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**Examining School Leadership and Teacher Wellbeing through a
Psychosocial Safety Climate Lens:
A Case Study in an Aotearoa New Zealand School**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine how leadership at different levels operationalises and transfers psychosocial safety climate (PSC) across school teams and how the leadership competence of school leaders supports the implementation of PSC. Additionally, it investigates how PSC shapes four common indicators of teacher wellbeing that remain underexplored in the PSC literature: teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy. This research builds on a growing body of PSC scholarship within educational settings that has provided new insights primarily into teacher distress, emotional exhaustion, and engagement. While recent studies have examined how various leadership styles influence PSC, limited attention has been given to how school leaders at different levels develop and implement PSC in practice.

A qualitative explanatory case study of a secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand was conducted, including data collection over a six-month period. This comprised the analysis of 19 organisational documents, 26 semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and three focus groups. Thematic analysis identified themes that extend theoretical and practical understanding by linking school leadership to PSC and to the four indicators of teacher wellbeing.

Three key findings were identified. First, this thesis demonstrates how the principal and line managers play a dual and collaborative role in employing leadership approaches to operationalise *existing* key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams. Second, this research introduces leadership competence as a complementary lens to the leadership styles literature in understanding how school leaders' skills, knowledge, and behaviours support PSC implementation. Third, it demonstrates how a

positive PSC environment may address challenges associated with teaching roles (e.g., workload, student misbehaviour, staff conflict) and create conditions (e.g., feeling valued, meaningful work, educator autonomy) that support teacher wellbeing.

Two emergent findings were also identified. The first emergent finding highlights the house system (mini-schools within a school) as a contextual factor that shapes PSC perceptions through co-leadership and workspace dynamics. The second emergent finding demonstrates how mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and worldview) provides a complementary framework for PSC through relational and holistic approaches to improving teacher wellbeing, guided by culturally responsive leadership within an Aotearoa New Zealand school context. Importantly, from a practical perspective, this research developed two leadership tools. The first is the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model, which provides a conceptual illustration for operationalising and transferring PSC across school teams. The second is the Leader Competence–PSC Framework for developing leaders’ capabilities and implementing PSC within a school setting.

This thesis proposes that the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model could support further exploration of how PSC is operationalised and transferred across teams within different school organisational structures. It also suggests that the Leader Competence–PSC Framework would be useful for examining how shifts in leadership competence influence PSC over time.

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attributable to the school's PSC setting, which appeared to contribute meaningfully to its inclusive culture and positive work environment.

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Definition of Key Concepts as Used in This Research

Psychosocial safety climate (PSC)

Dollard and Bakker (2010, p. 580) define PSC as the “policies, practices, and procedures for the protection of worker psychological health and safety (H&S),” reflecting a workplace climate free from psychological harm. The PSC of an organisation reflects the working conditions that affect employees’ psychological H&S and engagement (Dollard & Bakker, 2010) and largely depends on the policies, practices, and procedures that management designs and implements (Afsharian et al., 2019).

Educational/school settings

This research refers to educational/school settings as those within primary and secondary schooling only.

Leadership competence

Leadership competence is conceptualised in this research as “the knowledge and skills necessary for effective leadership ... whether due to natural talent or developed skill (or more often both)” (Sturm et al., 2017, p. 350), and that competence reflects what a leader can do, often through the manifestation of behaviours (Crossan et al., 2015).

Leader/leadership in school settings

In Aotearoa New Zealand school settings, the terms *leader* and *leadership* refer to individuals in formal positions of responsibility, such as a principal or line manager, as well as to the school’s collective leadership team. For clarity, when interpreting literature from other industries, this thesis consistently retains the terms *leader* and *leadership*. The term *management* has been retained when discussing management policies, practices, and procedures, as well as the four domains of the PSC construct (e.g., management commitment

and support), to align with the PSC framework. The terms *line manager* and *house leader* are used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

Teacher wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing is a multifaceted concept comprising cognitive, affective, physical, and mental components, and it is shaped by dispositional, personal, organisational, and environmental factors (Benevene et al., 2020). It encompasses multiple interrelated dimensions that develop through complex interactions between personal resources and organisational contexts (Collie et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Based on this definition and the teacher wellbeing literature, in which *teacher stress*, *job satisfaction*, *teacher commitment*, and *teacher self-efficacy* are well-cited (Gámez-Genovart, 2025; Zhou et al., 2024), the present research identifies these as *common indicators of teacher wellbeing*. Each of these common indicators of teacher wellbeing is defined below:

- ***Teacher stress*** is described as experiencing unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression (Kyriacou, 1987), which is most dangerous when it becomes chronic and unresolvable, leading to burnout. It is perceived as a negative indicator of teacher wellbeing (Bianchi et al., 2016; von der Embse & Mankin, 2021).
- ***Job satisfaction*** is a positive or negative evaluation of one's job or work situation (H. Weiss, 2002), which encompasses satisfaction with the teaching profession as well as with one's current school environment (Dicke et al., 2020).
- ***Teacher commitment*** is related to an individual's dedication and loyalty to the teaching profession (Jepson & Forrest, 2006) and the ability to remain resilient in challenging circumstances (Day & Kington, 2008; Zhou et al., 2024).

- ***Teacher self-efficacy*** refers to a teacher's judgement of their own capabilities in relation to desired outcomes for student engagement and learning, particularly when learners are challenging or unmotivated (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Psychosocial factors

Psychosocial factors are aspects of work organisation, design, and management, including work demands, organisational support, rewards, and interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Leka et al., 2024).

Psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards are adverse workplace interactions or conditions (psychosocial factors) that compromise a worker's health and wellbeing and which can lead to psychological and physical harm (Worksafe NZ, 2023).

Psychosocial risks

Psychosocial risks refer to aspects of “work design and the organisation and management of work, and their social and environmental contexts, in which a psychosocial hazard has potential for causing psychological, social or physical harm” (Cox et al., 2000, p. 14). Therefore, psychosocial factors can become psychosocial hazards when harmful, and hazards create psychosocial risks when they have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm.

Job demands

Job demands are physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort, which can be associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs and become job stressors (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Job resources

Job resources are “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that either/or (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (2) are functional in achieving work goals; (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 296).

Mātauranga Māori

Broadly described as Māori knowledge (Hikuroa, 2017), mātauranga Māori focuses on utilising “cultural principles (tikanga) to critique, examine, analyse and understand the world” (Kia Eke Panuku, n.d, p. 1). Originating from Māori ancestors, it includes the Māori worldview and perspectives, Māori creativity and cultural practices (Haar & Martin, 2022).

Tikanga Māori

Mead (2000) describes tikanga Māori as representing:

packages of ideas which help to organise behaviour and provide some predictability in how certain activities are carried out. They provide templates and frameworks to guide our actions ... They help us to differentiate between right and wrong and, in this, have built-in ethical rules that must be observed. (pp. 3–4)

Awhinatanga

Awhinatanga is defined as guidance and support for staff that is respectful and empathetic. It involves leaders developing a high level of awareness of staff and students’ needs and perspectives, and then taking action to care for others based on this awareness (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2012).

Manaakitanga

Within a school context, manaakitanga is concerned with “having a sense of moral purpose ... and a commitment to the professional growth and support of school leaders and teachers” (MoE,

2022b, para. 4). More generally, manaakitanga emphasises showing care, respect, and generosity to others.

Whanaungatanga

Whanaungatanga refers to establishing relationships and acknowledging the processes and rituals of encounters that enable a sense of belonging and connectedness amongst employees and promote decision-making by consensus (Bishop et al., 2014; Roche et al., 2015).

School charter

A school charter sets the direction for a school and identifies the priorities the board expects the principal to focus on. It is a key planning document that reflects a school's goals and aspirations for its students and staff for the next 3–5 years (MoE, 2025).

School house system

While house systems vary across Aotearoa New Zealand schools, the participating school in this research had a comprehensive house system that grouped teachers from different disciplines to collaborate in a dedicated area of the school. Each house functioned as an interdependent team comprising two co-leaders, 12 teachers, one house assistant, and approximately 250 students. The school had four houses, which operated as “mini-schools”. Therefore, this thesis often uses the term *team-PSC* to refer to the level of PSC within each house.

Professional learning community (PLC)

In this research, a PLC involves teachers and leaders from each house who engage closely and collaboratively throughout the school day. The main purpose of PLCs is to improve teacher practice through supportive mechanisms and to leverage staff expertise as an ongoing process of improvement (Cann, 2021). At the participating school, the staff and leadership met weekly

after school in PLCs to discuss teaching and learning challenges and to develop new pedagogical and pastoral initiatives.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

Amid mounting concerns about teacher wellbeing and retention, this research investigates the role of school leadership in shaping psychosocial safety climate (PSC) within a secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through an in-depth qualitative case study, this thesis examines how school leaders operationalise *existing* key policies, practices, and procedures to facilitate the transfer of PSC across teams, and how leadership competence, encompassing knowledge, skills, and behaviours, facilitates the implementation of PSC. The research further explores the impact of PSC on four common indicators of teacher wellbeing (teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy), offering insights into the working conditions that can foster a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

This introductory chapter summarises my earlier experience as a secondary school teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand and my interest in educational leadership, positive psychosocial work environments, and teacher wellbeing. It also outlines the research background, introduces the PSC construct, and describes the case study. The chapter then identifies research gaps, states the research questions and objectives, and justifies selecting the PSC construct as the guiding framework for this investigation. Lastly, it outlines the research scope and concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 Personal Statement

My interest in educational leadership, teachers' working conditions, and teacher psychological wellbeing stems from my six years as a secondary school teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand between 2013 and 2019. In my role as a teacher, I valued leaders who supported teachers in developing their teaching and learning practices, while also addressing common

classroom challenges and workload issues. In contrast, I felt less supported when these concerns were overlooked. Line managers also played a crucial role, particularly for beginning teachers, in creating a safe and trusting environment, prompting me to learn more about how they can shape perceptions of PSC, specifically within a school setting.

At the same time, I recognise the complexity of school environments and leadership roles, which involve balancing the needs of students, staff, parents/caregivers, and government agencies. School leaders are required to be highly skilled, not only to lead staff and be knowledgeable in pedagogy, but also to address pastoral issues, respond to parental concerns, and implement multiple internal and external directives. A senior leader and mentor once advised me to protect my personal time, reminding me that the demands of teaching are endless. Even with well-planned lessons and being on top of the role's extensive administrative tasks, there was always more to do. This advice remained true until my final day of teaching in 2019.

1.3 Research Background

Teaching has been consistently ranked amongst the most stressful and demanding occupations (Ashton, 2018; L. Robinson et al., 2023; Soykan et al., 2019). School teachers continue to experience job intensification and growing workloads, which require them to work after hours and increase their risk of stress and burnout (Hofmann et al., 2022; Stacey et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021). The profession has become increasingly unpredictable, complex, and fast-paced (Boström et al., 2020). For example, teachers have extensive tutor teacher responsibilities, which often include developing personalised learning plans for individual students, providing comprehensive pastoral support, and maintaining regular communication with parents/caregivers and students' subject teachers. Many teachers facilitate project-based learning while also teaching specialist subjects and leading co-curricular and extracurricular responsibilities.

Additionally, the role is subject to frequent changes in pedagogical practices and curriculum, often without clear direction and in short timeframes, as well as increased parental and societal demands (Day, 2017; McDonough et al., 2020). As demands on teachers rise (Hofmann et al., 2022), the issues that threaten their wellbeing increase, necessitating additional resources and a range of targeted interventions to minimise psychological harm. Moreover, poor teacher psychological health and wellbeing can be detrimental to teacher performance and student achievement (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Cherkowski, 2018).

School leaders play a critical role in addressing many of the challenges described above and supporting teachers' psychological health and safety (H&S) (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Day et al., 2020). Given the multiple challenges that teachers face in the workplace, they rely heavily on the competence of their school leaders, as leaders are responsible for a wide range of tasks and responsibilities that can influence teachers' psychological H&S (Arnold et al., 2023). Leadership competence is perceived by teachers when they feel both socially and professionally heard and supported (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). It also encompasses a combination of functional work-related (Handford & Leithwood, 2013) and interpersonal skills that support staff (Hauseman, 2021), as well as problem-solving abilities essential for overcoming challenges commonly faced in the role (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Collectively, leadership competencies such as these underscore the important role of school leaders in shaping teachers' perceptions of professional experiences and psychological health and wellbeing.

The challenges in attracting and retaining teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand schools are, at least in part, due to the demanding work conditions and their impact on teachers' psychological H&S. One recent survey found that the proportion of secondary school teachers resigning to enter non-teaching jobs rose from 16% in 2013 to 25% in 2023, and one in seven advertised positions had no applicants at all (Post-Primary Teachers' Association [PPTA], 2023). In addition, 44% of advertised roles had no suitable Aotearoa New Zealand-trained

applicants, resulting in 48% of principals employing untrained or unqualified teachers, and a similar percentage of teachers working outside of their specialist area (PPTA, 2023). In another survey, 58% of teachers said that they are either quite likely or very likely to leave the profession within the next five years (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023). More recent data found that vacancies at the beginning of the 2026 scholastic year had increased by 12% compared with the same period in 2025, owing to the large proportion of teachers nearing retirement (Cunningham, 2026b). An annual forecast in March 2026 showed a shortfall of 710 secondary school teachers, partly due to senior students remaining in school longer because of a lack of employment opportunities and changes to the vocational education system (Cunningham, 2026a).

The difficulties in filling roles and retaining teachers may also be linked to the recent rise of industrial action by secondary school teachers. In 2023, Aotearoa New Zealand experienced some of the lengthiest secondary school teacher strikes in recent history (Gerritsen, 2023). In 2025, the PPTA initiated further strikes, citing pay offers that do not keep pace with inflation, increasing workload pressures, challenging working conditions, and a lack of support for students with complex learning and pastoral needs as key reasons for the industrial action (PPTA, 2025).

