized in reviews generally supports this pattern, demonstrating that psychological safety is a robust predictor of learning-related outcomes and voice behavior across diverse organizational contexts (Newman et al., 2017). These learning behaviors, sharing information, seeking feedback, asking for help, and discussing errors, are precisely the interpersonal risk-taking behaviors through which knowledge integration is enacted in interdependent sales teams, as Section 1.3 will elaborate.

In conclusion, psychological safety emerges from the literature as a foundational interpersonal condition that enables the learning behaviors important for effective teamwork. It is a shared belief about the safety of interpersonal risk-taking, a team-level climate that is distinct from trust, cohesiveness, or lowering of standards. Psychological safety develops through supportive leadership, organizational practices, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within teams (Newman et al., 2017). Its primary relevance for this thesis lies in the cultivation of learning behaviors, feedback-seeking, information sharing, help-seeking, and error discussion, through which teams engage in the candid communication necessary for team learning and adaptation (Edmondson, 1999). Before specifying how PS enables these mechanisms, it is necessary to establish why knowledge integration is a distinctive challenge in sales contexts, which requires understanding the structural properties of interdependent sales teams. The next section therefore examines sales teams as interdependent work units and the coordination challenges that arise when roles, information sources, and expertise are distributed across members.

1.2. Sales Teams as Interdependent Work Units

As established in the preceding section, psychological safety enables learning behaviors that are essential for coordinated work in interdependent settings. In order to understand why this matters in selling contexts, it is first necessary to clarify the structural characteristics of sales teams as interdependent work units. In complex business-to-business selling, customer engagement and solution delivery often require the coordinated contribution of multiple actors and the integration of expertise across functional and hierarchical boundaries, rather than autonomous individual effort (Homburg et al., 2002; Rangarajan et al., 2004). These arrangements take various forms, from ad hoc selling centers assembled

around specific transactions to more formalized key account management structures, but share a common structural feature: selling outcomes depend on interdependent contributions across multiple roles and functions rather than on individual effort alone. Accordingly, this section conceptualizes sales teams as interdependent work units by synthesizing research on task and outcome interdependence (Wageman, 1995), cross-functional team-selling arrangements such as selling centers and key account management (Homburg et al., 2002; Moon & Gupta, 1997), boundary spanning in sales teams (Rangarajan et al., 2004), and the networked internal structure of KAM arrangements (Ivens et al., 2016).

The concept of interdependence provides the theoretical foundation for viewing sales teams as genuine teams rather than loose collections of salespeople. Interdependence refers to the degree to which team members rely on one another's inputs, actions, and outcomes to achieve their objectives (Wageman, 1995). In her seminal work, Wageman (1995) distinguishes between task interdependence, which concerns the extent to which work processes require coordination among members, and outcome interdependence, which concerns the degree to which rewards and performance outcomes are shared. Task interdependence arises because no single individual typically possesses all of the technical, relational, and contextual knowledge required to manage complex customers; outcome interdependence emerges when performance metrics or account-level goals are shared across members. As Wageman (1995) demonstrated, higher levels of either form of interdependence increase the need for mutual adjustment, information exchange, and communication, thereby transforming the social dynamics of work. In such settings, team effectiveness depends not merely on individual effort but on members' capacity to coordinate interdependent tasks through open, reciprocal interaction.

The interdependent nature of selling is often a response to the increasing complexity of customer organizations and buying processes. Suppliers have responded to this complexity by developing selling centers, cross-functional teams understood as the seller-side counterpart to the customer's buying center (Moon & Gupta, 1997). In their conceptual framework, they describe the selling center as a transaction-focused constellation of individuals assembled from various functional areas within the seller organization to manage a particular sale or account. Its composition is fluid and contingent on the requirements of each sales opportunity, reflecting the need to mobilize complementary expertise as selling situations evolve. This represents a form of transaction-specific team formation in which

progress toward a sale depends on integrating expertise dispersed across organizational domains.

This logic extends beyond episodic transactions to more enduring organizational arrangements. Many firms institutionalize team selling through key account management (KAM), which organizes internal resources around strategically significant customers and formalizes cross-functional collaboration at the account level (Homburg et al., 2002). Homburg and colleagues (2002) conceptualize KAM as an organizational configuration in which dedicated customer teams, drawing on multiple functional areas, collectively manage key-account relationships. This configurational perspective implies that KAM is not merely an individual role but a coordinated system of interdependent contributions, in which account-level outcomes depend on the alignment of dispersed activities and expertise across functions. Viewed through Wageman's (1995) interdependence lens, KAM can be understood as involving high task interdependence, since effective customer management requires ongoing coordination and integration of complementary inputs within the selling organization (Homburg et al., 2002).

Recent research reinforces this networked view of selling. Ivens et al. (2016) argue that KAM must be understood as a firm-internal network that cuts across hierarchical levels and functional boundaries. While earlier studies emphasized the boundary-spanning role of the key account manager vis-à-vis the customer, Ivens et al. (2016) show that much of KAM work consists of mobilizing and coordinating internal actors who possess complementary resources or expertise. These internal networks often operate across functional and hierarchical boundaries, such that key account managers and sales-team members must align and coordinate contributions without relying primarily on formal authority relationships. This implies that coordination is largely enacted through influence, relationship building, and reciprocal exchanges across functions, making the management of interdependencies a central part of key account work (Ivens et al., 2016).

The cross-functional composition of sales work also creates knowledge interdependence. In contemporary selling, relevant knowledge is frequently distributed across different individuals and organizational units, spanning, for example, technical expertise, commercial and financial inputs, market intelligence, and relationship-specific customer knowledge rather than residing in a single boundary spanner (Jones et al., 2005). Volpers et al. (2024) examine this reality through the lens of internal knowledge sourcing, showing that salespeople routinely draw on colleagues within the vendor organization to obtain procedural

and contextual knowledge that supports their selling activities. Their findings indicate that salespeople's effectiveness is shaped by how successfully they access and leverage internal knowledge relationships. Importantly, this pattern implies that selling in many contexts is not only resource dependent but also information dependent, insofar as actors' ability to act effectively hinges on timely access to, and productive use of, knowledge held by others. When critical expertise is dispersed across functions, the selling effort becomes structurally interdependent because progress depends on mobilizing and coordinating complementary informational inputs rather than executing isolated individual tasks. Taken together, these arguments suggest that knowledge interdependence becomes especially salient when customer-facing action requires interpreting and aligning multiple specialized perspectives into a coherent account-level understanding. The central challenge is therefore not merely acquiring information, but making distributed insights usable for coordinated action; this challenge anticipates the knowledge-integration mechanisms.

Rangarajan et al. (2004) provide additional insight into how organizational conditions interact with these interdependencies. They describe sales teams as boundary-spanning units that operate under environmental turbulence and market uncertainty, where learning and adaptability are central to performance. Their framework emphasizes that organizational culture, readiness for change, and the availability of learning mechanisms shape whether boundary-spanning teams can effectively process new information and adjust to shifting market demands. The more interdependent the team's work, the more it depends on such learning processes, because errors or misalignments in one part of the system can affect others. Interdependence thus not only creates the need for coordination but also elevates the importance of collective learning behaviors, the very behaviors that psychological safety enables.

The cumulative evidence across the studies reviewed in this section supports a coherent conceptualization of sales teams as interdependent work units rather than as collections of autonomous individual performers. Interdependence is evident in the design of contemporary selling tasks, which frequently require coordinated contributions across multiple roles and areas of expertise (Moon & Gupta, 1997; Rangarajan et al., 2004). It is further institutionalized through organizational arrangements such as key account management, where cross-functional customer teams and internal resource mobilization are formalized around strategically significant relationships (Homburg et al., 2002; Ivens et al., 2016). Interdependence also emerges as a knowledge structure: expertise and information

relevant to customer solutions are distributed across organizational units, and selling actors often rely on internal knowledge sourcing to access and deploy that expertise in customer-facing work (Volpers et al., 2024). At a theoretical level, these patterns align with core arguments in the interdependence literature that the degree to which work is organized through task and outcome linkages shapes the coordination demands faced by teams and the behavioral requirements for effective collective functioning (Wageman, 1995). Taken together, Wageman's (1995) interdependence perspective and Ivens et al.'s (2016) account of KAM networks suggest that, in such contexts, coordination cannot be understood as a matter of formal procedures or hierarchy alone; rather, it is enacted through ongoing communication, mutual adjustment, and the practical alignment of interdependent contributions across roles and boundaries.

Importantly, conceptualizing sales teams through an interdependence lens also clarifies why coordination challenges become especially salient when team selling operates under conditions that reduce spontaneous interaction and increase ambiguity. Across these settings, selling centers formed around specific transactions, KAM configurations that institutionalize cross-functional work, and internal KAM networks operating 'out of hierarchy', the common organizing principle is that selling outcomes are produced through systems of interdependent contributions rather than isolated individual activity.

In conclusion, the shift from individual selling toward team-based selling reflects deeper structural changes in both customer buying processes and vendor organizations' internal capability deployment. As customers increasingly evaluate solutions through multi-actor decision structures, and as supplier value creation depends on integrating dispersed expertise, sales organizations respond by assembling selling centers, institutionalizing key account configurations, and mobilizing internal networks that coordinate contributions across functional and hierarchical boundaries. The result is that sales-team work is characterized by high task interdependence and, in many contexts, by outcome linkages and shared accountability that further intensify coordination demands (Wageman, 1995). Moreover, the distributed nature of selling-relevant expertise makes knowledge sourcing and internal collaboration central to effectiveness, reinforcing the view that interdependence in sales is not merely a matter of pooled effort but also of distributed cognition and information dependence (Volpers et al., 2024). Understanding sales teams as interdependent work units therefore provides the conceptual basis for examining the mechanisms through which dispersed inputs are combined into coordinated customer-facing action. The next section builds on this

foundation by examining knowledge integration in team selling, focusing on information sharing, shared understanding, and "who knows what" mechanisms that enable teams to mobilize and combine distributed expertise.

1.3. Knowledge Integration in Team Selling and Its Connection to Psychological Safety

Building on the conceptualization of sales teams as interdependent work units (Section 1.2), the next step is to specify how coordinated selling work is accomplished when critical insights, expertise, and relationship-relevant knowledge are distributed across multiple people and functions. The sources provided consistently imply that interdependent selling creates an information-processing and coordination problem: members are exposed to multiple information sources and occupy different roles, which makes it necessary to coordinate information flow within the team and with the broader sales organization so that valuable information is used effectively (Jones et al., 2005; Lai & Yang, 2017). In this thesis, the term knowledge integration is used to capture the team-level mechanisms through which distributed knowledge becomes collectively usable for coordinated customer engagement. This framing treats integration as an interactional accomplishment, something the team does through communication, interpretation, and expertise coordination, rather than as a static stock of knowledge held by a single individual.

A central implication across the selling and team-learning literatures is that knowledge integration cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of facts. Edmondson's (1999) foundational study defines team learning behavior as activities through which a team obtains and processes data that allow adaptation and improvement; examples include seeking feedback, sharing information, asking for help, talking about errors, and experimenting. These behaviors are relevant here because they describe the micro-behaviors through which teams make distributed knowledge usable for collective action. In sales-team contexts characterized by interdependence, integration depends on whether such behaviors occur in routine interaction, and whether the team has practices that make distributed knowledge visible, interpretable, and locatable.

Across the sales-team and key account literature, three knowledge integration mechanisms can be identified as especially important for understanding how interdependent selling work is coordinated: (a) information sharing (including the degree to which sharing is structured and traceable), (b) interpretive alignment (so that exchanged information leads to coordinated interpretation and action), and (c) "who knows what" coordination, captured by

transactive memory systems that help teams locate and combine expertise. Psychological safety is relevant here not as a substitute for these mechanisms, but as an interpersonal climate that can facilitate or constrain the risk-bearing behaviors through which these mechanisms operate (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

A minimal starting point for knowledge integration is information sharing, understood as the within-team exchange of information needed to coordinate interdependent work. However, the team-selling literature does not treat information sharing as automatic, costless, or uniformly effective. In key account team contexts, internal alignment has been described as "keeping everybody on the same page" (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010, as cited in Lai & Yang, 2017, p. 313), and Lai and Yang (2017) motivate their study by emphasizing that such alignment depends on members' information sharing. They further argue that this challenge is heightened in fluid key account team arrangements, where participation and involvement can shift, making it necessary to pay deliberate managerial attention to encouraging information sharing within the team. This implication is central for conceptualizing knowledge integration in team selling: when contributions are distributed across multiple participants and involvement varies across time, teams may need practices that maintain informational continuity and visibility across members rather than relying solely on informal, goodwill-based exchange (Lai & Yang, 2017).

Lai and Yang (2017) make this point analytically concrete by defining formal information sharing as information sharing that a salesperson conducts with team counterparts in a structured, traceable, and formal setting (e.g., meetings, training). Emphasizing traceability and structure positions formality as part of the mechanism through which teams maintain informational continuity and alignment across distributed contributors. In their argument, formal information sharing supports information accuracy, openness, and source credibility and increases visibility and transparency of team members' current activities. They further connect transparency to classic coordination problems in fluid teams: by making actions visible, transparency can help mitigate low effort and free-riding risks that may be intensified when togetherness and commitment are reduced by fluid membership. Accordingly, in interdependent and fluid key account teams, structuring information sharing functions as a coordination mechanism by increasing the visibility and traceability of distributed contributions (Lai & Yang, 2017).

Jones et al. (2005) provide a complementary rationale for the importance of internal information sharing and coordination in key account and team-selling settings. Their review

emphasizes that team members occupy different functional roles and are exposed to multiple information sources, creating a need to coordinate information flows both within the team and with the wider sales organization so that customer-relevant knowledge is assembled and used effectively. Accordingly, knowledge integration in team-selling and key account contexts involves not only exchange among immediate team members but also the linking of team-level information flows to broader organizational sources and recipients. Under conditions of interdependent selling work, these internal and boundary-crossing information flows constitute part of the coordination problem that teams must manage in order to act on dispersed expertise and customer intelligence.

Research on the sales-marketing interface reinforces that the usability of exchanged information cannot be assumed when much of the relevant knowledge is tacit and context embedded. Arnett et al. (2021) distinguish tacit from explicit knowledge and describe tacit knowledge as acquired through experience, deep interaction, and learning by doing, which makes it complex and difficult to transfer. They further highlight that tacit knowledge transfer between sales and marketing can be hindered by poor interfunctional relationships and emphasize the roles of interfunctional communication quality and mutual understanding in enabling tacit knowledge transfer. In interdependent role interfaces more broadly, knowledge exchange therefore often extends beyond the transmission of explicit information: as Arnett et al. (2021) show in the sales-marketing context, transferring tacit knowledge requires interaction that supports interpretation and application, and the effectiveness of transfer depends on communication quality and the development of mutual understanding across roles.

Schultz and Evans (2002), though writing in the context of seller–customer communication, identify key communication dimensions, frequency, direction, and modality, that are also relevant for within-team coordination in interdependent selling contexts, as they shape how information is exchanged and interpreted across roles within the team. This suggests that communication in key account settings varies not only in volume but in its interactive properties and channels, dimensions Schultz and Evans (2002) identify, with implications for how knowledge is coordinated through relationship-relevant exchanges. When multiple actors coordinate around an account, the properties of communication, how bidirectional it is, how regularly it occurs, and through which channels it is conducted, can shape whether information is exchanged and coordinated in ways that support aligned action.

Taken together, these sources position information sharing as a necessary but incomplete component of knowledge integration in team-selling and key account contexts. Overall, the literature suggests that knowledge integration in team selling depends not only on the availability of information, but also on interaction patterns and practices that make knowledge transferable, interpretable, and usable across interdependent roles.

A second mechanism concerns interpretive alignment, the development of mutual understanding across roles. While Arnett et al. (2021) develop this argument at the sales-marketing interface, the same structural conditions identified in Section 1.2 (e.g., differentiated roles, distributed tacit knowledge, and cross-functional interdependence) apply within interdependent sales teams, making active interpretive work equally necessary for coordinated action. A recurring difficulty in interdependent work is that the same information can be interpreted differently by different actors, particularly when they approach the account from different functional perspectives. Arnett et al. (2021) explicitly position mutual understanding as central in a model of tacit knowledge transfer between sales and marketing, implying that transfer depends not only on sending knowledge but on building interpretive compatibility across roles. Mutual understanding, in this sense, concerns the extent to which parties can make sense of each other's knowledge, constraints, and decisions in ways that allow the transferred knowledge to be applied effectively. This interpretive alignment mechanism is therefore distinct from information exchange: it addresses how distributed knowledge is translated into shared frames that can guide coordinated action across contributors.

Jones et al. (2005) similarly emphasize the coordination and integration demands that arise in key account and team-selling contexts and draw on team scholarship to describe how team-based selling involves challenges of alignment and disciplined action. Their review discusses team effectiveness considerations in sales settings and highlights the need for coordination among members with different roles and information sources. In combination with Arnett et al. (2021), this supports treating interpretive alignment as a core integration mechanism: interdependent selling requires not only that information is shared, but that teams and associated functions develop compatible interpretations and working approaches that allow distributed inputs to be combined into a coherent account-level course of action.

A third mechanism addresses the coordination of expertise location, the problem of "who knows what." Bachrach et al. (2017) conceptualize this mechanism through transactive memory systems (TMS) in sales teams. They describe TMS as a shared cognitive system that

supports cooperative encoding, storage, and the division of expertise by linking specialized knowledge to particular team members and enabling the team to apply that distributed expertise to work activities. Their discussion also emphasizes key features of TMS, including differentiated expertise, confidence in others' expertise, and the coordination of differentiated expertise in executing team goals. Within this framing, TMS functions as a team-level infrastructure for integrating distributed expertise: when members know where expertise resides and rely on it appropriately, the team can combine specialized contributions without requiring every member to hold the same knowledge.

Bachrach et al. (2017) further discuss how TMS relates to the efficiency of information search and use in team settings. In their account, higher TMS is associated with faster information search and a reduced likelihood that task-critical information will be ignored, because the team can direct attention to relevant experts and coordinate contributions across differentiated knowledge domains. For interdependent sales teams, this mechanism captures a specific integrative capability that Bachrach et al. (2017) identify: the team's capacity to locate, access, and coordinate expertise in ways that support coordinated work under distributed knowledge conditions.

The relationship between knowledge integration and psychological safety can be specified by drawing on established definitions and mechanism arguments in the psychological safety literature. Psychological safety is defined as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999) and concerns perceived interpersonal consequences of behaviors such as speaking up, admitting uncertainty, asking for help, and discussing mistakes. Edmondson's (1999) study links psychological safety to team learning behavior, which includes activities such as sharing information and asking for help and describes these behaviors as the means through which teams obtain and process data that enable adaptation and improvement. Edmondson and Lei's (2014) review similarly emphasizes psychological safety as an enabling condition for voice and learning-relevant behaviors under interpersonal risk. These mechanism arguments are directly relevant for knowledge integration because information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination depend on members' willingness to engage in interpersonal-risk behaviors during routine interaction.

Table 2 summarizes the three knowledge integration mechanisms identified in the literature, their definitions, key sources, and the specific ways in which psychological safety enables each mechanism in interdependent sales team contexts.

Table 2

Knowledge integration mechanisms in interdependent sales teams and the enabling role of psychological safety

Mechanism	Definition	Key source(s)	How PS enables it
Information sharing	Structured, traceable within-team exchange of customer-relevant knowledge in formal settings (e.g., meetings, shared reports).	Lai & Yang (2017); Jones et al. (2005)	Sharing information, especially incomplete or uncertain information, is interpersonally risky. High PS reduces the perceived threat of revealing knowledge gaps or uncertainty, making members more willing to contribute openly and consistently (Edmondson, 1999).
Interpretive alignment	Development of mutual understanding across roles so that exchanged knowledge is interpreted consistently and can guide coordinated action.	Arnett et al. (2021); Schultz & Evans (2002)	Reaching shared understanding requires surfacing differences in assumptions and clarifying competing interpretations, behaviors that risk exposing disagreement or incompetence. PS enables the candid questioning and feedback-seeking through which alignment is built (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).
Expertise coordination (TMS)	A shared cognitive map of 'who knows what' that enables members to locate, access, and rely on specialized knowledge distributed across the team.	Bachrach et al. (2017)	Using TMS requires acknowledging limits of one's own knowledge, directing questions to specific experts, and admitting dependence on others, all socially sensitive behaviors. PS lowers the interpersonal cost of these acts, enabling members to seek and offer expertise without fear of being judged (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Notes: TMS = transactive memory systems; PS = psychological safety.

Source: Compiled by the author.

In key account teams, information sharing, particularly in its formalized form, often occurs in structured and traceable settings where individual contributions are visible (Lai & Yang, 2017). While visibility can support coordination, it can also heighten interpersonal exposure because providing updates, admitting uncertainty, or revealing incomplete work becomes more public. Edmondson's (1999) account of team learning behavior highlights that sharing information and asking for help are interpersonal-risk behaviors that can be inhibited

when perceived interpersonal risk is high. Accordingly, psychological safety is theoretically relevant to formal and informal information sharing because it shapes members' expectations about the interpersonal consequences of speaking up and revealing uncertainty (Edmondson, 1999). When interpersonal risk is salient, members may be more likely to delay, restrict, or strategically frame what they share, even when formal sharing routines exist, in order to avoid potential loss of image or status. Conversely, higher psychological safety is expected to facilitate candid information exchange and help seeking, supporting the enactment of the information-sharing behaviors on which coordination in key account teams depends (Edmondson, 1999).

The interpretive alignment mechanism depends on whether team members can discuss ambiguity and disagreement openly enough to develop aligned interpretations. In Arnett et al.'s (2021) account, mutual understanding in tacit knowledge transfer implies that parties surface differences in assumptions, clarify constraints, and engage with competing interpretations in order to reach usable alignment across roles. Edmondson (1999) frames closely related behaviors, questioning, feedback seeking, and discussing errors, as learning behaviors that involve interpersonal risk, and review evidence similarly links psychological safety to voice and open communication in teams. Under lower psychological safety, teams may be less likely to engage in the candid exchanges required to reconcile divergent interpretations, increasing the possibility that information is exchanged without producing coherent shared understanding. Under higher psychological safety, teams are more likely to engage in clarification, feedback seeking, and error discussion, which supports the development of interpretive alignment that can guide coordinated action.

Transactive memory systems also depend on behaviors that can be socially sensitive, including acknowledging dependence on others' expertise, directing questions to the relevant expert, and admitting one's own knowledge limits. Bachrach et al. (2017) describe TMS as a directory of expertise that enables reliance and coordination; for such a system to operate in practice, members must communicate what they know, recognize knowledge limits, and seek input from others. Edmondson's (1999) examples of team learning behavior include asking for help and sharing information, which are also the behaviors through which expertise mapping and reliance become possible in teams. Edmondson and Lei (2014) further clarify that psychological safety concerns expectations about the interpersonal consequences of such vulnerability in a specific context. Psychological safety is therefore expected to facilitate the enactment and use of TMS to the extent that TMS relies on interpersonally risky behaviors

such as help seeking, questioning, and admitting uncertainty, which are more likely when the team climate signals that such risk taking will not be punished (Edmondson, 1999).

Figure 1 illustrates the overall conceptual framework of this thesis, positioning psychological safety as an enabling condition for the three knowledge integration mechanisms and their collective contribution to coordinated customer engagement.