Schools, like other organisations, are responsible for adhering to the Aotearoa New Zealand Health and Safety at Work Act 2015. The Act requires that employees be given the highest level of protection from workplace H&S risks (physical and mental), as far as is reasonably practicable (Health and Safety at Work Act, 2015). Relatedly, many Western nations have advanced workplace H&S legislation that requires employers to assess and control psychosocial hazards (Dollard et al., 2024). This has resulted in organisations needing to eliminate, or at least mitigate, psychosocial hazards (Hernandez Grande et al., 2024).

However, the extent to which individual schools can minimise psychosocial hazards remains unknown, in part because of the multidimensional challenges posed by the teaching profession and the working environment. While the Act may be aspirational and well-intentioned, schools are resource-constrained. Given that schools often employ over 100 staff and serve over 1,000 students, leaders must manage competing demands from students, parents/caregivers, government agencies, unions, and staff.

1.4 Background to Psychosocial Safety Climate

As an organisational climate construct, PSC refers to employees' shared perceptions of organisational policies, practices, and procedures regarding psychological H&S (McLinton et al., 2025). PSC comprises four domains: management commitment and support, management priority, organisational participation in H&S activities and policy, and organisational communication. Collectively, these four domains represent employees' perceptions and experiences of psychological H&S within an organisation (Bentley et al., 2021). PSC is strengthened when organisations and management promote a psychologically safe environment, which leads to favourable working conditions and a positive work culture (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). In contrast, when leadership fails to prioritise employees' psychological H&S, PSC is weakened and psychosocial hazards can emerge, potentially resulting in psychological harm (Dollard & Karasek, 2010).

Evidence indicates that PSC can be a leading indicator of workplace psychological H&S and often functions as both an antecedent to and a moderator of psychosocial factors, which can manifest as hazards (Bond et al., 2010; Loh et al., 2020; Yulita, Idris & Dollard, 2022). Consequently, PSC can help identify and address psychosocial hazards (Law et al., 2011; Yulita Idris & Dollard et al., 2022). PSC has also been described "as an antecedent to the cause of the causes of stress at work" (Biron & Boulay-Leclerc, 2018, p. 230) and conceptualised as an

upstream predictor of everyday stressors (Dollard & Bailey, 2019) and therefore can act as an organisational resource to buffer psychosocial risks (Garrick et al., 2014). As such, in high PSC contexts, where the workplace is psychologically safe, overall working conditions and work culture are positive, while psychological health problems such as emotional exhaustion, depression, and acute fatigue can be prevented or mitigated through organisational, team, and individual-level policies, practices, and procedures (Hall et al., 2010).

While effective management policies, practices, and procedures contribute positively to PSC, leadership has also been identified as a potential instrumental factor in shaping policies, practices, and procedures related to employees' psychological H&S (Dollard et al., 2017; McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey et al., 2018). This has led scholars to emphasise not only the need to understand how leadership influences PSC (Dormann et al., 2019; Zadow & Dollard, 2016; Plimmer et al., 2022), but also how this relationship helps explain why and how policies and procedures improve PSC (Zadow et al., 2019). More recently, Laloo et al. (2023) noted that the literature has largely focused on the influence of management practices and management support on PSC, whereas leadership's influence on PSC has received limited attention. These calls for greater attention to the impact of leadership on PSC have primarily prompted quantitative studies examining how different leadership styles influence PSC (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Mirza et al., 2023; Winwood & Kramer, 2020). Collectively, this research highlights that PSC is shaped not only by management policies, practices, and procedures, but also by different leadership styles. Section 1.6 outlines how examining other aspects of leadership may impact PSC, offering valuable insights for PSC implementation.

Quantitative research linking PSC to indicators of employee wellbeing continues to grow, particularly outside educational settings. For example, a strong PSC environment has been negatively associated with stress (e.g., Farr-Wharton et al., 2023; Juutinen et al., 2023)

but positively associated with job satisfaction (e.g., Fattori et al., 2022; Gan & Kee, 2024), organisational commitment (e.g., Hu et al., 2022; Gan & Kee, 2022), and self-efficacy (e.g., Brunetto et al., 2021; Maqsood et al., 2023). Many of these studies reinforced the pivotal role of PSC in mitigating the adverse effects of job demands and enhancing the positive effects of job resources, resulting in favourable outcomes across various indicators of employee wellbeing.

1.5 The Case Study

This research is a qualitative explanatory single case study of a public secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand. As Bryman and Bell (2015) explain, a qualitative investigation is an effective approach to gain a deeper understanding of the complex contextual and social phenomena present in organisations. A qualitative inquiry enables the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviours within their natural working environments, which are not easily captured by quantitative measures, such as self-reported surveys (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Köhler, 2016). For these reasons, a qualitative lens offers a richer, more nuanced interpretation of the processes investigated in the present research.

The participating school's principal leads the senior leadership team. The school is divided into multiple houses ("mini-schools"), each led by house leaders who, in pairs, co-lead their respective houses and serve as line managers for teachers and support staff. Each house has about 250 students and 13 staff (12 teachers and one house assistant). House leaders are responsible for integrating the school's charter and core values within their respective houses, overseeing the curriculum, monitoring academic achievement and pastoral care, communicating with families, and leading staff. While house leaders are line managers for their staff, they are also integral members of the school's leadership team and more commonly referred to by staff as senior leaders and mentors.

The school places importance on its varied curriculum; the many academic, social, cultural, and sporting opportunities it offers its students; and the close relationships it develops with parents/caregivers and the local community. Irrespective of house, the school's values are evident throughout, with personalised student learning exemplified in its charter and pedagogical practices. The school's buildings and learning spaces are significantly different from those of most secondary schools built in the 1950s through to the 1970s. Instead of each department occupying a specific area of the school, the design and organisational structure are based on the four houses, each occupying a separate building, which are connected by shared entrances. Each house spans two floors (see Appendix A), with standard enclosed classrooms on the ground floors facing shared learning spaces. Enclosed science laboratories and other specialised learning areas, such as art and technology classrooms, are generally located on the first floor and face shared learning spaces. Classrooms are separated by glass partitions and standard walls, which provide occupants and those outside ample visibility into the activities taking place in the different learning spaces on both floors.

1.6 Identification of Research Gaps

This research identified three main gaps in the literature. The first gap concerns how leadership at the principal and line management levels operationalises existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams. While principals are known to play a pivotal role in shaping school and individual-level PSC (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Winwood & Kramer, 2020; Viseu et al., 2025; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), there is limited evidence that demonstrates how principals support line management in developing PSC at the team and individual levels. Furthermore, the literature remains unclear about how leadership, particularly at the line management level, operationalises existing school policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC to team settings. A recent literature review identified a gap in empirical research within

educational contexts, highlighting the need for future studies to “disentangle” how PSC operates at school and team levels to inform more targeted interventions (Karatuna et al., 2025, p. 12). This is especially important in educational settings, where schools comprise multiple close-knit teams of teachers who report to line managers and work closely over extended periods, requiring effective interventions at multiple organisational levels.

The second research gap concerns how school leadership competence (i.e., knowledge, skills, and behaviours) supports the implementation of PSC. As noted in Section 1.3, educational leadership literature emphasises that possessing specific leadership competencies is essential for both positive student outcomes and teachers’ psychological H&S (Day, 2017; Lester et al., 2020; Weiland, 2021). However, while the existing PSC literature sheds light on how various leadership styles *influence* PSC (Athanasios, 2024; Dormann et al., 2019; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Mirza et al., 2023; Winwood & Kramer, 2020), it has not explored how school leadership competence *relates* to PSC implementation. Focusing primarily on leadership styles within the PSC literature, and typically in quantitative terms, may constrain deeper, more nuanced understandings of the relationship between leadership and PSC. As Wong et al. (2016) posit, only examining leadership styles can obscure the broader, more complex behaviours and attributes of leaders that are critical for generating richer, more contextual conclusions. Similarly, in a recent review of the leadership field, Liden et al. (2025) conclude that future leadership scholarship should seek to identify a profile of leader behaviours that vary with situational factors and follower needs – something best achieved through a qualitative, inductive lens. Hence, the present research seeks to provide rich, contextually connected insights into how and why specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours can support PSC implementation within school settings. Exploring leadership competence in relation to PSC shifts the focus from categorising leaders by predetermined leadership styles to examining competencies that recognise the complex challenges prevalent in contemporary school contexts.

The third gap identified concerns the relationship between PSC and a broader range of teacher wellbeing indicators that are well established in the teacher wellbeing literature but have received comparatively limited attention in PSC research in educational settings. Research on teacher wellbeing has consistently identified teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy as common indicators of teacher wellbeing (Gámez-Genovart, 2025; Hascher & Waber, 2021; Zhou et al., 2024). However, studies conducted in educational contexts have primarily focused on PSC and teacher distress (e.g., Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Karasek, 2010; Dollard & Zadow, 2018), teacher emotional exhaustion (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Karasek; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah 2022) and teacher engagement (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024; Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Garrick et al., 2014; Viseu et al., 2025; Yulita et al., 2017). In contrast, empirical research linking PSC to teacher stress (Boström et al., 2020; Viseu et al., 2025), job satisfaction (Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Viseu et al., 2025), teacher commitment (Winwood & Kramer, 2020), and teacher self-efficacy (Viseu et al., 2025) in educational settings remains limited. Furthermore, few studies have examined all four common indicators of teacher wellbeing in a single study. Finally, the qualitative nature of the present research addresses another gap in the literature and provides greater depth for examining the impact of PSC on teacher wellbeing.

There are also clear links that connect these research gaps. Collectively, they highlight a need to understand how different levels of leadership and leadership competence shape PSC in school settings and, in turn, how these mechanisms impact the common indicators of teacher wellbeing. In addressing these research gaps, this thesis emphasises the importance of examining PSC as a multilevel construct rather than focusing on the influence of an individual leader (e.g., a principal), and of understanding the implications for both leadership development and teacher wellbeing.

1.7 Research Questions and Objectives

In response to the gaps in the literature identified in Section 1.6, the case study carried out for this thesis investigated the following research questions:

1. How does school leadership impact PSC?
2. How does PSC help address common challenges in teaching and enable conditions that support teacher wellbeing?

The first research question is addressed through two objectives:

1. The first objective explores how leadership (the principal and line managers) operationalises existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams. This focus recognises the school context, along with the participating school's house system, comprising multiple close-knit teams of teachers who report to house leaders (line managers), and moves beyond the primary emphasis in current literature on school principals.
2. The second objective examines how leadership competence enables school leaders to implement PSC by investigating how specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours support its implementation. This is important because the current focus on the impact of different leadership styles on PSC may hinder further understanding of school leaders' specific knowledge, skills, and behaviours, as well as the outcomes of their actions.

The second research question investigates how PSC helps address common challenges in teaching while enabling conditions that support the common indicators of teacher wellbeing examined in the present investigation. The literature, primarily outside educational settings, has found that PSC impacts multiple indicators of wellbeing, although, as mentioned in Section 1.6, the depth and breadth of exploration across these indicators vary within educational settings.

To gain a more holistic understanding of how PSC relates to teacher wellbeing, this research explores the relationship of PSC with four common indicators of teacher wellbeing namely, teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy – in greater depth.

1.8 Rationale for Selecting the PSC Framework

While a range of theoretical frameworks (e.g., social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory, or the job demands/resources model) could have been used to examine teacher wellbeing, many of these focus primarily on individual or job-level factors and their associated outcomes. In contrast, PSC provides a high-level antecedent upstream organisational lens that captures how policies, practices, and procedures shape working conditions and influence psychological H&S (Afsharian, Dollard et al., 2023). As such, PSC is particularly well suited to this research, as it enables a multilevel (school, team and individual) examination of how leadership and organisational systems interact to shape teacher wellbeing.

Therefore, this research utilises the PSC framework for three key reasons. First, a positive PSC environment can identify psychosocial risks and predict working conditions and employees' psychological H&S across different levels of an organisation (Afsharian et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2024; Yulita, Idris, & Dollard, 2022). Schools are complex and dynamic social environments, and effective leadership at both the top and line management levels is critical for teachers (Boström et al., 2020). Exploring PSC within a school context enables a detailed analysis of how existing key policies, practices, and procedures are operationalised and transferred across different leadership levels and teams within the school.

Second, as highlighted in Section 1.4, the link between different leadership styles and PSC has been highlighted in the literature (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Dormann et al., 2019; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Mirza et al., 2023; Winwood & Kramer, 2020). This demonstrates that examining leadership and management practices as distinct constructs can reveal novel

insights into PSC. Accordingly, this research utilises the PSC framework to understand how another leadership dimension, specifically leadership competence, may enable school leaders to implement PSC.

Third, as also noted in Section 1.4, multiple studies (both inside and outside of educational settings) have shown that PSC impacts various indicators of wellbeing (e.g., Dollard et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2022; Maqsood et al., 2023; Viseu et al., 2025), and it has been found to correlate more strongly with psychological health than other organisational climate measures (Huyghebaert, Gillet, Fernet et al., 2018; Loh et al., 2020). Therefore, PSC provides a strong theoretical foundation for researchers to explore the connections between organisational practices and teacher wellbeing (Afsharian et al., 2025). This is because evidence suggests that PSC is a foundational factor influencing not only isolated outcomes but also the broader experiences of health and work amongst educators (Viseu et al., 2025). Additionally, the PSC framework has been validated across multiple sectors, including education, mining, and nursing, and in countries as diverse as Aotearoa New Zealand, China, Japan, Malaysia, and Pakistan. The framework's empirical rigour and flexibility demonstrate its suitability for examining the interplay between school leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing in an Aotearoa New Zealand educational setting.