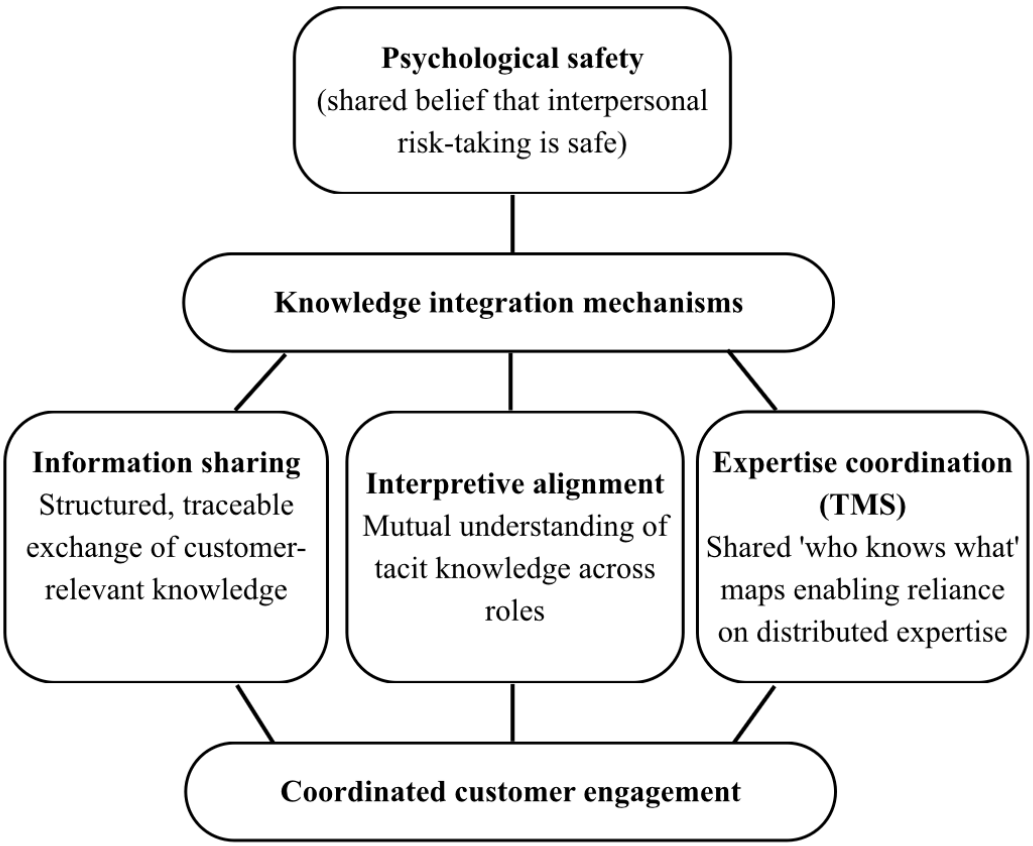

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: psychological safety as an enabling condition for knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams.
Source: Compiled by the author based on Arnett et al. (2021), Bachrach et al. (2017), Edmondson (1999), Lai & Yang (2017).

Taken together, the reviewed literature positions psychological safety as relevant to sales teams because it enables the interpersonal-risk behaviors through which interdependent teams integrate distributed knowledge. The sales-team and key account research highlights that knowledge integration demands emerge when roles and information sources are distributed, team participation can be fluid, and knowledge transfer occurs across functional boundaries. The psychological safety literature, in turn, links team climate to learning-relevant behaviors such as speaking up, help seeking, and information sharing, behaviors that

carry social risk in many work settings (Newman et al., 2017). Within interdependent sales teams, knowledge integration therefore rests on mechanisms of information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination, and psychological safety is theoretically consequential insofar as it facilitates the candid communication and help-seeking behaviors required for these mechanisms to operate in routine interaction (Edmondson, 1999).

These three mechanisms do not constitute hypotheses to be tested but rather sensitizing concepts, theoretical lenses that orient analytical attention toward particular features of the empirical material without predetermining what will be found within each domain.

2. Empirical Study on Psychological Safety in Sales Teams

2.1. Methodology of the Empirical Study

This thesis employs a qualitative, theory-informed research design to examine how psychological safety (PS) enables knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams. Consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, PS is conceptualized as a shared team-level belief that interpersonal risk-taking, such as speaking up, seeking help, admitting uncertainty, or discussing errors, is safe from negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions of team dynamics, and the nuanced processes through which PS shapes everyday interaction and influences behaviors such as information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination in sales work (Creswell, 2013). In contrast to quantitative approaches that typically emphasize the measurement of predefined constructs and hypothesis testing, qualitative inquiry prioritizes interpretive depth and contextual understanding, making it well suited for examining "how" and "why" questions in under-explored settings such as interdependent sales teams (Silverman, 2017). This design is not aimed at generalizability but at generating contextually grounded insights that can refine the theoretical framework and inform practical implications. More precisely, the study adopts a theory-informed qualitative logic: theoretical concepts from existing literature provide the analytical lens through which empirical material is examined, while the empirical material is treated as the source of evidence about how those concepts operate in a specific context, not as confirmation of pre-established conclusions.

The empirical study draws on semi-structured interviews with members of two sales teams in related business-to-business (B2B) contexts: wine distribution and bakery

distribution. Both teams operate in Crimea. Crimea is internationally recognized as part of Ukraine but has been under Russian occupation since 2014 and currently operates under Russian administrative control. This context shaped certain practical features of the study, including the communication infrastructure available to participants and the language in which interviews were conducted, while the analysis itself focuses on team-level dynamics rather than geopolitical conditions; the setting should therefore be considered when assessing the transferability of the findings to other sales-team contexts. The two contexts involve interdependent sales work where team members must coordinate distributed knowledge, such as customer preferences, inventory details, and market trends, to support ongoing client relationships and adaptive decision-making (Jones et al., 2005). Wine distribution requires sales team members to coordinate sales decisions around related functional constraints, such as logistics, supplier availability, and order customization, while bakery distribution requires coordination across sales channels, including retail chains, independent outlets, and hospitality clients, with team members managing differentiated client relationships and product availability constraints simultaneously. Operating within the same food distribution sector, the two teams share a common organizational logic: a central sales team coordinating distributed customer knowledge across a defined territory to drive product placement and client relationship management. This structural similarity allows findings from both teams to be examined within the same analytical framework, with differences between contexts treated as analytically informative rather than as a basis for causal comparison or statistical generalization. Access to participants was facilitated through the researcher's professional contacts within the industry, enabling recruitment of individuals with direct experience in team-selling environments. This recruitment approach is consistent with purposive sampling strategies that prioritize information-rich cases over random selection in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Because participants were recruited through professional contacts, the possibility of selection bias cannot be excluded; the risk of socially desirable responses was mitigated by anonymizing participants, avoiding company identifiers, and asking for concrete interaction episodes rather than general evaluations.

The two organizations differ in size, age, and structural configuration in ways that are analytically relevant to the study. The wine distribution company was founded in the early 2000s and employs approximately 60 staff, with an annual revenue of around 300-400 million rubles. The sales function operates through a multi-level hierarchy in which supervisors, account managers, and field representatives occupy distinct roles. The

confectionery production and distribution company has approximately 30 years of market presence, employs around 210 staff, and generates annual revenues of approximately 500-600 million rubles. Its sales team operates under a flat single-supervisor structure. These structural differences, in leadership configuration, team size, and tenure profiles, are treated as contextual features that help interpret variation in the findings.

Although several sources informing the theoretical framework, particularly Lai and Yang (2017), Arnett et al. (2021), and Bachrach et al. (2017), were developed in formal key account management (KAM) or broader team-selling settings, the mechanisms they identify are not exclusive to KAM. They are relevant here because the empirical contexts studied in this thesis share several structural conditions that generate knowledge integration demands (Jones et al., 2005; Wageman, 1995). First, both empirical contexts involve role differentiation with distributed expertise within the sales team: in both contexts, team members occupy distinct roles, such as account management, sales, and customer coordination, and each holds different customer-relevant knowledge shaped by their position in the selling process. Second, both also show task interdependence, where one member cannot complete their part without input or decisions from others; for instance, a sales representative may need information from an account manager, supervisor, or sales coordinator before confirming a client order, while a supervisor cannot set accurate territory plans without sales data and client intelligence provided by team members in the field. Third, both involve ongoing client relationships where coordinated customer-relevant knowledge must be maintained and updated across team members over time. These conditions are precisely those that motivate information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination as theoretical problems in the team-selling literature. The present study therefore treats these contexts as empirical instances of interdependent sales teamwork, using the theoretical framework to generate sensitizing concepts rather than to test propositions derived specifically from KAM research. The empirical analysis remains focused on sales-team members' accounts of these interdependencies.

Nine participants were interviewed across the two teams, with five from the wine distribution team and four from the bakery distribution team. Participants were sales team members with at least one year of experience in their roles, supporting familiarity with interdependent tasks. Sampling was purposive, targeting individuals involved in daily coordination (e.g., account managers, sales representatives, supervisors) to capture diverse perspectives on PS and knowledge integration. Interview duration varied considerably across

participants, ranging from 20 to 55 minutes, reflecting differences in role and communication style: supervisory participants provided more extended accounts of team dynamics and coordination practices, while field-based territorial managers gave briefer but focused responses shaped by the operational nature of their roles and the constraints of their working day.

Individual participant details and data collection information are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants and data collection details

Participant	Team context	Role / Occupation	Interview date	Duration (min)
P1	Wine distribution	Head of Sales	31.03.2026	30
P2	Wine distribution	Sales Division Manager	07.04.2026	53
P3	Wine distribution	Supervisor	07.04.2026	34
P4	Wine distribution	Supervisor	08.04.2026	33
P5	Wine distribution	Supervisor	10.04.2026	55
P6	Bakery distribution	Supervisor	14.04.2026	37
P7	Bakery distribution	Territorial Manager	14.04.2026	20
P8	Bakery distribution	Network & Wholesale Manager	15.04.2026	21
P9	Bakery distribution	Territorial Manager	16.04.2026	23

Notes: All participants had a minimum of one year of experience in their current role. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams or Zoom and audio-recorded with participants' consent. P = Participant.

Source: Compiled by the author.

The sample composition should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. In the wine distribution case, supervisory and managerial participants were included because these roles were directly involved in coordinating information flows, checking task understanding,

handling errors, and observing help-seeking and disclosure patterns across the sales hierarchy. Therefore, this case provides leadership-side evidence on PS-related conditions and knowledge integration, rather than a full account of frontline employees' experiences. In contrast, the bakery case includes both supervisory and field-level accounts within one local team under a single supervisor.

Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews as the primary method, chosen for their balance of structure and flexibility: they ensure coverage of theoretically relevant topics while allowing for follow-up probing into concrete episodes and contextual detail (Silverman, 2017). Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The interview guide (see Appendix A) was developed based on sensitizing concepts from Chapter 1, understood as theoretical ideas that guide attention without predetermining findings (Blumer, 1954), including PS-related behaviors (e.g., voice, help-seeking, error discussion) and knowledge integration mechanisms (e.g., information sharing, interpretive alignment, transactive memory systems). The goal was to elicit concrete episodes of team interaction, such as situations involving interdependence, misunderstandings, disagreements, or uncertainty, to explore how PS manifests in routine sales work and shapes knowledge integration behaviors. Questions started with open-ended prompts about roles and recent interdependent tasks, progressing to specific examples of risk-taking behaviors. The same broad interview guide was used across supervisory and field-level participants to ensure comparability across interviews, but question wording and follow-up prompts were adapted to participants' roles. For example, questions about information sharing, clarification-seeking, help-seeking, error admission, and raising concerns were framed differently depending on the participant's position: supervisors were asked about these behaviors both in relation to employees' openness toward them and their own openness toward the team, while field-level participants were asked about similar behaviors in relation to supervisors and colleagues.

Ethical considerations were prioritized in line with good scientific practice and data protection requirements (University of Tartu, 2025). All participants were informed verbally and in writing about the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature prior to participation (see Appendix B). They provided informed consent (see Appendix C), confirming their agreement to be interviewed and audio-recorded. To protect participants' confidentiality, participants were assigned coded identifiers (e.g., P1, P2) in the transcripts, coding process, and presentation of findings. Direct identifiers, such as names and company

names, were removed from the analysis and are not reported in the thesis. Contextual information about the organizations is presented only in generalized form where necessary for interpreting the empirical setting. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher, and will be deleted upon thesis completion. Participants were assured they could withdraw at any time without consequence.

Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim using TurboScribe. They were conducted in Russian and translated into English by the researcher for analysis and presentation. Transcripts were reviewed for fidelity before coding. The analytic process followed the coding structure of Gioia et al. (2013), moving from first-order codes grounded in participants' language to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions. Because the study is theory-informed rather than purely inductive, the PS behaviors and KI mechanisms developed in Chapter 1 served as sensitizing concepts: they shaped the topics explored in interviews and provided an initial analytical orientation, but did not function as fixed categories into which the data were mechanically assigned. In this sense, the framework shaped what was looked for, while the empirical material shaped the final interpretation. Coding proceeded in three rounds. First, interview excerpts were coded close to participants' wording to capture concrete episodes of sharing, clarification, help-seeking, and error discussion. Second, similar first-order codes were grouped into second-order themes reflecting recurring coordination patterns. Third, these themes were organized into aggregate dimensions by comparing them with the sensitizing concepts from Chapter 1 while retaining patterns that did not map neatly onto the initial framework. Coding decisions were recorded manually in an audit trail linking transcript excerpts, codes, themes, and aggregate dimensions. Dependability was supported through this audit trail, which documented the analytical process from raw transcripts to aggregate dimensions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was further supported by comparing patterns across the two team contexts, allowing recurring findings and context-specific differences to be identified in line with qualitative trustworthiness principles (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Figure 2 illustrates the overall analytical framework of the study, depicting how sensitizing concepts from Chapter 1 inform data collection and theory-informed analysis, culminating in empirical insights about how PS enables knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams.

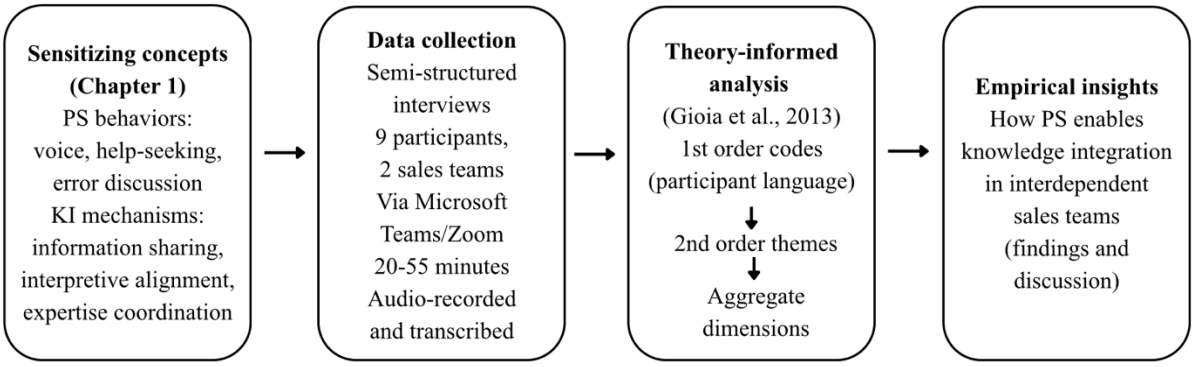

Figure 2. Analytical framework of the empirical study.
Source: Compiled by the author based on Gioia et al. (2013).

The data structure developed through the analytic process, illustrating the progression from first-order codes grounded in participants' language to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions, is presented in Appendix D.

Taken together, the methodological choices described above provide a coherent foundation for examining how PS enables knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams. The qualitative design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interview method, and theory-informed coding approach following the Gioia et al. (2013) structure collectively support an empirical analysis that is both theoretically grounded and responsive to the richness of participants' accounts. The following sections present the findings of this analysis and discuss their implications in relation to the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1.

2.2. Findings and Discussion: Psychological Safety in Sales Teams

Findings from interviews with nine participants across two interdependent B2B distribution teams point to recurring patterns in how members shared information, clarified misunderstandings, asked for help across roles, and responded to mistakes. Participants' accounts indicated that these practices were shaped not only by formal channels, role responsibilities, or the availability of expertise, but also by how safe members perceived it to be to speak up, admit uncertainty, ask for help, or disclose errors. Interpreted through the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1, these patterns suggest that psychological safety enabled knowledge integration by shaping whether the interpersonal risk-taking behaviors on which information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination depend were enacted in routine interaction. Where team members perceived interpersonal risk-taking as safer, information was shared more candidly, interpretive misalignments were surfaced and addressed, and expertise was accessed with less self-protective concealment.

Where perceived risk was higher, the same mechanisms were constrained, not necessarily by a lack of formal structures or expertise, but by the interpersonal calculations that shaped what members chose to reveal, ask, or admit. This section develops these findings across four aggregate dimensions: selective disclosure and filtering in information sharing (2.2.1), how team climate shapes whether interpretive gaps are caught and corrected (2.2.2), knowing who to turn to and asking for help across roles (2.2.3), and leadership and relational conditions shaping team openness (2.2.4), before drawing a cross-team synthesis and theoretical discussion (2.2.5). Throughout this chapter, wine distribution findings should be read as supervisory and managerial accounts of the team climate, while bakery distribution findings reflect one local team climate under a single supervisor.

2.2.1. Selective Disclosure and Filtering in Information Sharing

A consistent finding across both teams is that information sharing was shaped not primarily by the availability of formal channels, both teams had group chats, email, and phone, but by members' confidence that what they shared would not be used against them. Interpersonal risk did not prevent sharing entirely; it redirected it, filtered it, and in some cases routed it away from the people most capable of acting on it.

Across both teams, participants described information exchange practices that made contributions more visible and structured. P3 in the wine distribution team described email as a coordination mechanism precisely because it created a verifiable record: "*Email is confirmation, I can always go back and look up any information I need*" (P3). P1 described structuring task instructions so that the format itself constrained misinterpretation and limited the need for individual judgment: "*You send an empty table asking them to fill it in, where all the criteria are already there, everything labeled, the columns defined, all they have to do is enter the data*" (P1). P4 described a systematic confirmation practice built into the rhythm of daily coordination: "*Everyone needs to confirm that the task or promotion is correctly understood. Once we feel that the whole team's understanding is unified, the team heads out into the field*" (P4). In the bakery distribution team, a parallel logic organized the use of the group chat. P6 described differentiating information by urgency and required response: "*If it's some very important information, I write that they must respond and leave a comment. So there's information that's just: please read and be aware. And there's information where: confirm that you've read it*" (P6). P8 described using the shared channel to propagate problem resolutions across the team: "*I resolved my problem and wrote in the chat that everyone should update the programme, and after that everything would upload properly*" (P8). What

is analytically significant about these practices is not their technical form but their function: they reduced some of the interpersonal cost of sharing by making contributions traceable and attributable, thereby creating accountability through the channel rather than relying only on informal willingness to disclose uncertainty or incomplete understanding. This reflects the formal information sharing mechanism identified by Lai and Yang (2017), in which structured and traceable exchange supports coordination by making distributed contributions visible across team members. These practices should not be interpreted only as responses to low psychological safety; they also served practical coordination functions by reducing ambiguity, preserving records, and making task expectations clearer.

The inhibiting effect of interpersonal risk on information sharing was most visible not in the absence of formal channels, both teams had them, but in the strategic decisions members made about what to share, with whom, and through which routes. In the wine distribution team, P2 offered a candid leadership-side account of how fear of negative consequences had historically shaped information behavior: "*There were actual hours spent on those pointless email exchanges explaining why it wasn't my fault*" (P2). The same participant described employees bypassing their direct manager entirely when the perceived risk of disclosure was high: "*Employees sometimes go to the head office and bring things there, information they don't want to bring to me*" (P2). This routing behavior created an information asymmetry problem that P2 articulated directly: "*Whoever brings the information first, whoever 'reports' first, knows their version will be heard and the response will be based on it*" (P2). In the bakery distribution team, a related but differently framed pattern emerged. P7 described a pragmatic threshold below which problems were resolved without escalation: "*if you understand you can resolve it yourself, well, maybe he doesn't need to know about it unnecessarily. You solved it, fine, ok*" (P7). While framed instrumentally, avoiding unnecessary noise, this filtering behavior reduces the visibility of operational difficulties that might benefit from team-level attention. The contrast between these two accounts is analytically instructive: P2's account suggests a context in which disclosure carried personal risk and was associated with strategic concealment and blame-shifting; P7's account suggests a different logic, where disclosure was treated as unnecessary for solvable problems, producing selective sharing without the defensive character visible in the wine distribution case. Both reduce the completeness of information flow, but through different mechanisms, one driven by perceived interpersonal threat, one by a more neutral calculation of relevance. This distinction is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) account of self-protective behavior:

when perceived interpersonal risk is high, information withholding and error concealment serve to protect image and status; when risk is lower, filtering decisions are more genuinely instrumental.

Where participants described lower perceived risk of negative responses, they also described qualitatively different information behaviors: proactive consultation, voluntary error disclosure, and candid help-seeking. P1 described actively soliciting team input on strategic portfolio decisions: "*Today, for example, I sent the team a presentation from a new supplier who's approaching us, asking: what do you think, will this sell? Should we take it into our portfolio or not?*" (P1). P5 described proactively announcing mistakes rather than waiting to be discovered: "*Moreover, I can even announce them myself. It happens that I'll announce them*" (P5). P6 in the bakery distribution team described a similar willingness rooted in a principled view of management: "*No, it's not hard. That comes with experience... We're all human. We all make mistakes and we need to learn to admit them*" (P6). The most striking account came from P9, who framed error admission and help-seeking as practically obvious rather than socially risky: "*Why would I lie if I'm going to get caught in the lie? And I still have to keep working. How will people treat me then? I say: sorry, I made a mistake*" (P9), and, on help-seeking, "*Of course. Why would I be embarrassed in front of him? I'm not asking him for money, it's a work matter. I have nothing to be embarrassed about*" (P9). The contrast between P9's framing and P2's historical account of defensive email writing illustrates the core mechanism identified by Edmondson (1999): when team members experience lower interpersonal risk, the perceived cost of disclosure decreases, making them more willing to engage in learning behaviors such as information sharing, help-seeking, and error discussion, through which distributed knowledge becomes collectively usable. A structural difference between the two teams shaped how these patterns manifested. The wine distribution team relied primarily on email, templates, and asynchronous documentation, formal channels that create accountability through record-keeping. The bakery distribution team, operating under significant connectivity constraints due to messenger restrictions in the region, relied more heavily on group chats and direct phone calls, with formal corporate systems reserved for office-based communication. Despite this infrastructural difference, the underlying coordination logic was similar: in both teams, structured sharing practices helped reduce the interpersonal exposure associated with contributing information, while the PS-related conditions shaped whether members shared openly or filtered, delayed, and rerouted information.

2.2.2. How Team Climate Shapes Whether Interpretive Gaps Are Caught and Corrected

A key finding concerning how teams catch and correct misunderstandings is that clarification-seeking, the behavior on which shared understanding depends, was especially sensitive to perceived interpersonal risk. Both teams experienced recurring interpretive divergence, and both used practices intended to build shared understanding. But where clarification-seeking felt risky, members remained silent in uncertainty and acted on misinterpretations that could have been corrected, creating coordination failures that may have been preventable under stronger norms of candid questioning.

Interpretive divergence was described as a recurring and expected feature of team communication across both contexts. P2 in the wine distribution team framed it as a persistent feature of human communication: "*Every employee, how to put it, has their own interpretation of any task or situation in their head. Sometimes it gets to the point of being funny, as if I'm speaking a foreign language, because they interpreted it completely differently*" (P2). P5 offered a more concise characterization: "*It's like the telephone game, of course, differently. At the initial stage*" (P5). In the bakery distribution team, P6 described one possible mechanism underlying divergence: the way contextual absorption shapes how incoming information is processed: "*everyone constantly interprets information in their own way... a person is focused on something specific, they're absorbed in a task, some information comes in, they skim-read it, they associate it with what they're currently doing, don't fully take it in as intended*" (P6). The real-world consequences of this divergence were illustrated with specific incidents. P3 described how rapidly changing information produced direct client-facing errors: "*Over the course of two days, the information about a discount programme changed four times. The volume of information, all different, related to the same thing, and it confused the sales representatives. They didn't understand which version was the final one and made errors*" (P3). P8 in the bakery distribution team described a moment of genuine ambiguity that required immediate clarification: "*I asked a question and the answer was ambiguous. I was clarifying whether a promotion would start from the next day or not, and the answer was just 'yes.' But it was unclear, did 'yes' mean 'yes, we're running it' or 'yes, we're not'?*" (P8). What these accounts share is the observation that information exchange alone does not guarantee shared understanding: similar messages can produce different interpretive outcomes depending on the recipient's current context, role perspective, and processing capacity. This reflects the interpretive alignment challenge identified by Arnett et

al. (2021): when knowledge is distributed across members with different roles, shared understanding cannot be assumed from information exchange alone; it must be actively constructed.