1.9 Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is limited to the exploration of school leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing within the confines of the participating school. Other important factors, such as the school's size, location, and socioeconomic catchment area, are not the focus of this investigation. While this research prioritised recruiting a diverse and representative sample of school staff and leaders, participation was voluntary. Nevertheless, measures such as member checking, participant variation, researcher reflexivity, triangulation of data sources, and coding

tables were employed to maximise objectivity and transparency and to mitigate the impact of participant and researcher bias.

This research addresses gaps in the literature identified in earlier studies conducted primarily at the primary and secondary school levels, rather than in early childhood or tertiary education contexts. Primary and secondary school teachers have a relatively well-defined curriculum, set contractual teaching hours, provide extensive pastoral care, engage in regular communication with parents/caregivers, work mostly on-site, and have co-curricular and extracurricular responsibilities. In contrast, early childhood and tertiary teachers usually have less prescriptive roles and are therefore less relevant to the present research.

1.10 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. This introductory chapter has presented a personal statement, the research background, an introduction to PSC theory, and the case study context. It has also identified gaps in the PSC literature, articulated the research questions and objectives, explained the rationale for selecting the PSC framework, and discussed the research scope. Chapter 2 reviews literature on PSC, school leadership, and teacher wellbeing, and identifies the research gaps that inform this case study's investigation. It also describes how the literature informed the methodology of this research and where this thesis is positioned within the PSC literature. Chapter 3 then details the methodology of this research. The chapter explains how the pragmatist paradigm influenced the design of the case study, the rationale for a qualitative approach, and discusses the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and techniques used to ensure researcher reflexivity, transparency, and trustworthiness throughout the research process. Chapters 4–6 discuss findings related to PSC in the participating school (Chapter 4), the impact of leadership on PSC (Chapter 5), and how PSC shapes teacher wellbeing (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 explores the emergent findings from the case study, focusing

on how the school's house system and mātauranga Māori relate to PSC. The chapter also introduces two practical leadership tools. The first is the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model, which illustrates how PSC is operationalised and transferred across school teams by different levels of leadership. The second is the Leader Competence–PSC Framework, which is designed to support schools in evaluating and improving PSC through leader capability. Chapters 4–7 all relate their respective findings to the literature, offering theoretical, operational, contextual, practical, and cultural contributions relevant to other school contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. Finally, Chapter 8 synthesises the contributions of this research, discusses its practical implications for policy and practice, and outlines the limitations of the case study and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Chapter Overview

This literature review comprises three main sections, all of which relate to the research questions and objectives of the case study outlined in Chapter 1: psychosocial safety climate (PSC), school leadership, and teacher wellbeing. Each section reviews relevant literature and, where possible, identifies notable discrepancies and gaps in the literature, particularly within school settings. The literature was primarily sourced from Google Scholar and Scopus, using key terms for the search. In addition, the PSC Database (Afsharian, Dollard & Crispin, 2023) was used to identify many of the PSC studies cited in this review.

Table 2.1 outlines key inclusion and exclusion search terms used in this literature review to ensure a manageable scope while also maintaining a comprehensive coverage of the core concepts relevant to this research. The search terms were initially broad (e.g., “psychosocial safety climate” and “teacher wellbeing”) to minimise the potential exclusion of studies pertinent to this research. The search selection criteria were iteratively narrowed as patterns emerged from the literature. For example, a review of the PSC literature identified teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and self-efficacy as under-researched indicators of teacher wellbeing, despite their extensive coverage in the teacher wellbeing literature. This misalignment between the two literatures revealed a gap in the PSC literature, which resulted in the teacher wellbeing literature review being narrowed to focus primarily on these four indicators, while other areas, such as teacher engagement and teacher burnout, were excluded.

Table 2.1 Key Search Terms

Psychosocial safety climate and related concepts	School leadership	Teacher wellbeing
“Psychosocial safety climate” “Psychosocial safety climate AND teaching” “Psychosocial safety climate AND schools” “Psychosocial safety climate AND primary/elementary schools” “Psychosocial safety climate AND high school/secondary schools” “Psychosocial safety climate instruments” “Psychosocial safety climate AND wellbeing” “Psychosocial safety climate AND psychological health outcomes” “Psychosocial factors” “Psychosocial risks AND teaching” “Psychosocial hazards AND teaching” “Measuring AND evaluating psychosocial safety climate” “Job demands resources model” “Psychosocial safety climate AND health and safety in the workplace”	“School leadership AND schools” “Line managers AND schools” “Faculty leaders AND schools” “School leader competencies” “School leader competence” “School leader capability” “Role of school leaders” “Leading teachers” “Managing teachers” “Leadership skills of school leaders” “Leadership qualities of school leaders” “Effective school leadership” “Distributed leadership” (inside and outside of educational settings)	“Teacher wellbeing” “Teacher psychological health” “Teacher wellbeing AND “student outcomes” “Teacher wellbeing AND “student” “Academic achievement” “Teacher wellbeing AND pastoral care” “Teacher wellbeing AND workload” “Teacher wellbeing AND job intensification” The following key search terms were included in the search following a review of the PSC literature focused on teacher wellbeing: “Teacher stress” “Job satisfaction” “Teacher commitment” “Teacher self-efficacy”
Exclusion criteria - Studies that do not include PSC studies as the central framework unless closely related (e.g., psychological safety) - PSC studies that do not focus on employee psychological H&S (e.g., physical impacts such as musculoskeletal disorders)	Exclusion criteria - Most studies that were not conducted within educational settings to ensure contextual relevance to the present case study - Studies relating to school leader strategic planning and engagement with certain external stakeholders, as these are less relevant to teachers’ roles and their psychological health and wellbeing	Exclusion criteria - General employee wellbeing to ensure unique contextual relevance to school settings Following a review of the PSC literature, this literature review focused specifically on teacher wellbeing indicators (i.e., teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy) that are under-researched in the PSC literature. Therefore, the following indicators of teacher wellbeing were excluded: - Burnout - Emotional exhaustion - Engagement - Distress - Fatigue

A total of 87 PSC-related studies were identified as relevant to this research and therefore included in the literature review (see Table 2.2). In addition to the reference counts for school leadership (52) and teacher wellbeing (85), Table 2.2 also identifies the number of sources from outside the PSC construct that were reviewed in this literature review. Given the

close links between PSC and other job design and stress-related frameworks (e.g., the job demands–resources [JD-R] model; see below), this literature is included in the “Other stress/job design/climate-related sources” column. While the inclusion and exclusion criteria were generally applied, some flexibility was exercised in areas where extant research was limited (e.g., co-line management in schools). In these instances, relevant literature that fell outside the inclusion criteria was included.

Table 2.2 *Number of Sources Included in the Literature Review*

	Psychosocial safety climate	Teacher wellbeing	School leadership	Other stress/job design/climate- related sources	Total
Number of sources (excludes websites)	87	85	52 + 7 outside of the school setting	12	243

Note. Reference counts only reflect sources included in the literature review and exclude citations from other sections of the thesis.

2.2 Psychosocial Safety Climate

This section focuses on literature relating to the PSC construct. First, it provides an overview of its connections to earlier organisational climate and job design constructs, and introduces the four domains of the PSC framework. Second, it reviews literature that positions PSC as an organisational resource that promotes employee psychological health and safety (H&S) and critiques research conducted within educational contexts. Third, it examines the literature on leadership and PSC, as well as research on PSC in team settings. Lastly, this section identifies gaps in the literature, particularly within school settings that are examined in the present research.

2.2.1 The Origins of Psychosocial Safety Climate within Organisational Safety Climate Research

The PSC theoretical framework was introduced by Dollard and Bakker (2010) as a conceptual bridge between the work safety and stress literature (Afsharian et al., 2025). While PSC has been found to be a leading indicator of psychosocial work conditions, PSC theory was developed on the basis of earlier organisational safety climate theories (Leka & Jain, 2024) and represents a specific component of organisational climate. Safety climate, introduced by Zohar in 1980 (Dollard & Bakker, 2010), differs from PSC in that it focuses primarily on employees' physical H&S (Idris et al., 2015), through the management and prevention of workplace injuries, as well as their individual perceptions of the organisation's policies, practices, and procedures relating to workplace safety (Neal & Griffin, 2006; Zohar, 1980; Zohar & Luria, 2005). Despite the influential role of the safety climate construct in workplace H&S, Dollard and Bakker (2010) demonstrated that it had never been used to examine employees' psychological H&S as the PSC framework has.

Another construct, related but distinct from the PSC framework, is team psychological safety, which refers to the extent to which employees feel safe and comfortable taking interpersonal risks without fear of retribution from others or the organisation (Edmondson, 1999). Thus, team psychological safety refers to "a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking," which is largely tacit (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354). While psychological safety relates to a level of comfort or freedom from fear, safety in PSC refers to freedom from psychological harm and injury (Hall et al., 2010; Yulita et al., 2016). In addition to affecting interpersonal factors such as psychological safety, PSC also influences a range of other psychosocial hazards, including work pressure and low job control (Hall et al., 2010). Another unique feature of the PSC framework is its comparative measure, which compares

employees' psychological H&S with organisational production or productivity outcomes (Yulita et al., 2016).

Theoretically, PSC also extends various theories of job design and stress that precede it (Afsharian et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2015). While the job demand–control model (Karasek, 1979), the effort–reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996), and the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) explain the pathways through which working conditions influence psychological H&S outcomes (Idris et al., 2011), PSC has been shown to function as a high-level antecedent that shapes working conditions, employee psychological H&S, and work engagement (Bond et al., 2010; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Idris et al., 2011). Empirical studies generally demonstrate that PSC is negatively related to job demands and positively related to job resources, as it influences working conditions and protects employees' psychological H&S, through organisational practices, priorities, and values (McLinton, Loh et al., 2018; Potter et al., 2024; Zadow & Dollard, 2016; Zadow et al., 2019). Additionally, empirical evidence indicates that PSC predicts both the health erosion (poor health outcomes) and motivational (positive health outcomes) pathways of the JD-R model (Afsharian, Dollard et al., 2023).

In quantitative research, PSC is most often assessed with the PSC-12 (Psychosocial Safety Climate-12) scale, a validated instrument developed by Hall et al. (2010). The 12-item scale evaluates the four main theoretical domains of the PSC framework (discussed further in Section 2.2.2) (Fattori et al., 2022). As an evidence-based measurement tool, PSC-12 enables the measurement and aggregation of employees' shared perceptions of an organisation's PSC environment (Afsharian et al., 2025). Various studies have demonstrated that PSC-12 can be used across a range of occupations and amongst work teams within organisations to predict psychosocial risk factors and employee psychological H&S (Zadow et al., 2019). Additionally, benchmarks for organisational PSC are established using a Likert-type response scale, with a

low-risk workplace setting indicated by PSC scores of 41 or above and a high-risk workplace indicated by PSC scores of 37 or below (Bailey et al., 2015).

2.2.2 The Four Domains of Psychosocial Safety Climate

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the PSC framework comprises four domains that collectively represent employees' perceptions of PSC and encompass the necessary policies, practices, and procedures to mitigate psychosocial risks by prioritising employees' psychological H&S (Loh, Dollard et al., 2024). As illustrated in Table 2.3, PSC comprises (1) management commitment and support, (2) management priority, (3) organisational participation in H&S activities and policy, and (4) organisational communication (Dollard, Opie et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2010). PSC can be implemented and strengthened across these four domains by identifying and addressing potential psychosocial risks and implementing effective policies, practices, and procedures that enhance employee psychological H&S (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). While management commitment, the prioritisation of safety issues, communication, and employee involvement were commonly identified as safety climate dimensions in earlier constructs, the PSC framework is a specific measure that assesses all four components (Hall et al., 2010).

Table 2.3 outlines how each domain contributes to PSC and has been contextualised for the educational setting. For example, while the terms *production* and *productivity* are appropriate in a commercial context, they are less appropriate in school settings. Therefore, these terms have been replaced by *student outcomes* for the purposes of this research. Since different sectors have distinct competing priorities (Escartín et al., 2021), the schooling context generally prioritises student outcomes (e.g., academic, cultural, pastoral, and sporting) over productivity. Additionally, in the "Workplace context" column of Table 2.3, the terms *managers* and *management* have been replaced with *leaders* and *leadership*, respectively, to

reflect the terminology most commonly used in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, as outlined in the “Definition of Key Concepts” section at the start of this thesis.

Table 2.3 *The Four Domains of the PSC Framework Adapted for an Educational Setting*

PSC domains	Workplace context	
Management commitment and support	The speed at which school leaders take decisive action to rectify issues relating to employees’ psychological H&S	Dependent on the enactment of policies, practices, and procedures of the organisation
Management priority	The degree of priority that school leaders place on the psychological H&S (of teachers) compared to organisational objectives (i.e., student outcomes – academic, cultural, pastoral, and sporting)	
Organisational participation in H&S activities and policy	The inclusion, consultation, and participation in occupational H&S of various stakeholders, such as employees, unions, H&S representatives, including how well staff concerns are listened to and acted upon	
Organisational communication	The extent and effectiveness with which psychological H&S issues are communicated to employees	

Note. Table developed by the author based on concepts presented in Idris, Dollard, Coward, and Dormann (2012).

Management Commitment and Support. This domain assesses how quickly and decisively leaders respond to issues related to employee psychological H&S (Idris et al., 2012). It also encompasses the prevention or mitigation of psychosocial risk factors and work-related stress to which employees may be exposed (Afsharian et al., 2019). Furthermore, when organisations demonstrate a commitment to employees’ psychological health and workplace conditions, they are likely to create healthier and safer environments (Idris et al., 2014). The domain also emphasises that leaders should design jobs for employees that are not overly stressful and ensure leadership involvement in stress prevention initiatives (Dollard, Winwood, & Tuckey, 2019).