Faced with these recurring differences in interpretation, participants in both teams described practices for building shared understanding before members acted on distributed information. In the wine distribution team, these practices were organized primarily around managerial verification. P4 described a systematic process of confirming collective comprehension before the team dispersed into the field: "*Everyone needs to confirm that the task or promotion is correctly understood. Once we feel that the whole team's understanding is unified, the team heads out into the field*" (P4). P3 described using verbal interaction as a diagnostic check: "*By talking through a particular question or situation and getting feedback, you can hear whether the person understood you correctly and whether they're passing the information on to the client correctly*" (P3). Communicating information redundantly across multiple channels was also described as a way to support alignment: "*The more variations of the same information I give to my subordinates, the more likely they are to absorb it quickly and avoid mistakes*" (P3). In the bakery distribution team, alignment practices were differently organized, distributed across the group chat rather than concentrated in a managerial verification role. P6 described repetition as necessary for retention, drawing on a practical belief about how people process information: "*Psychologically, you need to say something at least three times for a person to retain it and actually take it on board. So we repeat sometimes three times*" (P6). The same participant described a principled explanatory approach that aimed at understanding rather than mere compliance: "*My policy is: I don't just say 'the round one goes in the square box' without explanation. I try to explain so they understand why*" (P6). P9 described the group chat as an alignment mechanism that made individual clarifications collectively visible: "*everyone asks, and everyone gets answers. Because someone might not have the question yet, but they might later. So everyone asks, and everyone gets answers*" (P9). These practices reflect the communication properties identified by Schultz and Evans (2002) as shaping whether exchanged knowledge is coordinated in ways that support aligned action: frequency, directionality, and modality of communication all bear on whether shared understanding is achieved across distributed contributors. The difference between the two teams is analytically significant: in the wine distribution team, alignment was described mainly through managerial verification, as managers checked whether understanding was aligned before action began. In the bakery distribution team,

alignment appeared more lateral and transparent, because questions asked in the shared group channel made clarification visible to peers as well as to the supervisor. Both approaches addressed the interpretive alignment problem, but through different relational structures.

A central finding concerning interpretive alignment is what happened when members were uncertain but did not seek clarification. In the wine distribution team, P3 described a pattern in which errors went undetected when members assumed their interpretation was correct and acted without checking: "*No, they didn't come to me, they thought they had understood correctly, that the final version of the discount programme was such-and-such. But that was an error*" (P3). P2 described the same dynamic from the receiving end: "*No questions, because people thought they understood it, as they understood it at that moment. And then it turns out they understood it wrong*" (P2). P3 explicitly connected speaking up to the anticipated response from management: "*If I were to scold them, they wouldn't speak up, so you have to be measured about it*" (P3). P2 described the climate-reading calculation that shaped when members decided to raise concerns: "*Some sense it, some don't. Just as I myself sense when it's a good time to raise something with management, and when it's better to postpone the conversation*" (P2). The bakery distribution team showed a different pattern on this specific behavior. P7 linked clarification-seeking to the practical consequences of misunderstanding: "*Of course. Because I'm here to earn money. If I'm given a task and I don't complete it because I didn't understand it, naturally I'll earn less. And then the question will come back to me: why did you stay silent if you didn't understand?*" (P7). P9 described the same behavior as socially unproblematic: "*Nobody is embarrassed to seem like they don't know. That would be foolish*" (P9). Importantly, these accounts do not suggest that clarification-seeking was driven only by psychological safety; rather, asking became more likely when it was both practically necessary and low in interpersonal risk.

The difference between these accounts should not be reduced to individual personality; participants' explanations linked clarification-seeking to the interpersonal conditions in which questions were received. In the wine distribution case, leadership-side accounts suggest that clarification-seeking was climate-sensitive: members read the situation before asking, and in some cases chose not to ask. In the bakery distribution team, participants' accounts suggest that the supervisor's consistently explanatory responses helped establish a norm in which asking was expected and comfortable.

2.2.3. Knowing Who to Turn to and Asking for Help Across Roles

The most analytically interesting finding concerning who team members turn to for help is that shared expertise maps appeared to be shaped by team climate not only in their enactment but also in their development. Participant accounts suggest that longer shared tenure and lower-risk interpersonal conditions were associated with clearer and more efficient expertise coordination, indicating that PS may shape the relational conditions through which expertise maps are built over time, not only the willingness to access them once built.

Participants across both teams described a clear awareness of who held what expertise within and around the team, and described directing questions and tasks accordingly. In the wine distribution team, this expertise awareness operated at multiple levels. P4 described role-based expertise maps as an operational feature of team functioning: "*Within the team, yes. They know that for each company and each of our partner manufacturers, who to approach and with what kind of question*" (P4). P1 described deliberately consulting team members whose market-level knowledge was relevant to strategic decisions: "*I want to hear their opinion. The final decision isn't theirs, but their opinion matters, since they're directly in sales and know the market mood*" (P1). Critically, expertise coordination also operated horizontally between peers: "*The sales rep might not call me directly but call another colleague, a peer, and ask for help: how did you get out of that situation?*" (P4), a pattern consistent with distributed expertise coordination, in which expertise is accessed across the team network rather than only through hierarchical escalation. What distinguishes these accounts from simple task delegation is the reliance on others' specific expertise rather than generic authority, a pattern consistent with the TMS mechanism in which who knows what is as important as formal role assignment (Bachrach et al., 2017).

In the bakery distribution team, expertise coordination operated through a combination of the supervisor as a knowledge router and a set of functional specialists across departments. P6 described training team members to access expertise directly, bypassing unnecessary escalation: "*if they need to arrange an order to a specific location that's slightly off the regular route, the managers have the logistics contact directly and can sort it without me*" (P6). P8 described direct access to functional expertise as a default practice: "*If I need information from the accountant, I go to them; if from logistics, I go to them... We always work directly in the first instance, because it's much faster*" (P8). P9, with over a year of team experience, described having internalized the expertise map sufficiently to operate with minimal escalation: "*I've been working here over a year now, so in principle I already know who I need to reach. There aren't that many people, accounting, logistics, merchandise*

manager, those are three phone numbers that will resolve the problem" (P9). While some of this expertise coordination extended beyond the immediate sales team to functional departments such as logistics and accounting, the underlying coordination logic was similar: members directed questions to wherever relevant expertise resided rather than routing everything through formal hierarchy. These accounts reflect the TMS mechanism described by Bachrach et al. (2017): when members know where expertise resides and rely on it appropriately, the team can combine specialized contributions efficiently without requiring every member to hold the same knowledge. The structural difference between the two teams is worth noting: expertise coordination in the wine distribution team operated within a more hierarchically organized sales team, while the bakery distribution team's expertise coordination extended across departmental boundaries to logistics, accounting, and production, reflecting the broader functional interdependencies created by its multi-channel distribution model. Despite this structural difference, the underlying dynamic was similar across both contexts: effective expertise coordination depended not only on knowing where expertise resided, but also on members' willingness to access it. Participant accounts suggest that this willingness was shaped partly by PS-related conditions, because asking for help required members to expose uncertainty or knowledge limits.

Alongside accounts of effective expertise coordination, findings also revealed how perceived interpersonal risk could inhibit help-seeking and access to available expertise. In the wine distribution team, P5 described how strong professional identities could create resistance to help-seeking and admitting possible error: "*There are strong, powerful personalities, of course, they won't ask anyone. They all try to prove to themselves that it's not a mistake*" (P5). P2 described a parallel dynamic: "*There are people who are not ready to ask for help and not ready to accept it, seeing it as weakness*" (P2). In the bakery distribution team, P7's account revealed how past punitive responses to mistakes had shaped subsequent behavior, creating a private standard of self-resolution that reduced visible help-seeking: "*of course there was some scolding, naturally, for making a mistake, and there was a fine, and all of that, so now I try not to make mistakes*" (P7). P8 described a confidence threshold that shaped willingness to speak up: "*Well, if I'm confident in my position, then yes, very comfortably. If I'm less sure, I might still share my opinion, but I'll also see how others respond*" (P8). The accounts also show that help-seeking was shaped by more than team climate. Professional pride, confidence, and previous negative responses influenced whether members asked for help, but they became relevant to expertise coordination because asking

required members to expose uncertainty, dependence, or limited knowledge to others. What connects these accounts is the observation that expertise coordination requires more than knowledge of who knows what; it requires members to be willing to access that expertise, which may involve exposing uncertainty, dependence, or possible error.

A finding that appeared consistently across both teams concerns the time and repeated interaction required for shared expertise maps to become usable in routine coordination, and the relational conditions under which that development occurs. In the wine distribution team, P5 drew on nineteen years of organizational experience to describe shared expertise maps as a slow-building organizational asset: "*For it to be solid, genuinely working at 100%, minimum six months. That's a fact*" (P5). P4 captured the operational cost of inadequate expertise maps: "*If that clarity didn't exist, I think you'd lose around 30% of your day*" (P4). In the bakery distribution team, the same developmental logic was visible in both supervisory onboarding practices and field-level experience. P6 described a deliberate onboarding practice through which new members were introduced to the expertise network: "*When a new employee comes in, I tell them: this goes here, you call here about that, you ask this about something else*" (P6). P9, drawing on over a year of experience, described the supervisor as an initial expertise navigator whose role diminishes as members develop their own maps: "*If I have a question and I don't know who to turn to, I first go to Supervisor, and he tells me who to contact*" (P9), adding that at this stage, such escalation was rarely necessary. The key finding is not simply that expertise maps take time to develop, but that relational climate may shape how members participate in that development by asking questions, admitting uncertainty, and seeking input. Participant accounts suggest that these forms of candid communication were easier where PS-related conditions reduced interpersonal risk. This points to PS as relevant not only to TMS enactment, but also to TMS formation.

2.2.4. Leadership and Relational Conditions Shaping Team Openness

The three dimensions examined above: selective disclosure in information sharing, catching and correcting interpretive gaps, and knowing who to turn to for help, all involve behaviors that are shaped by whether team members perceive interpersonal risk-taking as safe. This dimension examines the conditions behind that perception in each team. Consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in Section 1.1, findings point to three antecedent conditions of PS climate: leadership behavior, relationship quality and tenure, and the norms around error handling within the team. These are not knowledge integration mechanisms; they are the relational conditions that shape how the mechanisms in Sections 2.2.1–2.2.3 are

enacted in practice. These conditions should be read together with the structural features of each case, especially supervisor structure and tenure profiles, rather than as isolated causes of PS climate.

Leadership behavior was the most consistently described antecedent of PS climate across both teams, and this connection appeared most concentrated in the bakery distribution team because climate-setting influence was located primarily in one supervisor. In the wine distribution team, the most direct statement of the leadership-climate connection came from P3: "*If I were to scold them, they wouldn't speak up, so you have to be measured about it*" (P3). P5 described a deliberate management philosophy built on democratic principles: "*Mine is democratic. That is, it's important to me that people are open. That's the most important thing*" (P5), contrasting this approach with pressure-based management that depletes rather than develops: "*You can pump up a team in pressure mode, hardness, for a maximum of about six months. But then a person's potential runs out*" (P5). The most analytically complex account came from P2, who described regulating team openness based on personal emotional state: "*Whether I'm ready to listen or not, whether it's hard or easy, it will depend on my state too*" (P2). This account suggests that, in the wine distribution case, PS-related conditions could be shaped by variable managerial receptiveness: opportunities for candid disclosure may have depended on whether the manager was ready to listen, rather than on a consistently stable expectation that speaking up would be safe. In the bakery distribution team, the climate-setting role of leadership was concentrated in a single supervisor whose behavioral style was described similarly across all four participants. P7 described the climate as "*fashionably democratic*", noting that the supervisor "*always tries to explain why a certain situation is happening*" (P7). P8 characterized responses to difficulty as consistently calm: "*Calmly, always calmly, because there are no unsolvable problems, we can always resolve things calmly and work things out with the partner. Supervisor always helps*" (P8). P9 specifically described the absence of humiliating responses: "*He never says 'How could you!' or anything like that. Nothing that would put me down*" (P9). P6 articulated a deliberate trust-based management philosophy: "*I work on the basis of trust. And at the same time, when I explain things calmly to people, I can also call them when I need something... in my experience, with this approach the results are better*" (P6). This comparison shows how supervisor structure shaped climate-setting differently across the two cases. In the wine distribution team, leadership-side accounts suggest a more differentiated construction of PS climate because multiple people in different roles contributed to it through their respective

leadership behaviors. In the bakery distribution team, the flat single-supervisor structure concentrated climate-setting influence almost entirely in one person, whose consistent style appeared to support a more uniform PS climate across participants' accounts.

Relationship quality and shared history within the team appeared to function as background conditions shaping PS climate, reducing perceived interpersonal risk not through deliberate managerial action but through the accumulated trust of repeated interaction. In the wine distribution team, P5 described long-term collaboration as the foundation of a climate in which communication was open without requiring deliberate effort: "*I've been working here for 19 years, I trust my people and my team, so, thank God, I don't feel that tension*" (P5). P4 described sustained collaboration as producing a climate in which constructive challenge had become a norm: "*In my sales team, each one of them is already a leader in their own right, constructive criticism is the only kind, and genuinely only constructive*" (P4). In the bakery distribution team, where field participants had shorter tenure, P7 drew on personal professional experience, twenty years in distribution, to describe a similar comfort with openness, framed as something earned through accumulated practice: "*I've already been in distribution for about 20 years, I've seen a lot... if something goes wrong, of course it's easier to admit it and move on, so it doesn't happen again*" (P7). These accounts suggest that tenure and accumulated experience may shape PS-related conditions in two ways: through shared relational history within a specific team, which reduces the social risk of candid communication with known colleagues; and through accumulated professional experience, which reduces the personal sense of threat associated with admitting uncertainty or error. The first pathway aligns with Newman et al.'s (2017) identification of interpersonal relationships as antecedents of PS, while the second points to accumulated professional experience as an additional source of perceived safety.

Norms around error handling within each team formed a third condition shaping PS climate, and the one most directly observable in participants' accounts of everyday team interaction. Where errors were received calmly and correctively, members described openness as easy; where they were received punitively, members described defensive behavior and concealment. P3 and P4 in the wine distribution team described error admission as expected and normalized: "*The team understands that you need to accept your mistakes quickly, not dwell on them, and move on and keep working*" (P3), and "*Well, everyone has the right to make mistakes. They accept it. Sometimes with a joke*" (P4). However, leadership-side accounts also suggest that this acceptance may not have formed a stable expectation in

all situations. P2 connected error-handling norms directly to a climate-reading calculation: "*Some sense it, some don't. Just as I myself sense when it's a good time to raise something with management, and when it's better to postpone the conversation*" (P2). This account suggests that where error-handling norms are perceived as inconsistent, members may develop sensitivity to situational cues rather than a stable expectation that admission is safe, a more fragile foundation for the open error discussion that PS enables (Edmondson, 1999). In the bakery distribution team, P6 described how error-handling responses may shape later openness, drawing on a parenting analogy: "*if you constantly scold a child, tell them how bad they are... over time they start hiding what they've done... When parents come and talk, explain, don't scold, in a trusting way... then the child and the employee are more open*" (P6). P9 described a supervisor response that maintained accountability without generating interpersonal threat: "*He says: please be more careful. Just that. Because further down the line there will be financial penalties... well, is he going to shoot me or shout at me? Of course not*" (P9). The difference between the wine distribution team's more variable leadership-side accounts of error handling and the bakery distribution team's more consistent pattern reflects the structural difference already observed in the leadership theme: where a single supervisor sets the tone consistently, participants described more uniform error-handling norms; where multiple leaders shape the climate, norms appeared more differentiated. Both contexts suggest that error-handling norms were shaped through repeated behavioral signals from those in leadership positions.

2.2.5. Discussion: Synthesis, Cross-Team Comparison, and Theoretical Implications

Across the four dimensions, the findings specify how psychological safety functioned as an enabling condition for knowledge integration in the two studied sales teams: it shaped the interpersonal calculations through which members decided whether to share uncertain information, seek clarification, access expertise, or admit mistakes. Each of these behaviors involved interpersonal risk, and its perceived cost was shaped by the team's PS climate. This pattern is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) argument that PS enables learning behaviors through which teams obtain and process information for adaptation. The contribution of this study is to show how this enabling relationship appeared to operate across three knowledge integration mechanisms in the concrete interactional context of B2B distribution sales teams. In practical sales terms, these mechanisms matter because they make customer-relevant knowledge usable for coordinated customer engagement through information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination in routine team interaction.

Crucially, similar dynamics appeared across both teams despite their structural differences in communication infrastructure, supervisor structure, and tenure profiles. This consistency suggests that the enabling relationship between PS and KI mechanisms may reflect a broader dynamic in interdependent selling environments, while the specific organizational structure of the team shapes how that dynamic is expressed.

This finding extends Lai and Yang's (2017) account of formal information sharing in an important respect. Lai and Yang (2017) argue that structured and traceable sharing practices support coordination by increasing the visibility and accountability of distributed contributions. The present data are consistent with this coordinative function, but point toward a contingency that their framework does not explicitly address: the effectiveness of formal structures as coordination mechanisms may depend partly on the PS-related conditions within which they operate. Where PS-related conditions supported candid communication, formal channels and open communication reinforced each other, structured routines reduced the interpersonal cost of sharing, and members used those routines to exchange substantive, candid information. Where PS-related conditions were less supportive of candid sharing, formal structures could produce what the present data suggest can be termed surface compliance: members completed the required template, sent the confirmation, or posted the update, while routing substantive uncertainty, incomplete knowledge, and error-relevant information through informal or avoidance channels, or suppressing it entirely. P2's account of hours spent on defensive email exchanges explaining fault attribution, and the pattern of employees bypassing their direct manager to bring sensitive information to head office, illustrate this dynamic directly: the formal channel was used, but not for the coordination purpose it was designed to serve. The implication is that formal sharing structures and PS are not substitutes for one another, nor are they simply additive. Rather, the data point to a potential interaction: formal structures were associated with more substantive coordination where PS-related conditions supported candid disclosure, but could produce the appearance of informational transparency without its substance where those conditions were weaker or less consistent. This qualifies Lai and Yang's (2017) framework by indicating that the coordinative value of formal information sharing may depend not only on the presence of structured routines, but also on whether PS-related conditions allow those routines to carry substantive disclosure. Future research could examine this relationship across broader samples and different sales contexts.

The finding concerning interpretive alignment adds nuance to the mechanisms developed by Arnett et al. (2021) and Edmondson (1999). Arnett et al. (2021) conceptualize mutual understanding as a product of communication quality, the argument being that when communication is sufficiently frequent, bidirectional, and rich, tacit knowledge becomes transferable across roles and interpretive alignment follows. Edmondson's (1999) account implies a parallel logic at the team level: PS lowers the perceived cost of clarification-seeking, and members who feel safe will ask when they are uncertain. Both arguments primarily foreground situations in which the need for clarification is subjectively visible to the member who needs it: the person experiencing uncertainty recognizes it as uncertainty and faces a choice about whether to surface it. The present data point to an additional problem that precedes clarification-seeking itself. In the wine distribution team, misalignments recurred not because members recognized their uncertainty and chose not to ask, but because they appeared not to recognize the misalignment at all; they acted on their interpretation with confidence, unaware that a divergence existed. P3's account is precise on this point: members did not come forward because they believed they had understood correctly. P2 described the same pattern from the receiving end: no questions were raised because people thought they understood, and it was only in the consequences that the misalignment became visible. This dynamic suggests that the enabling role of PS in interpretive alignment is not limited to lowering the cost of known risk-taking. Where clarification is normalized, managers explain rather than simply instruct, and asking is unremarkable, potential misalignment is more likely to become recognizable because the interaction norms create habitual checking rather than confident acting. PS-related conditions may therefore influence not only the willingness to surface ambiguity, but also whether ambiguity becomes noticeable in the first place, through interactional routines of checking, explaining, and questioning that a safer climate makes habitual. This points to a possible extension of existing communication quality and interpersonal risk-reduction arguments: in interpretive alignment, PS may matter not only for the expressibility of recognized uncertainty, but also for the recognizability of misalignment before action is taken.

The TMS finding points to a dynamic that is less developed in Bachrach et al. (2017): rather than treating TMS as a pre-existing capability, the present data are consistent with the possibility that expertise maps may be built through the same candid interactions that PS-related conditions support, including asking for help, admitting knowledge limits, directing questions to specific others, through which they are later enacted. Whether this reciprocal

developmental dynamic holds across different team contexts warrants examination in future longitudinal research.

The antecedent findings also point to a structural issue that is less visible in Newman et al. (2017): the degree to which PS climate is experienced as shared may depend not only on leadership quality but also on how concentrated or distributed climate-setting influence is within the team's structure. This distinction between shared and differentiated micro-climates, and its implications for how PS is measured in hierarchically complex teams, represents a direction for future quantitative research.

Taken together, these findings make two core contributions to the literature on PS and knowledge integration. First, they provide empirically grounded specification of how PS enables three distinct KI mechanisms in B2B distribution environments, a context underrepresented in existing PS research. Second, they suggest that formal information sharing structures and PS climate interact rather than operate independently, with surface compliance emerging as a possible boundary condition on structure-based coordination arguments.

Beyond these core contributions, the data point to three further dynamics that warrant examination in future research. First, PS may shape whether interpretive divergence is recognized as requiring clarification, not only whether it is expressed. This suggests an extension of existing communication quality and risk-reduction arguments that longitudinal and larger-scale studies could examine more precisely. Second, PS-enabled risk-taking behaviors may contribute to the process through which expertise maps are built. Third, leadership structure may shape whether PS operates as a more consistently experienced team-level belief or as a more differentiated set of local micro-climates. This points toward theoretical and methodological questions that go beyond what the present data can establish but open productive directions for future work. (For a full cross-team comparison across all dimensions, see Appendix E.)

Conclusion

This thesis examined how psychological safety enables knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams. The aim was to investigate the mechanisms through which psychological safety, understood as a facilitative condition that lowers the perceived interpersonal cost of risk-taking behaviors, shapes the enactment of information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination in routine team interaction. The study

developed a theoretical framework connecting psychological safety to three knowledge integration mechanisms identified in the team-selling and KAM literature, and examined this framework through qualitative empirical research with nine participants across two B2B distribution sales teams operating in Crimea.

The theoretical part addressed the first three research tasks by reviewing the psychological safety construct, conceptualizing sales teams as interdependent work units, in which selling outcomes depend on coordinated customer engagement across distributed roles, and specifying three knowledge integration mechanisms relevant to team-selling contexts: structured information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination through transactive memory systems. Together, these sections established the argument that knowledge integration in sales teams depends on interpersonal risk-taking behaviors that psychological safety can enable.

The empirical part addressed the remaining research tasks. The methodology was introduced and justified through a qualitative, theory-informed design based on semi-structured interviews with five participants from a wine distribution team and four from a bakery distribution team, both B2B distribution businesses operating in Crimea with interdependent sales structures. Data were analyzed using the Gioia et al. (2013) coding structure as an analytic scaffold, producing four aggregate dimensions that connect first-order codes grounded in participants' language to the theoretical framework. Findings were discussed in relation to the theoretical framework, and managerial implications and directions for future research were developed from the empirical analysis.

Findings across both teams were consistent with the central argument of the thesis: psychological safety shaped knowledge integration by influencing whether the interpersonal risk-taking behaviors on which the three mechanisms depend were enacted in routine interaction. Information sharing was shaped not only by the availability of formal channels, which both teams had, but also by members’ confidence that what they shared would not be used against them; interpersonal risk shaped what members chose to share, suppressing candid contributions even when formal channels were available. Interpretive alignment depended critically on whether members felt safe to seek clarification when uncertain; where the climate made clarification-seeking feel risky, members remained silent and acted on misinterpretations that could have been corrected. Expertise coordination through TMS required help-seeking behaviors sensitive to perceived interpersonal cost, and participant accounts suggest that the relational climate shaped not only the enactment of existing

expertise maps but also how members participated in building those maps over time. Leadership behavior emerged as the most consistently described condition shaping PS climate, particularly the consistency and constructiveness of managers' responses to mistakes and uncertainty, alongside relationship quality, tenure, and error-handling norms within the team.

Taken together, these findings make two core contributions. First, they provide an empirically grounded specification of how psychological safety enables three distinct knowledge integration mechanisms in B2B distribution sales teams, a context underrepresented in existing psychological safety research. Second, they suggest that formal information-sharing structures and PS climate interact rather than operate independently: where PS-related conditions were weaker or less consistent, formal channels could produce surface compliance rather than substantive informational openness. Overall, the findings suggest that the enabling relationship between PS and knowledge integration is conditional and structurally situated rather than automatic.