Management commitment and support are critical to developing and implementing timely, effective policies, practices, and procedures to protect employees’ psychological H&S (Biron et al., 2018). Targeted measures that focus on preventing or mitigating task-organisation

issues and work demands, as well as increasing social support, have been shown to reduce psychological distress (Biron et al., 2016; Mansour & Azeem, 2024). Leaders who are willing to learn about psychosocial risk factors, listen to employees, and take appropriate action to address issues are typically characteristic of positive PSC environments (Loh, Dollard et al., 2024). In contrast, unsuccessful or poorly implemented policies, practices, and procedures often stem from a lack of management commitment and support (Ipsen et al., 2015). In addition, commitment and support may not succeed without essential resources that enable leaders to implement effective policies, practices, and procedures (Biron et al., 2019).

Management Priority. The management priority domain reflects the extent to which psychological H&S is prioritised over productivity or production imperatives, typically through organisational policies, practices, and procedures (Loh et al., 2019; Potter et al., 2017). Research involving Australian frontline healthcare staff revealed that when leadership prioritised budgets and productivity over employee wellbeing, this was associated with a low PSC (McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018). In turn, these findings underscore how management priority can shape employees' perceptions of psychosocial safety within the organisation.

Conversely, participants in a study conducted at a remote Australian mine perceived that leadership had significant concerns about employee safety, which were embedded in the industry's culture (McTernan et al., 2016). Aligned with this, the literature suggests that top-level leadership has the authority to direct the implementation of policies and systems that support employee psychological H&S (Dollard & Bailey, 2019). This suggests that, within the mining context, safety culture is firmly embedded amongst mining employees and actively prioritised by top leadership, through regular employee consultation and participation (McTernan et al., 2016).

Organisational Participation in H&S Activities and Policy. This domain concerns the involvement of members at different levels of the organisation and across different interest groups (e.g., leadership, employees, H&S and union representatives) in protecting employees' psychological H&S (Afsharian, Dollard, et al., 2023). Allowing different stakeholders to participate in developing and enacting policies, practices, and procedures enables individuals and groups to express their concerns and suggestions amongst themselves and to leadership (Zadow et al., 2017). Organisations that promote H&S and encourage employees to be actively involved demonstrate strong participation in implementing effective measures across all levels of the organisation and throughout the intervention process (Idris et al., 2011; Nielsen & Brough, 2023).

Employee participation can improve worker mental health and address job stressors (Kobayashi et al., 2008). Staff participation in addressing psychosocial risk factors at work is beneficial for both employees and employers, as it improves employees' psychological H&S, increases engagement, and reduces presenteeism and sickness absence (Bailey et al., 2016). Furthermore, when employees perceive that their employers treat them well and care for their psychological needs through employee participation, it appears to improve staff skills (M. Lee & Idris, 2019).

Organisational Communication. The organisational communication domain concerns how organisations and leaders communicate psychological H&S matters to employees (Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022). This domain also focuses on how well staff concerns are listened to and addressed, emphasising the importance of reciprocal communication (Idris et al., 2012). Organisational communication can increase employees' awareness of the psychological H&S issues they may experience (Plimmer et al., 2022) and impact employee perceptions of PSC (Tappin et al., 2023). This domain also reflects how effective the communication processes are between the different levels (e.g., senior leadership, line management, and employees) within

the organisation (Bond et al., 2010), allowing leadership to monitor and adjust the degree to which their internal communication systems detect and correct high job demands and low job resources (Dollard & Bailey, 2021).

The importance of organisational communication is highlighted by a longitudinal investigation in Aotearoa New Zealand, which concluded that effective communication contributes to positive perceptions of the organisation's efforts to improve psychological H&S (Tappin et al., 2023). A commonly mentioned outcome of the intervention process was that participants "now feel listened to by the organisation" (Tappin et al., 2023, p. 81). Similarly, line management participants in Dollard and Bailey's (2021) study reported increased organisational communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, which enabled employees to be heard and to communicate effectively about psychological H&S issues. Not only did these systems facilitate mental health communication, but they also normalised it, highlighting the need for regular communication about risks to employees' psychological H&S (Dollard & Bailey, 2021).

2.2.3 An Overview of Psychosocial Safety Climate as an Organisational Resource for Employee Psychological Health and Safety

PSC is conceptualised as an upstream organisational resource that enables the allocation of resources and job control within the workplace (Gan & Kee, 2024) and has been shown to reflect the working conditions that impact employees' psychological H&S and engagement (Afsharian et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2024). Therefore, a positive PSC can act as a safety signal, informing employees how to use available resources and options safely, which in turn protects employees' psychological H&S (Law et al., 2011; Mansour & Tremblay, 2018). These preventive and supportive measures increase employee awareness of psychological H&S issues (Plimmer et al., 2022; Zadow et al., 2017).

A positive PSC environment is achieved by prioritising stress prevention and a participative culture in which various stakeholders contribute to psychological H&S decision-making (Biron et al., 2019). Job demands are regularly monitored by leadership, and effective communication systems at all levels of the organisation evaluate and manage risks to psychological health (Garrick et al., 2014). Leaders who identify psychosocial hazards by proactively ensuring that job demands are not excessive and that work is appropriately challenging for employees are more likely to develop a positive PSC environment (Dollard, Dormann, & Idris, 2019), which, in turn, can enhance employee job performance and productivity (Idris et al., 2015).

In positive PSC workplaces, policies, practices, and procedures protect employees' psychological H&S by being incorporated into organisational systems and employee job design, which enables safe working conditions during settled periods (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). In turn, these established systems enable leadership to respond appropriately and effectively when external challenges arise (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). Hall et al. (2010) also posited that in positive PSC environments, psychosocial hazards such as emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, anger, depression, and acute fatigue can be prevented or mitigated at the organisational, team and individual employee levels.

Conversely, in low PSC environments, psychosocial hazards may lead to psychological and social harm (Dollard & Karasek, 2010). For instance, in workplaces where leadership does not prioritise employees' psychological H&S, a high-pressure, high-demand work environment is likely (Idris et al., 2012). In such settings, leadership allows excessive demands to mount and invests little in resources that support mental health (Idris & Dollard, 2011). Moreover, Dollard and Karasek (2010) asserted that a lack of coordination and resourcing initiated at higher levels within an organisation could threaten individual employees' self-regulation, personal development, job stability, and work–family life.

However, some evidence suggests that PSC does not always function as a moderator of psychosocial factors. For example, Fattori et al. (2022) did not find a significant interaction between PSC and job demands in relation to burnout. In another study, Dollard and Bakker (2010) found that PSC did not moderate the effect of job resources on psychological H&S (i.e., teacher distress and emotional exhaustion). These results may be attributable to the studies' cross-sectional design. In addition, Fattori et al.'s (2022) sample had high levels of burnout and emotional demands, along with a lower level of PSC compared to previous studies amongst health workers (McLinton et al., 2019; Zadow et al., 2017).

The quantitative literature also indicates that PSC may not always serve as an antecedent of employee psychological H&S, as it does not consistently show a statistically significant effect on such outcomes. For instance, while Idris et al. (2014) found that PSC is negatively related to emotional demands and exhaustion, the same study did not find that PSC had a significant effect on depression. One reason for the discrepancy may be that the study used only a three-month period, so there was not sufficient time for depression to develop. In another study, Platania et al. (2022) reported that the effect of PSC on distress within healthcare settings was not statistically significant. As the authors of this study noted, there may have been varying levels of pressure and workload across hospital departments, which may have influenced both the extent to which PSC affected distress and the accuracy with which PSC could be measured (Platania et al., 2022).

More broadly, the types of discrepancies found in the studies above may simply reflect the complex, interconnected array of organisational, environmental, and social factors that combine to create psychosocial hazards (Harvey et al., 2014). Moreover, how the psychosocial environment impacts employees is highly dependent on individual differences, including each employee's experience and their cognitive and emotional processes (Rugulies, 2019).

Accordingly, it is unsurprising that the PSC framework, while highly valuable, is unlikely to provide an all-encompassing approach to mitigating and preventing psychosocial hazards.

2.2.4 Key Psychosocial Safety Climate Literature in Educational Contexts

The PSC framework has been applied in a limited but growing number of educational contexts; the studies most relevant to the present research are summarised in Appendix B. These studies have been conducted primarily in Australian, Malaysian, Swedish, South African, Greek, Canadian, and Portuguese primary and secondary schools. No studies have investigated PSC in an Aotearoa New Zealand primary or secondary school setting. This means that unique and contextual factors, such as Aotearoa New Zealand's school system, its bicultural heritage (a Māori and non-Māori partnership that ensures equal rights, status, and recognition; Hayward, 2023), and teachers' working conditions in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, could generate novel yet distinct findings.

Research from Australia (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Garrick et al., 2014), Canada (Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024), Malaysia (e.g., Nasharudin & Rui, 2024; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), and Portugal (Viseu et al., 2025) primarily supports the case for fostering a positive PSC environment in school workplaces. PSC has generally been found to mitigate job demands, increase job resources and, in turn, have favourable implications for teachers' psychological H&S. For instance, studies have shown that building PSC in schools minimises the detrimental effects of job demands, leading to improved fatigue recovery and teacher engagement (Garrick et al., 2014; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022). Moreover, as a workplace intervention strategy, PSC provides employees with greater resources to meet daily job demands, therefore acting as a buffer against psychosocial hazards, which may, in turn, contribute to positive wellbeing outcomes (Afsharian et al., 2025; Garrick et al., 2014).

Afsharian et al.'s (2025) Australian longitudinal study is particularly relevant to the present research. Not only is it a recent study, but it is also pertinent because Aotearoa New Zealand's schooling system shares many structural and contextual similarities with Australia's. The findings showed that improving low-PSC settings through workplace interventions reduced emotional exhaustion, helped identify and mitigate psychosocial risks, and protected teachers' psychological H&S, while employee engagement levels remained constant. However, the authors concluded that the interventions have a limited impact on overall PSC throughout the study's five-year period. Future research that undertakes similar longitudinal intervention studies outside of Australia would strengthen the generalisability of these findings across different cultural and national contexts.

There are also divergent findings across the studies listed in Appendix B. For example, three studies from three different education systems (Canada, Australia, and Malaysia) found that PSC was positively related to teacher engagement (Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024; Garrick et al., 2014; Yulita et al., 2017), while another Australian intervention study found no significant improvement in engagement (Dollard & Zadow, 2018). This could be due to methodological factors, such as Dollard and Zadow's (2018) mixed-methods design, the intervention workshops being spaced only eight weeks apart, the participation of only one education participant in the post-intervention interview, and the inclusion of human service workers in the study.

However, high teacher engagement and commitment, as well as opportunities for development, were found in Swedish primary schools with low PSC, high stress, and emotional demands (Boström et al., 2020). These disparate findings could be due to contextual factors. For example, most participants in the Swedish study had been in their roles for less than five years, suggesting limited long-term exposure to working conditions that could adversely affect teachers' work engagement and commitment. Furthermore, it appears to be one of the few

studies that specifically includes primary school teachers in its sample, suggesting that there may be PSC differences between the primary and secondary school sectors. Future research comparing PSC across the two school settings could provide valuable insights into sector-specific differences.

Multiple studies have investigated the relationship between PSC and teacher emotional exhaustion (Afsharian et al., 2025; Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024; Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Karasek, 2010; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022). While most of these confirmed the link between the two variables, Dollard and Zadow (2018) and Yulita et al. (2017) did not establish that PSC mitigates teachers' emotional exhaustion. Notably, Dollard and Zadow's (2018) investigation identified only one change in the control group, whereby staff concerns were acknowledged and addressed. These were reported at a higher level than in the PSC intervention group's capacity-building workshops, which did not lead to significant changes in stress factors or improvements in employee wellbeing. These findings were contrary to expectations, but this may have been due to higher initial PSC levels in the control group (Dollard & Zadow, 2018).

Despite being contextually different from primary and secondary school settings, Zinsser and Zinsser's (2016) dual-case study explored PSC in early childhood centres through a qualitative inquiry. This study highlighted that teachers and leaders can hold divergent perceptions of psychological risks and support. For example, teachers at both centres reported feeling inadequately supported, while leadership gave examples of how they believed they were supporting their staff. The qualitative analysis of this study also emphasised how contextual factors within each early childhood centre shape these perceptions, underlining the influential role of leadership in influencing workplace culture and PSC.

However, what remains unclear in the literature conducted within primary and secondary school settings is the operationalisation of *existing* policies, practices, and procedures. For example, Dollard and Karasek (2010) identified school discipline, standards, interpersonal demands, student welfare, role clarity, professional development, workload, resources and facilities, health and wellbeing, and communication and consultation as activities requiring changes to policy, practices, and procedures to improve PSC. Yulita, Idris, and Dollard (2022), meanwhile, found that positive PSC creates conditions that enhance psychological detachment and relaxation on weekends and reduce emotional exhaustion. However, neither study provided specific details or explained *how* the schools' existing policies, practices, and procedures were operationalised to produce the reported outcomes through a positive PSC environment.

As mentioned above, Afsharian et al.'s (2025) five-year intervention study, which focused on improving PSC to reduce emotional exhaustion and stabilise engagement, has provided greater insight into the specific policies, practices, and procedures implemented in the investigation. For instance, the study highlighted that building and maintaining collegial and supportive networks, creating a safety culture and a safe space to raise concerns, and clear and transparent workplace communication were the practices and procedures that had the greatest impact on improving PSC (Afsharian et al., 2025). Clarifying how school leaders operationalise a school's existing practices and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams, and how leadership competence enables the implementation of PSC when examined through a qualitative lens, may provide a valuable extension to this comprehensive intervention study.