For sales management practice, the findings carry three implications. First, cultivating a psychologically safe climate is primarily a relational and behavioral challenge. Managers who respond constructively to admissions of uncertainty and error, explain their decisions, and remain consistently open to questions play a central role in shaping whether information sharing, interpretive alignment, and expertise coordination are enacted effectively. Inconsistency in these behaviors can produce a climate-sensitive dynamic in which members read the situation before speaking rather than engaging candidly by default. Second, formal coordination structures, such as shared channels, templates, confirmation routines, and regular meetings, can reduce but not eliminate the filtering effect of perceived interpersonal risk. They should therefore be treated as partial rather than complete substitutes for a psychologically safe climate. Third, team stability matters for expertise coordination. Effective TMS requires time to develop, and this development is supported by a relational climate in which members can ask questions, acknowledge the limits of their own knowledge, and seek input without excessive interpersonal risk. This implies that frequent team restructuring or personnel rotation may weaken the expertise maps that make distributed knowledge practically accessible.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The sample composition limits interpretation. The bakery case includes both supervisory and field-level perspectives, whereas the wine case reflects only supervisory and managerial views. Therefore, team-level

claims are stronger for the bakery case, while wine findings should be read as leadership-side perceptions. Bakery findings also reflect one local PS climate under one supervisor, rather than bakery distribution teams more generally. Interviews were conducted in Russian and translated by the researcher, introducing the possibility of nuance loss. The qualitative design and purposive sample of nine participants do not support generalization beyond the two contexts studied; findings are best understood as contextually grounded insights that can inform theoretical propositions rather than as empirical generalizations. The study is also cross-sectional, which limits the ability to trace the developmental dynamics of PS climate and TMS formation over time.

These limitations point to productive directions for future research. Future research could examine whether PS-enabled risk-taking behaviors contribute to the development of expertise maps over time, not only to their activation once established, a question for which longitudinal designs tracking PS climate and TMS development would be especially well-suited. Future studies could also examine whether PS shapes not only whether interpretive divergence is expressed, but also whether it is recognized as requiring clarification in the first place. Studies including frontline sales representatives alongside supervisors would provide a more complete picture of how PS climate is experienced across hierarchical levels. Quantitative research across larger samples of B2B sales teams could test the PS–KI relationship and the possible conditioning roles of team structure and leadership concentration, allowing the mechanisms identified in this study to be examined with greater analytical precision.

Overall, psychological safety matters for interdependent sales teams not simply as a positive team climate, but as a practical condition shaping whether distributed knowledge becomes shareable, discussable, and accessible in routine coordination.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Semi-structured Interview Guide: General Themes and Guiding Questions

Theme / topic	Main question	Possible follow-up prompts
1. Role and context	Could you briefly describe your role in the sales team, what you are responsible for, and what your most typical tasks are?	How long have you been in this role? Who do you interact with most regularly in your day-to-day work?
2. Interdependent work situation	Please think of a recent work situation where you depended on other people in the sales team, meaning you could not move forward without their information or decision. Please walk me through what happened step by step: how it started, who became involved, what happened next, and how it ended.	What made this situation require coordination rather than individual effort? How did you decide who to turn to? What would have happened if that information had not been shared?
3. Information sharing	In that situation, how did you share and update information so that everyone stayed informed (e.g., messages, calls, meetings, shared notes)?	Were there situations where important information was missing or arrived too late? How did you notice it, and what did you do next? Did you speak directly with the person involved, involve your manager, or decide not to act? Why?
4. Disagreement and critical feedback	Please recall a recent case where someone disagreed with a proposed action, suggested a different solution, or gave critical feedback about how you or the team were handling a situation. What happened?	How was the disagreement communicated, directly, via a manager, informally? How did you and others respond? What was decided in the end?
5. Asking for help and admitting uncertainty	Please recall a situation where you needed to ask for help, admit uncertainty, or where it felt difficult to say something important, for example, to raise a concern, acknowledge a mistake, or flag a problem.	What made it easy or difficult to speak up in that moment? How did others respond when you raised the issue? Is there a situation where you noticed a colleague's mistake that could affect a client, what did you do?

Notes: Interviews were semi-structured. The table presents the general themes and guiding questions used across interviews rather than a fixed script. The same broad themes were used across supervisory and field-level participants to ensure comparability, but question wording and follow-up prompts were adapted to each participant's role and to the concrete episodes they described. The guide was developed based on sensitizing concepts from the theoretical framework (Chapter 1).

Source: Compiled by the author.

Appendix B. Participant Information Sheet

Research Title:
Psychological Safety and Knowledge Integration in Interdependent Sales Teams

Researcher:
Kateryna Myroshnychenko
Bachelor's student, Business Administration
University of Tartu

The purpose of the study: This bachelor's thesis examines how psychological safety, a shared team climate in which members feel safe to take interpersonal risks such as speaking up, asking for help, admitting errors, or discussing uncertainties, enables effective knowledge integration in interdependent sales teams. The study explores how team members share customer-relevant information, develop shared understanding across roles, and coordinate distributed expertise (the "who knows what" in the team). The aim is to generate insights into the day-to-day team processes that support coordinated customer engagement in business-to-business selling contexts. Your professional perspective and experiences will help deepen understanding of these dynamics in real sales teams.

Participation in the study: Participation involves taking part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–50 minutes**.** Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the interview at any time without providing a reason.

Confidentiality: All information provided during the interview will be used only for academic research purposes and will be treated confidentially**.** The identity of participants will be anonymized in the thesis, unless explicit permission is given to disclose the participant's identity.

Recording: With the participant's permission, the interview may be audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Contact:
Kateryna Myroshnychenko
University of Tartu
Email: myroshny@ut.ee

Appendix C. Interview Consent Form

Research Title:
Psychological Safety and Knowledge Integration in Interdependent Sales Teams

Researcher:
Kateryna Myroshnychenko
Bachelor's student, Business Administration
University of Tartu

I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research.
- I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without providing a reason.
- I agree that the information provided during the interview may be used for academic research purposes in the researcher's Bachelor's thesis.
- I understand that my responses will be treated confidentially and that my identity will be anonymized in the thesis.
- I agree that the interview may be audio-recorded for research and transcription purposes.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D. Data Structure: From First-Order Codes to Aggregate Dimensions

Data structure: from first-order codes to aggregate dimensions

1st order codes (participant language)	2nd order themes	Aggregate dimensions
“Email is confirmation, I can always go back and look up any information I need” (P3)	Structured and traceable information sharing	Selective disclosure and filtering in information sharing
“Everyone needs to confirm that the task or promotion is correctly understood. Once we feel that the whole team's understanding is unified, the team heads out into the field” (P4)	Structured and traceable information sharing	
“You send an empty table asking them to fill it in, where all the criteria are already there, everything labeled, the columns defined, all they have to do is enter the data” (P1)	Structured and traceable information sharing	
“We have a group chat. We exchange information there daily, I share general information, and the managers, as they make progress throughout the day, also post information there” (P6)	Structured and traceable information sharing	
“If it's some very important information, I write that they must respond and leave a comment. So there's information that's just: please read and be aware. And there's information where: confirm that you've read it” (P6)	Structured and traceable information sharing	
“There's a constant back-and-forth of information” (P7)	Structured and traceable information sharing	
“I resolved my problem and wrote in the chat that everyone should update the programme, and after that everything would upload properly” (P8)	Structured and traceable information sharing	
“There were actual hours spent on those pointless email exchanges explaining why it wasn't my fault” (P2)	Strategic filtering and selective routing of information	

“Employees sometimes go to the head office and bring things there, information they don't want to bring to me” (P2)	Strategic filtering and selective routing of information	
“Whoever brings the information first, whoever 'reports' first, knows their version will be heard and the response will be based on it” (P2)	Strategic filtering and selective routing of information	
“Mistakes are still admitted with difficulty, people still tend to look for someone else to blame” (P2)	Strategic filtering and selective routing of information	
“if you understand you can resolve it yourself, well, maybe he doesn't need to know about it unnecessarily. You solved it, fine, OK” (P7)	Strategic filtering and selective routing of information	
“Today, for example, I sent the team a presentation from a new supplier who's approaching us, asking: what do you think, will this sell? Should we take it into our portfolio or not?” (P1)	Proactive disclosure and voluntary error admission	
“So we admitted our mistake, we still say it... yes, I admit it fully, it was our mistake, yes, we were wrong” (P1)	Proactive disclosure and voluntary error admission	
“Moreover, I can even announce them myself. It happens that I'll announce them” (P5)	Proactive disclosure and voluntary error admission	
“No, it's not hard. That comes with experience... We're all human. We all make mistakes and we need to learn to admit them” (P6)	Proactive disclosure and voluntary error admission	
“Why would I lie if I'm going to get caught in the lie? And I still have to keep working. How will people treat me then? I say: sorry, I made a mistake” (P9)	Proactive disclosure and voluntary error admission	
“Of course. Why would I be embarrassed in front of him? I'm not asking him for money, it's a work matter. I have nothing to be embarrassed about” (P9)	Proactive disclosure and voluntary error admission	
“Every employee, how to put it, has their own interpretation of any task or situation in their head. Sometimes	Divergent interpretation of shared information	How team climate shapes whether

it gets to the point of being funny, as if I'm speaking a foreign language, because they interpreted it completely differently" (P2)		interpretive gaps are caught and corrected
"It's like the telephone game, of course, differently. At the initial stage" (P5)	Divergent interpretation of shared information	
"Over the course of two days, the information about a discount programme changed four times. The volume of information, all different, related to the same thing, and it confused the sales representatives. They didn't understand which version was the final one and made errors" (P3)	Divergent interpretation of shared information	
"everyone constantly interprets information in their own way... a person is focused on something specific, they're absorbed in a task, some information comes in, they skim-read it, they associate it with what they're currently doing, don't fully take it in as intended" (P6)	Divergent interpretation of shared information	
"I asked a question and the answer was ambiguous. I was clarifying whether a promotion would start from the next day or not, and the answer was just 'yes.' But it was unclear, did 'yes' mean 'yes, we're running it' or 'yes, we're not'?" (P8)	Divergent interpretation of shared information	
"By talking through a particular question or situation and getting feedback, you can hear whether the person understood you correctly and whether they're passing the information on to the client correctly" (P3)	Proactive alignment practices	
"The more variations of the same information I give to my subordinates, the more likely they are to absorb it quickly and avoid mistakes" (P3)	Proactive alignment practices	
"Everyone needs to confirm that the task or promotion is correctly understood. Once we feel that the	Proactive alignment practices	

whole team's understanding is unified, the team heads out into the field" (P4)	
"Psychologically, you need to say something at least three times for a person to retain it and actually take it on board. So we repeat sometimes three times" (P6)	Proactive alignment practices
"My policy is: I don't just say 'the round one goes in the square box' without explanation. I try to explain so they understand why" (P6)	Proactive alignment practices
"everyone asks, and everyone gets answers... Because someone might not have the question yet, but they might later. So everyone asks, and everyone gets answers" (P9)	Proactive alignment practices
"No, they didn't come to me, they thought they had understood correctly, that the final version of the discount programme was such-and-such. But that was an error" (P3)	Unrecognized ambiguity producing confident misinterpretation
"No questions, because people thought they understood it, as they understood it at that moment. And then it turns out they understood it wrong" (P2)	Unrecognized ambiguity producing confident misinterpretation
"If I were to scold them, they wouldn't speak up, so you have to be measured about it" (P3)	Variable clarification-seeking shaped by perceived safety
"Some sense it, some don't. Just as I myself sense when it's a good time to raise something with management, and when it's better to postpone the conversation" (P2)	Variable clarification-seeking shaped by perceived safety
"Of course. Because I'm here to earn money. If I'm given a task and I don't complete it because I didn't understand it, naturally I'll earn less. And then the question will come back to me: why did you stay silent if you didn't understand?" (P7)	Variable clarification-seeking shaped by perceived safety
"Nobody is embarrassed to seem like they don't know. That would be foolish" (P9)	Variable clarification-seeking shaped by perceived safety

“Within the team, yes. They know that for each company and each of our partner manufacturers, who to approach and with what kind of question” (P4)	Shared awareness of team expertise distribution	Knowing who to turn to and asking for help across roles
“The sales rep might not call me directly but call another colleague, a peer, and ask for help: how did you get out of that situation?” (P4)	Shared awareness of team expertise distribution	
“I want to hear their opinion. The final decision isn't theirs, but their opinion matters, since they're directly in sales and know the market mood” (P1)	Shared awareness of team expertise distribution	
“For example, logistics, if they need to arrange an order to a specific location that's slightly off the regular route, the managers have the logistics contact directly and can sort it without me” (P6)	Shared awareness of team expertise distribution	
“If I need information from the accountant, I go to them; if from logistics, I go to them... We always work directly in the first instance, because it's much faster” (P8)	Shared awareness of team expertise distribution	
“I've been working here over a year now, so in principle I already know who I need to reach. There aren't that many people, accounting, logistics, merchandise manager, those are three phone numbers that will resolve the problem” (P9)	Shared awareness of team expertise distribution	
“There are strong, powerful personalities, of course, they won't ask anyone. They all try to prove to themselves that it's not a mistake” (P5)	Past consequences and personal identity shaping willingness to seek help	
“There are people who are not ready to ask for help and not ready to accept it, seeing it as weakness” (P2)	Past consequences and personal identity shaping willingness to seek help	
“of course there was some scolding, naturally, for making a mistake, and there was a fine, and all of that, so now I try not to make mistakes” (P7)	Past consequences and personal identity shaping willingness to seek help	

“Well, if I'm confident in my position, then yes, very comfortably. If I'm less sure, I might still share my opinion, but I'll also see how others respond” (P8)	Past consequences and personal identity shaping willingness to seek help	
“For it to be solid, genuinely working at 100%, minimum six months. That's a fact” (P5)	TMS development through time and climate	
“If that clarity didn't exist, I think you'd lose around 30% of your day” (P4)	TMS development through time and climate	
“When a new employee comes in, I tell them: this goes here, you call here about that, you ask this about something else” (P6)	TMS development through time and climate	
“If I have a question and I don't know who to turn to, I first go to Supervisor, and he tells me who to contact” (P9)	TMS development through time and climate	
“Mine is democratic. That is, it's important to me that people are open. That's the most important thing” (P5)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter	Leadership and relational conditions shaping team openness
“Whether I'm ready to listen or not, whether it's hard or easy, it will depend on my state too” (P2)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter	
“You can pump up a team in pressure mode, hardness, for a maximum of about six months. But then a person's potential runs out” (P5)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter	
“If I were to scold them, they wouldn't speak up, so you have to be measured about it” (P3)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter	
“I work on the basis of trust. And at the same time, when I explain things calmly to people, I can also call them when I need something... in my experience, with this approach the results are better” (P6)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter	
“it's kind of, how to put it, fashionably democratic, you could say, in that you can express your opinion. But he always tries to explain why a certain situation is happening” (P7)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter	

“Calmly, always calmly, because there are no unsolvable problems, we can always resolve things calmly and work things out with the partner. Supervisor always helps” (P8)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter
“He never says 'How could you!' or anything like that. Nothing that would put me down” (P9)	Leadership behavior as primary climate-setter
“I've been working here for 19 years, I trust my people and my team, so, thank God, I don't feel that tension” (P5)	Shared history and experience as relational foundation
“In my sales team, each one of them is already a leader in their own right, constructive criticism is the only kind, and genuinely only constructive” (P4)	Shared history and experience as relational foundation
“We've done a million joint negotiations together, I know how we conduct them, and they always come to something” (P5)	Shared history and experience as relational foundation
“I've already been in distribution for about 20 years, I've seen a lot... if something goes wrong, of course it's easier to admit it and move on, so it doesn't happen again” (P7)	Shared history and experience as relational foundation
“The team understands that you need to accept your mistakes quickly, not dwell on them, and move on and keep working” (P3)	Error-handling norms shaping whether admission feels safe or dangerous
“Some sense it, some don't. Just as I myself sense when it's a good time to raise something with management, and when it's better to postpone the conversation” (P2)	Error-handling norms shaping whether admission feels safe or dangerous
“In the past, admitting mistakes was very hard, really hard... I felt like admitting a mistake was like admitting you're a professional failure, like admitting you're some kind of loser” (P2)	Error-handling norms shaping whether admission feels safe or dangerous
“Well, everyone has the right to make mistakes. They accept it. Sometimes with a joke” (P4)	Error-handling norms shaping whether admission feels safe or dangerous

“if you constantly scold a child, tell them how bad they are... over time they start hiding what they've done... When parents come and talk, explain, don't scold, in a trusting way... then the child and the employee are more open” (P6)	Error-handling norms shaping whether admission feels safe or dangerous	
“He says: please be more careful. Just that. Because further down the line there will be financial penalties... well, is he going to shoot me or shout at me? Of course not” (P9)	Error-handling norms shaping whether admission feels safe or dangerous	

Notes: First-order codes are verbatim or near-verbatim excerpts from interview transcripts. Interviews were conducted in Russian and translated into English by the researcher. P1–P5 = wine distribution team; P6–P9 = bakery distribution team. TMS = transactive memory systems.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Gioia et al. (2013).

Appendix E. Cross-team comparison: PS climate and knowledge integration patterns across wine and bakery distribution teams

Comparison focus	Wine distribution team	Bakery distribution team
Information sharing	Formal channels (email, templates) helped reduce interpersonal exposure by embedding accountability into the channel; interpersonal risk redirects rather than prevents sharing, routing information away from direct managers when disclosure feels risky (P2).	Group chat and phone serve as primary channels with urgency-differentiated messaging (P6); selective filtering is pragmatic rather than defensive, with solvable problems resolved privately without escalation (P7).
Formal channels: coordination versus self-protection	Evidence of surface compliance: formal channels used for blame-attribution rather than coordination, with sensitive information bypassed to head office (P2); formal requirements met while substantive information is routed elsewhere.	Selective filtering present but instrumentally framed; formal channels used for substantive coordination rather than primarily self-protection, with solutions shared openly across the team (P8).
Interpretive alignment	Top-down managerial verification before field deployment (P4); clarification-seeking is climate-sensitive, with members reading situational cues before deciding whether to raise concerns (P2).	Lateral clarification via shared group chat normalizes asking across the team (P9); explanatory management philosophy supported checking as habitual rather than effortful (P6).
Whether misunderstandings were noticed before action	Misalignments went undetected because members acted on confident misinterpretations without recognizing uncertainty; the failure mode was absence of perceived need to ask rather than refusal to ask (P3, P2).	Consistent supervisor explanations reinforced asking as a habitual default, so uncertainty appeared more likely to be recognized and surfaced rather than acted upon in confidence (P9).
Expertise coordination	Hierarchically organized TMS with horizontal peer help-seeking across the team (P4); resistance to acknowledging knowledge limits present among strong professional identities (P5).	Expertise coordination extended to functional specialists in logistics and accounting; direct access to functional specialists is the default practice, bypassing unnecessary escalation (P8, P9).

Development of expertise maps over time	Minimum six months for reliable expertise maps (P5); data are consistent with expertise maps being built through the same candid interactions that PS-related conditions support and through which they are later enacted.	Deliberate onboarding routes new members through the expertise network (P6); expertise map internalized gradually over one year of open interaction, reducing reliance on supervisor as navigator (P9).
Leadership behavior	Leadership-side accounts suggest more differentiated PS-related conditions across leadership levels; P2's contingent receptiveness ("depends on my state") suggested a less stable foundation for speaking up, while P5's democratic philosophy and P3's measured approach provided pockets of safety.	Single supervisor's behavioral style was described similarly across all four participants' accounts; calm responses to difficulty (P8), absence of humiliating reactions (P9), and explicit trust-based management philosophy (P6) supported a more uniform local PS climate.
Relationship quality and tenure	P5's 19-year tenure was associated with open communication without deliberate effort; accumulated relational trust reduced the social risk of candid exchange with known colleagues (P4).	Shorter team tenure was partly offset by P7's 20 years of professional experience; personal comfort with openness developed through accumulated practice rather than team-specific history.
Error handling norms	Mixed norms: P3 and P4 describe a normalized admission culture, but P2 reports inconsistent norms requiring situational reading before speaking up, suggesting a more fragile foundation for open error discussion than a stable expectation of safety.	Consistently calm-corrective responses throughout; P6's parenting analogy captures the developmental logic, and P9 describes accountability maintained without interpersonal threat.
Overall PS climate	Leadership-side accounts suggest differentiated PS-related conditions across hierarchical levels; PS supported candid engagement where present, but climate-sensitivity meant members sometimes read the situation before speaking rather than engaging candidly by default.	More uniform local PS climate across all four participants' accounts; PS operated increasingly as a background condition as openness became a practical norm through consistent leadership.

Notes: PS = psychological safety; TMS = transactive memory systems. P-numbers refer to participants: P1–P5 = wine distribution team; P6–P9 = bakery distribution team.
Source: Compiled by the author.

Resümee

PSÜHHOLOOGILINE TURVALISUS JA TEADMISTE INTEGREERIMINE VASTASTIKKU SÕLTUVATES MÜÜGIMEESKONDADES

Kateryna Myroshnychenko

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö uurib, kuidas psühholoogiline turvalisus võimaldab teadmiste integreerimist vastastikku sõltuvates müügimeeskondades. Töö eesmärk on selgitada, milliste mehhanismide kaudu psühholoogiline turvalisus, meeskonnaliikmete jagatud uskumus, et isikutevahelise riskivõtmise tagajärjed on ohutud, kujundab teabe jagamist, tõlgenduslikku ühtlustamist ning ekspertiisi koordineerimist igapäevases meeskonnasuhtluses.

Teoreetilises osas käsitletakse psühholoogilise turvalisuse konstrukti arengut Kahni (1990) individuaalselt tasandilt Edmondsoni (1999) meeskonnatasandi operatsionaliseerimiseni. Töös kontseptualiseeritakse müügimeeskonnad vastastikku sõltuvate tööüksustena, kus müügitulemused sõltuvad erinevate rollide ja teadmistega liikmete koordineeritud panusest. Teoreetiline raamistik toetub kolmele teadmiste integratsiooni mehhanismile, mis esinevad müügimeeskondade ja võtmeklientide haldamise kirjanduses: struktureeritud teabe jagamine, tõlgenduslik ühtlustamine ning ekspertiisi koordineerimine transaktiivsete mälumehhanismide kaudu.

Empiiriline osa põhineb kvalitatiivsel uurimistööl, mille raames viidi läbi poolstruktureeritud intervjuud üheksa osalejaga kahes vastastikku sõltuvas B2B müügimeeskonnas, veini- ja pagaritoodete jaotusmeeskonnas, mis tegutsevad Krimmis. Andmeid analüüsiti Gioia jt (2013) kodeerimisstruktuuri alusel, liikudes osalejate keelel põhinevatest esimese taseme koodidest teise taseme teemadeni ja koondmõõtmeteni. Uuringu tulemused kinnitavad teoreetilist põhiargumenti: psühholoogiline turvalisus kujundab teadmiste integreerimist, määrates, kas isikutevahelise riskivõtmisega seotud käitumised, teabe jagamine, selgituse otsimine, abi küsimine ja vigade arutamine, realiseeruvad igapäevases meeskonnasuhtluses. Teabe jagamist ei kujundanud mitte formaalsete kanalite olemasolu, vaid liikmete kindlustunne, et jagatavat teavet ei kasutata nende vastu. Tõlgenduslik ühtlustamine sõltus sellest, kas liikmed tundsid end turvaliselt ebakindluse väljendamisel. Ekspertiisi koordineerimine nõudis abi otsimise käitumisi, mis olid tundlikud tajutud isikutevahelise riski suhtes.

Uuring teeb kaks põhilist teoreetilist panust ning osutab mitmele edaspidist uurimist vajavale küsimusele. Esiteks täpsustab see empiiriliselt, kuidas psühholoogiline turvalisus

võimaldab kolme erinevat teadmiste integreerimise mehhanismi B2B-jaotuskeskkonnas. Teiseks näitab uuring, et formaalsed teabe jagamise struktuurid ja psühholoogilise turvalisuse kliima ei toimi üksteisest sõltumatult: madalama psühholoogilise turvalisuse tingimustes võivad formaalsed kanalid luua pealispinnalise vastavuse, mille puhul vormilised nõuded täidetakse, kuid sisuline ebakindlus, puudulik teadmine või veaga seotud teave suunatakse mujale või jäetakse väljendamata. Lisaks viitavad tulemused kolmele edasist uurimist vajavale suunale. Esiteks võib psühholoogiline turvalisus kujundada mitte ainult valmisolekut ebamäärasust väljendada, vaid ka seda, kas ebamäärasust üldse märgatakse enne tegutsemist. Teiseks võivad psühholoogilise turvalisuse toel toimuvad riskivõtmise käitumised aidata kaasa ekspertiisikaartide ja transaktiivsete mälumehhanismide kujunemisele. Kolmandaks võib juhtimisstruktuur mõjutada seda, kas psühholoogilist turvalisust kogetakse ühtse meeskonnatasandi kliimana või eristunud kohalike mikrokliimadena.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION IN INTERDEPENDENT SALES TEAMS

supervised by

Veiko Valkiainen

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13/05/2026