2.2.5 Leadership in PSC Literature

In relation to leadership, the literature generally focuses on how a positive PSC setting enables effective leadership behaviours and management practices, rather than examining how leadership impacts PSC (Laloo et al., 2023). Research suggests that leadership quality can be

determined by an organisation's PSC (Biron et al., 2018), as it can positively influence leadership behaviours (Berglund et al., 2024; Plimmer et al., 2022). However, as noted in Section 1.4, calls for further investigation of the reverse relationship – the impact of leadership on PSC – have prompted a limited yet growing body of research examining how different leadership styles affect PSC.

Two such studies have been conducted in educational settings (Athanasios, 2024; Winwood & Kramer, 2020). One suggested that servant leadership could be pivotal in cultivating a high-performing workplace and that teacher leadership may play a crucial role in nurturing a positive psychosocial environment (Athanasios, 2024). While this research is a much-needed contribution to the PSC literature in educational settings, its focus on teacher leadership and PSC, specifically leaders who do not necessarily hold more formal line management responsibilities, limits the applicability of its findings to broader school leadership and organisational structures. Therefore, teacher leaders and line managers are likely to have varying degrees of influence on PSC.

The second study found that principal-caring school leadership has a direct effect on school morale, raising overall PSC by building and maintaining high PSC values (Winwood & Kramer, 2020). Additionally, PSC moderates the development of preventable, work-related maladaptive stress and its adverse outcomes for teachers. PSC was also found to be strongly and positively correlated with resources and affective commitment, and negatively correlated with bullying, fatigue, and staff abuse. Like many other school-based PSC studies, this investigation focused solely on the impact of principals' caring school leadership on PSC. While principals are highly influential in shaping school-level PSC, this study neglects the pivotal role of line management in operationalising and transferring PSC across school teams.

While not a leadership style in the traditional sense, PSC leadership, which involves implementing policies, practices, and procedures related to prioritising psychological H&S, enabled line managers in healthcare settings to transmit and shape PSC as directed by senior leadership (Loh et al., 2021). PSC levels increased over time and were positively influenced by PSC leadership, whereas transformational leadership had a negligible effect on PSC. Therefore, leaders' values and actions for psychological H&S are important in building and sustaining strength, as they can reinforce PSC certainty and its safety-signalling effect (Loh et al., 2021). Relatedly, Plimmer et al. (2022) concluded that fostering constructive leadership behaviours amongst line managers mediated the direct relationships between organisational PSC and exposure to workplace bullying.

Ethical leadership also appears to promote a worker-centred leadership ethos, which could lead to stronger PSC, as its primary goal is to advance workers' human rights and dignity. While the study could not confirm a causal link, ethical leadership practices may mitigate workplace corruption and facilitate PSC (Dollard & Jain, 2019). Conversely, Laloo et al. (2025) found that while ethical leadership did not influence PSC, authentic leadership had a positive and significant impact on it, underscoring the variability in the findings between the two studies. These differences may be due to the fact that Dollard and Jain (2019) did not specifically examine the link between ethical leadership and PSC, whereas Laloo et al.'s (2025) investigation included the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire by Yukl et al. (2013).

Wiklund's (2023) qualitative study appears to be one of the few investigations to examine the impact of a school principal's leadership on PSC without focusing on specific leadership styles. It identifies key leadership measures that promote a psychologically safe workplace for teachers, including prioritising PSC, fostering effective communication, and addressing everyday employee concerns. Despite these valuable findings, this study has two significant limitations. Firstly, it only encompasses principals' perceptions of the relationship

between leadership practices and PSC, as teachers were not included in the sample. This represents a substantial limitation, as teachers may not only hold different perceptions from principals regarding which leadership practices promote a positive PSC, but also differ in their understanding of what constitutes a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. The second limitation is that teachers in medium to large-sized primary and secondary schools usually work in teams and report directly to a line manager rather than to the principal. Therefore, teachers in medium and large schools typically have less direct contact with their principal than with their line manager, a factor that neither Wiklund's (2023) study nor many others account for.

The growing interest in the impact of leadership styles on PSC emphasises two important points relevant to the present research. Firstly, it demonstrates that leadership does indeed impact PSC and that investigating it separately from management practices and support can generate novel insights into which leadership styles facilitate PSC and which may inhibit it. Secondly, because existing studies have examined how various leadership styles impact PSC (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Dollard & Jain, 2019; Laloo et al., 2025; Mirza et al., 2023; Winwood & Kramer, 2020), exploring a broader range of leadership dimensions, such as competence, may elucidate new insights as to how leadership can shape PSC.

2.2.6 Psychosocial Safety Climate within Team Settings

A number of studies have revealed valuable insights in relation to team-level PSC (e.g., Berglund et al., 2024; Fattori et al., 2022; Loh et al., 2021; Omid et al., 2022; Plimmer et al., 2022; Potter et al., 2019), including the role of line management in determining the likelihood of a psychosocial risk occurring (Escartín et al., 2021). These studies are important because PSC can vary across teams, as one line manager may be less consistent in implementing policies, practices, and procedures than another (Afsharian et al., 2018). Importantly, team-level factors, such as line management, account for a significant proportion of PSC variance between teams

(Krasniqi et al., 2019), reinforcing earlier PSC evidence that all levels of the organisation should work towards stress prevention (Hall et al., 2010).

Therefore, the role of line managers in enacting PSC has implications for working conditions and engagement within team settings (Afsharian et al., 2018). For instance, line managers influence team-level PSC and set expectations regarding appropriate work behaviour and the promotion of psychological H&S (Escartín et al., 2021). When line managers increase resources and communication, employees' perceptions of PSC increase, and psychosocial risks decrease (Berglund et al., 2024; Dollard & Bailey, 2021). Similarly, line managers who actively support and prioritise employees' psychological H&S practise swift implementation of relevant policies and procedures (Potter et al., 2019).

However, despite the best intentions of line management, the prioritisation and commitment of senior management remain important factors in determining line management's ability and political will to implement PSC within their teams (Dollard & Bailey, 2021; Escartín et al., 2021; Krasniqi et al., 2019). Therefore, when a high organisational PSC is developed and driven by senior leadership, it has a positive and significant impact on line management support in reducing emotional demands that require sustained psychological effort from employees (Krasniqi et al., 2019). While line management can impact team-level PSC, a determining factor is the organisation's starting PSC context, set by senior leadership, which can empower line managers to implement policies, practices, and procedures that can protect employees' psychological H&S (Loh et al., 2021).

When top leadership demonstrates explicit concern for the wider psychological H&S of their employees, they encourage their line managers to do the same (Plimmer et al., 2022). Relatedly, in positive organisational-level PSC contexts, line managers can sustain positive team-level PSC, ensuring that it reflects the priorities and behaviours set by senior leadership

and the wider organisation (Loh et al., 2021; Plimmer et al., 2022). However, irrespective of how the climate is shaped at the higher organisational level, line managers who lead teams may still play an influential role over team climate (Loh et al., 2021).

2.2.7 Gaps in Psychosocial Safety Climate Literature Relating to School Leadership and Qualitative Research

The present research identifies three key gaps in the PSC literature, which it endeavours to address. First, while studies have examined school and individual-level PSC (Afsharian et al., 2025; Boström et al., 2020; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Karasek, 2010; Wiklund, 2023; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), little is known about how principals and other school leaders with significant line management responsibilities operationalise *existing* key policies, practices, and procedures so that PSC can be successfully transferred across school teams. Although the literature emphasises the importance of implementing effective policies, practices, and procedures to strengthen PSC in school settings (Winwood & Kramer, 2020; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), it offers limited clarity about the specific mechanisms by which school leadership at different levels operationalise them. Thus, exploring this under-researched area has the potential to generate important findings and practical implications for school leaders and teachers working in team settings.

Secondly, a growing number of studies have investigated how leadership influences PSC (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Dollard & Jain, 2019; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Winwood & Kramer, 2020). However, this literature has largely focused on leadership styles rather than other leadership dimensions. Despite leadership being a conceptually broad and complex construct, this narrow focus on leadership styles may constrain deeper, more nuanced behaviours and attributes of leaders (Wong et al., 2016), which, in turn, may influence PSC. Furthermore, leadership is better understood by examining profiles of leader behaviours and skills that vary in response to contextual conditions and the needs of those being led, rather than

relying on leadership-style survey-based measures (Liden et al., 2025). The present research responds to these methodological concerns by adopting a predominantly inductive approach to identifying leadership profiles, which provides richer, more contextual insights into how specific leadership competencies (defined as skills, knowledge, and behaviours) enable the implementation of PSC in practice within an educational setting.

Thirdly, there is a distinct lack of qualitative studies in the PSC literature in school settings. Consequently, quantitative PSC scholars have also called for more qualitative research in educational workplaces. For example, they have recently argued that despite the profession's high stress levels, there is a lack of qualitative research specifically focused on PSC in educational settings (Dong et al., 2024; Karatuna et al., 2025). While Hall et al.'s (2010) PSC-12 scale provides a comprehensive understanding of how organisational factors contribute to the development of risks and hazards and helps guide intervention and prevention strategies (Leka & Jain, 2024), it may lead to a narrow-dimensional understanding, limiting insight into the broader and more contextual implications of PSC. Thus, qualitative case study research that includes interviews and focus groups may offer deeper insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of both teachers and leaders, potentially establishing a link between leadership and PSC (Athanasios, 2024).

The gaps identified above highlight a disjointed understanding of how PSC functions within school settings. In particular, limited attention has been given to how leadership operationalisation and leadership competence shape PSC across organisational levels. Despite PSC's strong empirical evidence as an important organisational resource, less attention has been given to existing policies and practices enacted in schools. In particular, the role of leadership at the line management level in translating PSC into everyday practice remains underexplored, reinforcing the need for a more integrated and qualitative investigation.

2.2.8 Summary of Psychosocial Safety Climate Literature Review Section

PSC research builds on earlier job design and stress frameworks, and the literature suggests that the construct is an antecedent of psychosocial hazards and employee psychological H&S. As a key indicator of working conditions, PSC can support the enactment of interventions that mitigate the risk of psychological harm. In school contexts, research has generally shown that PSC is negatively associated with teacher emotional exhaustion and distress, but positively associated with engagement. In relation to leadership, research has predominantly focused on the impact of PSC on leadership quality. However, recent literature, largely conducted outside educational contexts, has examined the influence of different leadership styles on PSC. Therefore, PSC research in educational settings is limited by its scarce attention to how different levels of leadership operationalise and transfer PSC across teams, a narrow focus on leadership styles rather than broader leadership influences, and a lack of qualitative studies examining how leadership shapes PSC.

2.3 Leadership Competence and the Role of School Leaders in Supporting Teachers in the Workplace

This section reviews the literature on school leadership and its impact on teachers' working conditions, as well as the shift towards more distributed leadership in response to greater school autonomy, external accountability, and the growing internal and external challenges schools face. It examines the literature on the importance of leadership competence in educational settings and how possessing diverse skills, knowledge, and behaviours (the definition of leadership competence used in this thesis) may enable its application in everyday practice despite the multidimensional nature of these roles. The section also reviews the role of leadership in fostering supportive environments and positive workplace cultures, and examines

how leadership decisions regarding structural and policy changes shape teachers' perceptions of leadership competence and teacher wellbeing.

2.3.1 Distributing the Burdens of School Leadership through Leadership Competence

Leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, depending on school size, typically comprises the principal and multiple other leaders who hold significant line management responsibilities. Collectively, leadership across all levels is responsible for the governance and implementation of school policy, as well as the development of new learning and pastoral initiatives (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Shaked, 2025; Turner & Sykes, 2007), resulting in schools increasingly adopting shared or distributed leadership frameworks (Benoliel, 2017; A. Harris et al., 2022). These changes to school organisational structure were, in part, a response to the 1989 Tomorrow's Schools reforms, which saw schools converted into self-managing institutions responsible for designing their own charters (Fullan, 2015; Openshaw, 2014). These widespread reforms led to greater autonomy and higher expectations placed on schools, increasing leaders' workloads (McGee & Hampton, 1996; Wylie, 1995) and requiring larger and more distributed leadership teams. Therefore, the leadership function has been described as a tool, "to share and spread the burdens of school leadership" (Cardno & Tetzlaff, 2017, p. 70).

As leadership teams have expanded, school principals require leadership competencies specific to educational settings to effectively influence and support their school leaders. For example, principals must demonstrate an ability to set pedagogical directions and goals to facilitate school success, enabling other leaders to adopt and implement these in their own leadership practice (Cardno & Tetzlaff, 2017; Currie et al., 2009). Principals also need to serve as role models, coaches, and mentors for other members of the leadership team, enabling them to develop their own competence and succeed in their roles (Cardno & Tetzlaff, 2017; Wang et al., 2022).

Complex organisations require a range of leadership competencies that cannot be effectively provided by a small number of leaders (Dust & Ziegert, 2012). Relatedly, schools are complex and ambiguous organisations tasked with educating children, often from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, with varying academic abilities and learning and social developmental needs (Elliott & Hollingsworth, 2020). As such, schools need multiple leaders who are highly adaptable, can lead in the volatile and uncertain settings of 21st-century schools, and possess the necessary dispositions, knowledge, skills, and motivation to provide effective leadership to their teaching colleagues (Elliott & Hollingsworth, 2020; Leithwood, 2012). As schools have increasingly adopted distributed leadership structures, they have drawn on the collective wisdom and competence, as well as the diverse perspectives and experiences, of multiple leaders, enabling more responsive and shared decision-making while also placing greater expectations on them (Starr, 2014).

2.3.2 A Wide-ranging Knowledge and Broad Skillset are Critical for Leadership Competence in Schools

Schools are heavily reliant on the diverse range of skills and knowledge that their school leaders bring to their roles (Cardno & Tetzlaff, 2017; Elliott & Hollingsworth, 2020). However, the literature contains no single agreed-upon list of skills, knowledge, or behaviours, although job descriptions indicate that leaders require a variety of leadership competencies (Starr, 2014). School leaders, for example, must oversee large-scale organisational tasks such as developing the school's vision, as well as multiple day-to-day microtasks, such as classroom observations, communicating with parents/caregivers, and leading effective team meetings (Spillane et al., 2001). While this variation in skills and knowledge reflects the broad scope and complexity of school leadership roles, the evidence remains unclear about how leadership competence relates to PSC, as noted in Section 2.2.7.

Establishing a favourable climate, fostering collegial communication, and facilitating workplace learning and career development for teachers are key factors that enhance teacher–leader relationships (R. Butt & Retallick, 2002; Lester et al., 2020). Leaders must also be capable of leading teams under increased compliance and competing workload demands (Elliott & Hollingsworth, 2020), and of providing an inspiring and compelling vision for the school (Billot, 2003). Building relational trust, integrating educational knowledge, and solving complex problems have been identified as critical competencies for effective educational leadership. However, V. Robinson et al. (2009) posit that expecting every leader to possess all these competencies at a high level is unrealistic, given the expansive and complex nature of these skills.

There is a broad consensus in the literature that leadership competence is typically demonstrated through strong emotional and social skills (Billot, 2003; Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Shie & Chang, 2022; Weiland, 2021). Importantly, interpersonal skills are amongst the most valuable competencies for leaders, given their close working relationships with teachers (Billot, 2003; L. Brown & Roloff, 2011; Wang, 2021). Emotional and social skills can be developed through training, and are also linked to leader effectiveness. For instance, the ability to manage ongoing social interactions and relationships with students, staff, and parents/caregivers across varied circumstances is critical for 21st-century school leaders, given the rapid change in digital communications and unpredictability in schools (Elliott & Hollingsworth, 2020; Elliott et al., 2022; Riggio & Reichard, 2008).

Strong interpersonal skills amongst leaders are also associated with better teacher wellbeing outcomes. Leaders who demonstrate good awareness (Shie & Chang, 2022), empathy (Lester et al., 2020), strong relationships (Weiland, 2021), and effective communication with staff are likely to have a positive impact on teacher wellbeing (Bush & Glover, 2012). Additionally, leaders must understand teachers’ needs and preferences (Brady & Wilson, 2021)

and ensure staff feel valued and supported (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). Social skills, such as the ability to build trusting relationships, are essential for school leaders to support and remain connected with their teachers (Wang, 2021). Conversely, teachers experience a loss of trust and excessive stress when leaders display poor communication and interpersonal skills, and regularly fail to follow through with decisions (Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

2.3.3 School Leader Support: An Essential Leadership Competence

School leader support is also documented in the literature as a key leadership competence that positively impacts teacher wellbeing. For instance, it is positively related to teacher agency, resilience, and commitment, and may also impact teacher quality (Day, 2017; Day & Kington, 2008). Leader support enables teachers to perform their roles confidently as they confront and overcome the various challenges of their job, particularly as beginning teachers. This support also allows leaders to monitor teacher workloads and foster positive work environments, enabling harmonious relationships between leaders and staff and encouraging teachers to learn and improve their practice (Day, 2017). Hence, school leaders play an integral role in supporting and strengthening teachers' capabilities, which, in turn, can lead to higher teaching and learning outcomes (Cardno & Tetzlaff, 2017).

While both teachers and leaders view leader support as a pivotal part of a leader's role, their perspectives differ on what effective support entails (Daniëls et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). For example, some school leaders have reported feeling responsible for supporting the wellbeing of their staff (Manning et al., 2020). Another survey involving leaders found that coaching and guiding people are core to their job, while teachers view leadership support as facilitation and as recognising staff's achievements and contributions (Daniëls et al., 2020). These different perspectives may have implications for which leadership competencies school leaders practise and which ones positively impact teachers' perceptions of PSC.

Notwithstanding these different perspectives, both leaders and teachers agreed that prioritising trust, openness, and collaboration between the two parties is imperative (Daniëls et al., 2020).

Leader support is also related to teacher commitment, as it remains the most important factor in a teacher's decision to leave the profession (D. Boyd et al., 2011) and is specifically important for beginning teachers (K. Brown & Wynn, 2009). An open-door policy, a visible presence, and fostering collegiality to reduce teacher isolation, so that professional learning communities (PLCs) can thrive, are all important school leader competencies (K. Brown & Wynn, 2009). Ideally, leader support also includes emotional support and strengthening relationships between leaders and beginning teachers, who often require the most frequent and comprehensive assistance as they transition into their new roles (Le Cornu, 2013).

2.3.4 Leaders and School Culture

School culture refers to the norms, values, and behaviours that are representative of a school, for which its leaders are responsible for setting and maintaining (Day & Grice, 2019; Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Naghieh et al., 2015). Leaders' words, non-verbal messages, actions, and accomplishments all shape school culture (Peterson & Deal, 1998). While the culture of a school has implications for students, substantial literature has also examined its impact on teachers' perceptions of their work environment (Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Heinla & Kuurme, 2024; Schipper et al., 2020; Toom, 2018). Thus, the type of school culture that leaders create impacts teachers' daily work experiences and perceptions of their working conditions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gaikhorst et al., 2019; Moir et al., 2014).

Leaders need to be skilled at building school cultures characterised by norms that deliberately foster and support positive interactions, leading to favourable views amongst staff and students (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2014). For example, establishing trusting, professional relationships and providing professional development opportunities facilitates the development

of a positive school culture (Langford & Crawford, 2025; Pagán-Castaño et al., 2021). Leaders are therefore essential for enabling a positive professional learning culture and play a critical role in promoting professional development for beginning teachers (Flores, 2004).

Importantly, when teachers evaluate their working conditions, the school's social elements have a greater impact than planning time, school facilities, or instructional resources (S. Johnson et al., 2012). Social elements, such as school culture, are characterised by mutual trust, respect, openness, and a commitment to student achievement. This includes teachers trusting one another, feeling comfortable raising concerns, and being committed to helping students learn. Collegial relationships and the principal's leadership are important for teachers' perceptions of school culture (S. Johnson et al., 2012). Hence, positive cultures and relationships foster success, whereas dysfunctional cultures and relationships undermine teachers' beliefs and progress (Langford & Crawford, 2025).

2.3.5 School Leaders Driving Structural and Policy Changes

School leaders' knowledge and skills in implementing structural and policy changes are also influential for improving teachers' working conditions (Manning et al., 2020). For example, excessive oversight of teachers' performance and failure to ensure clear boundaries between teachers' work and home lives can increase workloads, threaten teacher autonomy, and compromise teacher wellbeing (Ball, 2016; Brady & Wilson, 2021). Changes in reporting systems and curricula often result in setting short deadlines and expecting more from teachers in less time (Ofsted, 2019), further adding to the high-pressure, fast-paced work environment of schools and the teaching role. While new systems and processes are implemented to address the pedagogical and pastoral challenges commonly experienced in schools, the rapid succession of these measures has implications for job intensification and teacher workload.

Past research in the United Kingdom has shown that the most positive policy and structural changes implemented by leaders are those that develop professional relationships, so that teachers feel valued and working conditions improve (Ofsted, 2019). Reducing after-school meetings lessens teachers' workloads and stress levels, and is likely to improve teacher wellbeing. School leaders, therefore, have a critical role in shaping the work environment through key policy and structural decisions, as their actions can positively mitigate administrative burdens, reduce daily work pressures and demands, and improve teachers' overall perceptions of their working conditions (Ofsted, 2019).

2.3.6 School Leadership and Psychosocial Safety Climate

While the literature has identified how school leadership can impact teachers' working conditions and teacher wellbeing, the specific ways in which leadership interacts with PSC in school settings are still emerging. This reinforces the earlier discussion in Section 2.2 about the need to understand this critical relationship, as leadership may impact how existing policies, practices, and procedures are operationalised and transferred across teams, and how leadership competence might shape the implementation of PSC within school settings. For example, school leaders may struggle to exercise organisational communication and to effectively encourage teacher participation in H&S activities and policy without the leadership competencies needed to support meaningful engagement.

Relatedly, leadership competence may shape the types of management policies, practices, and procedures that school leaders can develop and implement. As noted in Section 1.4, the PSC literature asserts that management policies, practices, and procedures enable the effective implementation of PSC (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). While this is a critical aspect of the PSC framework, placing greater emphasis on leadership competence may clarify how specific leadership skills, knowledge, and behaviours of school leaders can facilitate the operationalisation and implementation of PSC and provide valuable insights into the

mechanisms of this process. The underexplored relationship between school leadership and PSC further underlines the research gaps identified in Section 2.2.7.

2.3.7 Summary of School Leadership Literature Review Section

This section has examined how school leaders operate within increasingly complex and rapidly changing environments, necessitating a more distributed leadership approach that draws on the leadership competence (skills, knowledge, and behaviours) of multiple school leaders. The extensive scope of leaders' roles requires a range of competencies that build trust, foster strong interpersonal relationships, and demonstrate pedagogical expertise. Leaders at various levels are tasked with fostering a supportive workplace culture by implementing policies and structural changes that can improve teachers' daily working conditions and wellbeing. However, exploring the relationship between school leadership and the operationalisation and transfer of policies, practices, and procedures, as well as the implementation of a positive PSC environment within school settings, may generate valuable insights into these important processes.

2.4 Teacher Wellbeing

This section begins by reviewing the literature on the challenges of addressing teacher wellbeing. It then examines research on the four common indicators of teacher wellbeing that this case study focuses on: teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy. Next, the section reviews the literature on the relationship between PSC and the four common indicators of teacher wellbeing. Collectively, these common indicators not only closely reflect the definition of teacher wellbeing used in this thesis, but also, as the literature review highlights, have been under-researched in the PSC literature in school settings, despite the teacher wellbeing literature underscoring their importance to teachers' wellbeing. This

section concludes by identifying research gaps relating to how PSC shapes the common indicators of teacher wellbeing.

2.4.1 Challenges of Addressing Teacher Wellbeing Issues

Teacher wellbeing is a multifaceted concept, comprising cognitive and affective as well as physical and mental components; it includes dispositional, personal, organisational, and environmental factors (Benevene et al., 2020). It encompasses multiple interrelated dimensions that develop through complex interactions between personal resources and organisational contexts (Collie et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). As teaching is one of the most stressful and demanding occupations (Ashton, 2018; L. Robinson et al., 2023; Soykan et al., 2019), teacher wellbeing continues to be a considerable focus for educators, school leaders, unions, and scholars alike (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Cann et al., 2023; Falecki & Mann, 2020). Over two decades have passed since S. Brown and Nagel (2004, p. 40) called for “effective organisational interventions” that would require schools to assume greater responsibility for teachers’ wellbeing. Scholars have had to reiterate these calls for schools to play a more prominent role in enhancing teacher wellbeing. Therefore, the literature suggests that schools have done little to improve working conditions and overall teacher wellbeing over this period, and that these issues remain challenging to address, indicating the need for further research in this area (Naghieh et al., 2015; Stacey et al., 2020).

Rectifying issues related to teacher wellbeing is also hindered by some leaders who believe it falls outside their organisation’s responsibility (Schuller, 2019). Concerningly, research by Sharrocks (2014, p. 28) showed that teachers’ perceptions of their wellbeing in schools “appeared to be the responsibility of staff who needed to learn the required skills to cope” with the role’s demands and complete the specific duties. The study also found that teachers who failed to acquire such skills were depicted as “not good enough” in the role. These findings indicate that many schools and policymakers have not responded to repeated requests

for more equitably balanced responsibilities for teacher wellbeing between teachers and schools, despite compelling research indicating that these issues persist in schools (Naghieh et al., 2015; Stacey et al., 2020).

However, other factors may also be affecting conceptual understanding of teacher wellbeing, which could be impeding schools and other relevant stakeholders, such as unions, school leaders, and policymakers, from making meaningful improvements in this area. Teacher wellbeing is collaboratively constructed within a social and relational space (Brady & Wilson, 2021), reflecting the multidimensional nature of the role and the numerous daily interactions teachers have with colleagues, students, and parents/caregivers. For instance, a teacher's wellbeing may be influenced by feeling empowered, elated, and satisfied through interactions with pupils and colleagues, while simultaneously experiencing stress and apprehension when dealing with a disgruntled parent/caregiver (Soini et al., 2010). Additionally, as noted earlier, the teaching role operates within a continuously evolving environment (Boström et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2017) and an increasingly demanding workload (Soykan et al., 2019; Stacey et al., 2020), making it challenging to address teacher wellbeing issues.

Since schools in Aotearoa New Zealand operate as self-managing Crown (government) entities (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2024b), as outlined in Section 1.3, they are required to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015. However, because schools are independently managed by elected boards and led by leadership teams, consistent adherence to the Act is difficult to enforce and likely to vary from school to school. While each school has a board responsible for H&S legislation, the implementation of H&S policy is delegated to principals and their leadership team (MoE, 2024b, 2024d).

The MoE website includes multiple H&S links and checklists for school leaders to plan, assess, manage, and respond to risks and hazards (see, e.g., MoE, 2024a, 2024c). However, the

extent to which strategies, interventions, and legislation are actively implemented and adhered to in schools, especially from an operational perspective, remains unknown and largely rests with each school's board, principal, and leadership team. This can make implementing H&S regulations problematic, as meeting the requirements of the Act depends on the degree to which school leaders prioritise both the physical and psychological H&S of employees.

2.4.2 Common Indicators of Teacher Wellbeing

Following an extensive review of the teacher wellbeing literature, teacher stress (Greenberg et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017a), job satisfaction (Dicke et al., 2020; Kern et al., 2015), teacher commitment (Ford et al., 2019; Hakanen et al., 2006), and teacher self-efficacy (Chesnut & Cullen, 2014; Falecki & Mann, 2020) were found to be common indicators of teacher wellbeing. In addition, these indicators of teacher wellbeing are frequently cited in Hascher and Waber's (2021) systematic review of 98 teacher wellbeing studies and in Zhou et al.'s (2024) recent meta-analysis, which included 173 eligible studies, highlighting their importance in the literature. Another recent systematic review of 328 eligible studies also highlighted that these four indicators of teacher wellbeing have been extensively researched within the teacher wellbeing literature (Gámez-Genovart, 2025). Research has also demonstrated that these common indicators are interrelated and that they collectively impact teacher wellbeing (Collie et al., 2012; Granziera et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). However, although these indicators are well cited in the teacher wellbeing literature, they are under-researched within the PSC literature.

Teacher Stress. This indicator has been shown to significantly impact teacher wellbeing, as it can lead to adverse physical and psychological health consequences (Montgomery, 2017; Naghieh et al., 2015), which are often exacerbated by the regular pressures teachers face (Travers, 2017). Sources of teacher stress include student misbehaviour, teacher workload, and time pressure (De Carlo et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2023). Other stressors

include demands from leadership, colleagues, and parents/caregivers, as well as poor leadership support (S. Brown & Nagel, 2004) and a lack of connectedness (Sass et al., 2011).

In quantitative studies, questionnaire items on disruptive student behaviour are frequently included, highlighting its impact on teacher stress and overall teacher wellbeing (McCarthy et al., 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Shernoff's (2011) qualitative study offers a counterpoint to the dominance of quantitative research on teacher stress, highlighting how student misbehaviour, especially verbal and physical aggression, left teachers feeling overwhelmed and ineffective. These findings on disruptive behaviour have also been shown to make teaching complex and energy-intensive (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Classroom management and disruptive behaviour are job demands that impact teacher wellbeing (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Because classroom management skills develop over time, beginning teachers, in particular, often experience stress due to behavioural challenges and limited support (S. Brown & Nagel, 2004). In the United Kingdom, beginning teachers reported that student misbehaviour was a key factor in their decision to leave the profession (Garner, 2015).

Heavy workloads also contribute to teacher stress through work–life conflict, which can further exacerbate stress (Creagh et al, 2025; Travers, 2017), with beginning teachers at greatest risk (Carroll et al., 2022). A linear relationship between working hours and teacher stress was evident amongst secondary school teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, with each additional hour of work beyond a 40-hour week associated with the same decline in wellbeing due to increased teacher stress. Notably, stress levels were higher amongst teachers who spent more time working outside their contracted hours during the working week and on the weekend (Jerrim & Sims, 2021). These findings reflect the complex interrelationships between teacher workload, wellbeing, and stress, which are likely to contribute to future recruitment challenges and rising teacher attrition (Hulme et al., 2025; McLean et al., 2024; Morris et al., 2026).

High-volume, low-quality workloads can also increase work pressure and contribute to elevated teacher stress (Brady & Wilson, 2021). Teachers' workloads have increased due to ongoing pedagogical changes and the addition of time-consuming responsibilities, such as pastoral care, extracurricular activities, and compliance-related administrative tasks, which often lead to the duplication of work (Creagh et al., 2025; Long, 2022; Skinner et al., 2021). Educators in Aotearoa New Zealand spend more time on administrative tasks than their counterparts in Canada, England, and the United States (Jerrim & Sims, 2021), further intensifying job demands. Finally, the pressure to improve student outcomes often increases teachers' workloads, including the adoption of new initiatives and reporting processes, leading to greater job intensification and stress (Lawrence et al., 2019).

Carroll et al. (2022) contend that, because workload is frequently identified as a major contributor to teacher stress in the literature, it represents a systemic issue that requires more effective interventions at a higher level than at individual schools. However, recent research from the United Kingdom indicates that minimal progress has been made in reducing teacher workloads following a government initiative to reduce planning, marking, and other administrative tasks, and that pupil behaviour is now contributing to increased workloads (McLean et al., 2024). The literature also suggests that workload stress is shaped by school policies and practices, and that leaders should address workload issues through mentoring and PLCs (Collie & Mansfield, 2022). Additional job resources, such as participation in decision-making, help teachers cope with the demands of the role and mitigate the stress they experience (Lawrence et al., 2019). Furthermore, workload can be reduced by limiting the extensive pastoral and administrative tasks and responsibilities that overwhelm teachers (De Carlo et al., 2019; A. Heffernan et al., 2022).

Job Satisfaction. Another important indicator of teacher wellbeing is job satisfaction (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2021). As in any occupation, job satisfaction can be influenced by events

and the tasks required of employees. While aimed at improving student outcomes and teacher practice, increased pedagogical and technological innovations have contributed to insufficient time for lesson planning, rising workloads, and reduced job satisfaction (Toropova et al., 2021). For example, the expectation to engage with students and parents/caregivers through technology beyond school hours via email and platforms like Google Classroom and other learning management systems can lead to digital overload and disrupted work–life balance (Lawrence et al., 2019).

Job dissatisfaction is also believed to contribute to high attrition rates amongst teachers (Madigan & Kim, 2021), which, in turn, disrupts student learning and negatively affects learner achievement (Gu, 2020; Toropova et al., 2021). Dissatisfied teachers who are likely to leave the profession are also more likely to be disengaged in their jobs (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017), again with implications for student learning, as job dissatisfaction adversely impacts teachers' pedagogical practice and their overall school involvement (Rutter & Jacobson, 1986). While improving job satisfaction can prevent attrition, reducing demands, such as workload, and mitigating burnout and exhaustion may also contribute to job satisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Scholars, however, disagree about what contributes to job dissatisfaction, mainly when teachers are well supported by leadership and problems are addressed. For example, Sass et al. (2011) found that workload stressors were not significant contributors to job dissatisfaction when the social support of leaders and student behaviour stressors were taken into account and appropriately addressed. Collie et al. (2012) noted that if teachers have adequate self-efficacy through effective classroom management and teaching strategies, student behaviour stress might have a less negative impact on job satisfaction. Therefore, contextual factors such as school culture, leadership support, and student behavioural policies and procedures may impact the extent to which student behaviour contributes to teacher stress and job satisfaction.

When teachers experience job satisfaction, it positively impacts their wellbeing. For example, working with students and experiencing pupil and teacher achievement (G. Butt & Lance, 2005), as well as undertaking other work that is meaningful for teachers, such as positive teacher–student relationships, usually results in higher job satisfaction (Lavy & Bocker, 2018; Mankin et al., 2018). This underscores the importance of teachers’ willingness to engage in meaningful work as an effective means of achieving greater job satisfaction (Lavy & Bocker, 2018).

Positive school cultures are also related to higher job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012). School cultures that value teacher accomplishment, recognition, and affiliation (Anderman, 1991) or that promote collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, a unified sense of purpose, and collegial support are all linked to job satisfaction (Bektaş et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2019). Job satisfaction also increases when teachers can seek guidance and reassurance from colleagues, enabling them to adjust their practice to manage and overcome challenging situations (Granziera et al., 2020). Positive staff relationships and a sense of belonging at work can also lead to higher job satisfaction (Brady & Wilson, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Favourable leadership behaviours and practices can also contribute to positive outcomes related to job satisfaction. For example, being open to new ideas and frequently giving feedback (Dinham, 2007), as well as enabling active decision-making and adequate teacher input, all increase job satisfaction (Collie & Perry, 2019; Leithwood, 2016; Siskin, 1991). In addition, supportive communication and network environmental factors, such as value consonance, can positively impact job satisfaction (De Nobile & McCormick, 2008; Gauche et al., 2017; Sass et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that supportive, communicative, and participatory leadership practices and behaviours enhance job satisfaction.

Teacher Commitment. This indicator of teacher wellbeing is associated with multiple psychological outcomes and with an individual's intention to leave their school or the teaching profession entirely (McInerney et al., 2015). Teachers with the highest levels of commitment are likely to have the lowest turnover intentions and the highest levels of wellbeing (Morin et al., 2015). Establishing commitment amongst beginning teachers is particularly important, given the challenges and setbacks they may regularly experience (Day & Qing, 2009). This evidence highlights the importance of leaders and schools in supporting teacher commitment, so that teachers are not inclined to move too frequently between schools or leave the profession, which can also disrupt student learning and contribute to teacher shortages (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Research has also shown that teacher commitment is related to work-related stress, job satisfaction, and teacher self-efficacy (Collie et al., 2012; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017a), further demonstrating the notable links between the four common indicators of teacher wellbeing. For instance, Jepson and Forrest (2006) found that when teacher commitment rises, perceived stress decreases. Similarly, as teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction rise, so does teacher commitment (Collie et al., 2012; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Therefore, when a teacher is perceived as not committed to their job, that reduction in commitment may have been influenced by other indicators of wellbeing.

Low commitment can also be influenced by organisational factors, which are typically beyond the teacher's control (Riehl & Sipple, 1996). Policy developments and leadership changes, such as new ways of working, can all increase workloads and impose demanding administrative tasks on teachers. In turn, these additional, time-consuming tasks place pressure on teachers, which can have detrimental implications for job commitment, particularly when there is a lack of leadership support and direction to enable them to make the necessary changes to their practice that are being requested (Skinner et al., 2021).

Conversely, commitment can be enhanced through meaningful changes to school culture, which is usually enabled by effective leadership (Cansoy et al., 2022). Positive school cultures that provide administrative support, foster collegiality amongst teachers, and promote positive student behaviour are also likely to enhance teacher commitment (Riehl & Sipple, 1996). Therefore, leadership can play a central role in shaping school culture, which, in turn, enhances teacher commitment (Cherkowski et al., 2020; Skinner et al., 2021). For instance, leaders who promote and sustain compassion and deep care towards their teachers foster positive learning environments, and are influential in generating stronger commitment and job improvement (Cherkowski, 2012).

Research has also demonstrated that teacher commitment can be enhanced by developing strong leader–teacher relationships and by leaders valuing teachers’ opinions on factors that affect student achievement (Cansoy et al., 2022). These findings align with a recent study indicating that shared decision-making is positively associated with teacher commitment (Liu & Watson, 2023). School leaders can also increase teacher commitment by strengthening staff opportunities and skills, and co-constructing a shared vision that all teachers can relate to (Sun, 2010). More generally, the research suggests that leadership practices and behaviours can impact the degree to which teachers are committed to both their school and their students’ achievement.

Teacher Self-efficacy. This indicator impacts teacher wellbeing because teachers who perceive themselves as capable are less likely to experience negative emotions (Cansoy et al., 2020). Teacher self-efficacy also impacts how teachers perceive and respond to stressors, is positively associated with job satisfaction and teacher engagement, and reduces burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Furthermore, higher self-efficacy leads to greater effort and perseverance, resulting in improved performance and enhanced teaching and learning outcomes

(Hoy & Davis, 2006). These findings indicate that teacher self-efficacy has implications for both teachers' individual outcomes and the quality of the classroom practice they provide.

However, higher stress and burnout can reduce teacher self-efficacy. For instance, von der Embse and Mankin (2021) found that as stress levels rose throughout an academic year, teacher self-efficacy declined rapidly. This aligns with Granziera et al.'s (2020) study, which reported that stress increases when teachers have to implement curriculum changes, decreasing their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can also serve as an effective buffer against job demands in challenging situations, such as dealing with demanding workloads, and is particularly important for beginning teachers. Hence, self-efficacy is associated with positive mental health, high work motivation, effective coping, and positive emotions (Hofmann et al., 2022).

Teacher self-efficacy is context-specific, whereby the situation and environment can shape how efficacious a teacher feels about their practice (Hoy & Davis, 2006). For example, a teacher who teaches both English and French might feel more confident about teaching English, having taught it previously, but less confident about teaching French, having never taught it previously. These scenarios may alter the teacher's ability, as well as their perceptions of competence, knowledge, and skills to undertake tasks and overcome challenges, and therefore influence their self-efficacy and overall performance (Chesnut & Cullen, 2014).

However, it takes time for teachers to develop self-efficacy, which then enables them to overcome difficult situations. For example, capability in classroom management is likely to strengthen and sustain self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), with the most common and effective method and success being previous mastery (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Thus, experienced teachers typically have more time to develop effective classroom management and instructional strategies for addressing challenging situations, whereas less experienced teachers do not (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

In addition, teachers who develop the personal skills to manage adverse situations may have higher self-efficacy and overall wellbeing (Granziera et al., 2020). Again, this can be particularly challenging for beginning teachers, who need time to build content knowledge, address varying levels of student engagement and abilities, and manage challenging classroom behaviour. Less experienced teachers need opportunities to strengthen their self-efficacy through vicarious learning, reflection, social persuasion, and feedback from colleagues and leaders (Falecki & Mann, 2020). Complicating this development process of building self-efficacy is that teaching is largely an autonomous role (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), so teachers rely on social connections and sustained collegial support (McInerney et al., 2018), despite typically being the only adult in a classroom.

2.4.3 Psychosocial Safety Climate and Common Indicators of Wellbeing

In educational settings, the links between PSC and teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy have received limited attention in the literature; they are summarised in Appendix C (in bold text). In contrast, a more substantial body of PSC research conducted outside of educational settings has examined links between PSC and similar indicators of wellbeing. Accordingly, studies from non-educational settings are also included in Appendix C to demonstrate that the broader PSC literature recognises the important relationship between PSC and the indicators of wellbeing relevant to the present investigation. While some of these studies did not specifically focus on the relationship between PSC and the indicators of teacher wellbeing (e.g., self-efficacy rather than teacher self-efficacy), their findings may be transferable to other settings and roles, including the teacher role.

However, the results from some of these studies are inconsistent and exhibit unusual discrepancies. For example, significant negative associations have been found between the organisational communication domain of PSC and job satisfaction (Lintanga & Rathakrishnan, 2024) and between PSC and organisational commitment (Geisler et al., 2019). Lintanga and

Rathakrishnan (2024) also reported no significant relationship between the management priority, management commitment and support domains, and job satisfaction. The variability in the findings may reflect broader contextual and methodological differences across the studies, including cultural settings, industrial sectors, organisational conditions, national legislation, and union density.

Despite variability in some of the results above, most of the studies in Appendix C suggest that PSC has a favourable impact on stress, job satisfaction, commitment, and self-efficacy. Importantly, the largely consistent results across these studies further support the framework's suitability for examining the potential links between PSC and the common indicators of teacher wellbeing examined in the present research. Additionally, Appendix C highlights the limited number of studies (in bold text) investigating the impact of PSC on teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy, indicating that these areas have been under-researched in school settings.

2.4.4 Research Gaps in PSC Research on Common Indicators of Teacher Wellbeing

As noted in Chapter 1 and in Appendix C, the links between PSC and the common indicators of wellbeing (stress, job satisfaction, commitment, and self-efficacy) have been relatively well investigated outside school settings. However, within educational settings, there is limited literature examining the links between PSC and teacher stress (e.g., Boström et al., 2020; Winwood & Kramer, 2020, [Dollard & Bakker, 2010, and Dollard & Karasek, 2010, focused on psychological distress]), job satisfaction (Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Viseu et al., 2025), teacher commitment (Winwood & Kramer, 2020), and self-efficacy (Viseu et al., 2025). Therefore, studies investigating PSC and the common indicators of teacher wellbeing examined in the present research remain limited, highlighting areas that warrant further research. Moreover, a single investigation that examines how PSC impacts a broader range of wellbeing

indicators using a qualitative approach should provide a more holistic and in-depth understanding of these relationships.

2.5 Literature-informed Methodology

This review of the literature has shaped the methodology of this research by identifying limitations in existing methodological approaches and providing direction for future investigations. For instance, scholars have highlighted the value of extending PSC assessment beyond perceptual indicators, using psychometric scales, such as PSC-12 (Loh et al., 2021), and conducting research that accounts for the dynamism of the contextual environment (McLinton et al., 2025). However, much of the existing literature has been limited in capturing the dynamic and context-dependent nature of PSC, particularly in educational settings.

As noted in Sections 2.2.7 and 2.4.4, the preponderance of quantitative studies may limit understanding of how PSC is operationalised and implemented by school leaders as well as how it supports teachers' wellbeing. This research addresses these limitations by examining PSC as a continuously evolving, multilevel (school, team, and individual) organisational resource shaped by leadership at various levels within the school's distinctive contextual settings. This approach enables a deeper and more detailed exploration of PSC in practice. This methodological decision also answers recent calls for studies highlighting the value of qualitative approaches in enhancing understanding of PSC's role in educational workplaces (Dong et al., 2024; Karatuna et al., 2025). Consequently, this research employs a methodological approach distinct from the PSC-12 scale to explore PSC through qualitative inquiry.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on PSC, school leadership, and teacher wellbeing. Multiple quantitative studies have shown that PSC serves as both an antecedent and

a moderator of psychosocial risks and predicts various indicators of employees' psychological health and wellbeing indicators. While the literature has found that principals influence school and individual-level PSC, the role of line management in operationalising policies, practices, and procedures, and in transferring PSC across school teams, remains underexplored. Additionally, although the literature suggests that certain leadership styles have a more positive impact on PSC than others, the link between leadership competence and PSC implementation remains undetermined.

Greater autonomy, accountability, and pressure placed on individual schools have led to more distributed forms of leadership and, therefore, greater collective leadership competence across larger leadership teams has become necessary. School leaders require a broad range of skills, knowledge, and positive behaviours to fulfil the responsibilities of their complex roles and to address the challenges that schools face in the 21st century. Principals have also become increasingly reliant on the combined competence of their leadership teams to shape school culture and lead key structural and policy decisions. These leadership practices directly impact teachers' daily experiences, working conditions, and wellbeing.

Despite decades of research, teacher wellbeing remains a challenging issue for schools and leaders to address. The literature suggests that teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy are common indicators of teacher wellbeing. However, the impact of PSC on these four indicators of teacher wellbeing remains under-researched in educational settings. The scarcity of qualitative studies may be limiting deeper, more contextual insights, which has led the present research to employ a qualitative approach.

Finally, this thesis is situated within the broader PSC literature in two key areas. First, it is positioned alongside a limited but growing body of literature examining how leadership styles influence PSC (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Mirza et al.,

2023; Winwood & Kramer, 2020). Drawing primarily on participants' perspectives, this research explores how leadership at different levels (principal and line management) operationalises existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC, and how leadership competence may enable school leaders to implement PSC. Second, the thesis is located within a body of literature that focuses on PSC and teacher psychological health and wellbeing (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Garrick et al., 2014; Viseu et al., 2025; Winwood & Kramer, 2020; Yulita, Idris, & Dollard, 2022). The present qualitative inquiry complements this quantitative literature (primarily cross-sectional studies, PSC-informed longitudinal interventions, and diary studies) by adopting a more contextual focus and examining a broader range of indicators of teacher wellbeing (teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy) within a single study for a more holistic understanding of these relationships.

Chapter 3: Research Method

3.1 Overview of Methodological Approach

This research presents an explanatory single case study situated within the pragmatist paradigm. Purposive sampling included school leaders and staff who could provide valuable insights into the phenomena under investigation. The data collection process began with document analysis, followed by the sequential collection and analysis of data from semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and focus groups. Data triangulation and member checking were accompanied by continuous reflective practice, which contributed to a transparent and trustworthy data collection and analysis process. Both inductive and deductive thematic analyses were employed to identify patterns across the datasets, yielding rich, contextualised findings with implications for both theory and practice.

3.2 Research Method Justification

This section explains how the pragmatist epistemology informed the design and implementation of this case study. The nature of the research questions and objectives made qualitative research more appropriate for this investigation. From a pragmatic perspective, a qualitative explanatory single case study was deemed the most effective method for exploring the contextual links between school leadership, psychosocial safety climate (PSC), and teacher wellbeing, which are difficult to capture using a survey-based approach.

3.2.1 Pragmatist Paradigm

My alignment with the pragmatist paradigm reflects my epistemological and ontological perspectives about knowledge and reality. These perspectives shaped the formulation of the research questions and the case study's research design. Pragmatism within organisational sciences extends beyond objectivist conceptualisations to explore and understand the

connections between knowledge and action within contextual settings, enabling researchers to learn in the process (L. Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). The need to comprehensively understand the school's context and engage closely with participants' lived experiences required research questions that, as L. Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) claim, enable the researcher to probe into the inner organisational processes.

Also central to the pragmatist paradigm is the desire to focus on solving practical problems through real-world inquiry. This requires that research questions are structured to facilitate knowledge building and develop an intimate understanding of complex contexts (Allemang et al., 2022). As such, the research questions of this case study had to capture the contextual complexity of the school setting by eliciting participants' perceptions of interactions between school leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing and by enabling my experiential exploration of these interactions firsthand. I considered this approach to be sound research practice because it enabled me to address the research questions effectively and comprehensively, as discussed in more detail in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.

Pragmatist researchers employ various techniques to understand social phenomena and explain complex relationships by collecting diverse data, thereby enabling a flexible, contextually focused approach (L. Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). As such, pragmatism provides an effective way to examine how leadership, organisational systems, PSC, and teacher wellbeing interact and to understand how PSC operates in practice. Importantly, these varied data sources enabled me to examine the operationalisation and transfer of PSC across teams and to analyse school leadership by interpreting organisational documents and conducting participant observation, rather than relying solely on participants' perceptions. Pragmatism also aligns with the combined inductive and deductive analytical approach (Morgan, 2020) employed in this research (see Section 3.5.6), allowing findings to emerge from the data while also being informed by existing PSC theory.

The pragmatist paradigm guided this research, given its focus on addressing a real-world problem relating to PSC and teacher wellbeing within a complex organisational setting specific to this investigation. For example, challenges in securing adequate participation from schools would have made it difficult to achieve a statistically valid sample size by involving multiple schools. Within the pragmatist paradigm, methodological decisions are guided by what works in practice and by what best meets the needs of the research (Creswell, 2014). Given the access constraints, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate and practical way to address the research questions.

3.2.2 Rationale for a Qualitative Research Approach

Since pragmatism is not bound to a single methodological tradition (Yin, 2009), I considered both quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, as a pragmatist, there were key reasons for selecting a qualitative design for this research. Qualitative research offers in-depth, richly contextual insights that quantitative approaches may not fully capture (Köhler, 2016). While qualitative research is well suited to exploring “how” and “why” questions, quantitative research typically focuses on “what” and “how many” questions (Barbour, 2008; Pratt, 2009), making a quantitative approach less appropriate for examining *how* PSC is understood and operationalised within a school setting. Upon careful reflection, I decided that a qualitative approach was not only the most appropriate but also the most practical and effective method for addressing the research questions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, qualitative studies of PSC remain limited compared to quantitative ones, particularly within primary and secondary school settings. Through an examination of the impact of leadership on PSC and, subsequently, the implications of PSC for teacher wellbeing, this research adopted a qualitative approach to explore these potential links, which would be difficult to capture through quantitative methods such as surveys or diary entries from randomly selected teachers across multiple Aotearoa New Zealand schools.

Similarly, although intervention/experimental studies can shed light on causal relationships, their insights do not always reflect the contextually embedded nature of school settings and teaching practices (Cook et al., 2019). Hence, a quantitative study is less suitable for the objectives of the present research, which focuses on exploring the school's *existing* key policies, practices, and procedures, as well as leaders' knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to PSC. The inclusion and analysis of multiple qualitative data sources reflect the in-depth nature of this case study, enabling the generation of valuable theoretical insights that are highly contextualised within an educational setting.

Qualitative findings from this research may offer practical insights for school leaders and policymakers seeking to foster a psychologically healthy and safe workplace that improves teacher wellbeing. In contrast to the predominantly quantitative literature, which has focused on interventions and measuring PSC using Hall et al.'s (2010) PSC-12 scale (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024; Casely-Hayford et al., 2025; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), a qualitative approach enables a more detailed exploration of the relational and contextual aspects of PSC within a school setting. By focusing on participants' lived experiences and perceptions, the research examines how school leadership, team interactions, and organisational features shape PSC and, in turn, how PSC may help identify the challenges and working conditions that impact teacher wellbeing within a school workplace.

3.2.3 Case Study Research

There were also strong methodological reasons for choosing a case study design. Case studies involve units of human activity embedded in the real world, situated in specific contexts, and understood within those contexts (Gillham, 2000). Likewise, schools have units of human activity, such as staff, leadership, teams, and students, that interact continuously. Furthermore, qualitative case studies offer important insights into educational leadership practices and

experiences within schooling contexts (DeMatthews et al., 2026). Since most data were collected on the school's premises, I was able to observe workplace relationships and interactions between staff and leaders, as well as contextual factors such as the participating school's systems and its organisational structure, while also, at times, experiencing the common challenges that teachers face in the classroom.

Case studies are ideal for researching complex issues (Merriam, 1998) and for problem-solving, as they allow the consideration of contextual factors (Stake, 2008), which, as a pragmatist researcher, was critical. Schools are rich in contextual factors and therefore a qualitative case study enabled me to examine them comprehensively within their natural setting. Additionally, case studies allow researchers to investigate policies and procedures in depth and understand them in their unique contexts (Simons, 2009). This was particularly important for examining the school's PSC, as the success of its enactment was largely dependent on the effectiveness of its policies, practices, and procedures (Dollard & Bakker, 2010).

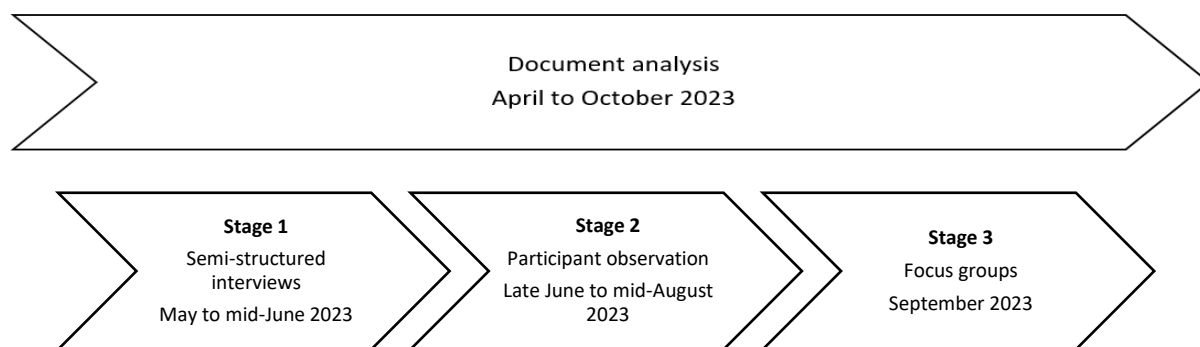
3.2.4 Explanatory Single Case Study Rationale

Having adopted a pragmatist perspective, I selected an explanatory single case study design to meet this research's objectives. Explanatory single case studies are effective for examining links between phenomena and extending theory (Yin, 2014) because they ask "how" questions that seek evidence of how phenomena occur and relate to one another (Simons, 2009). The research questions of this investigation focus on examining how leadership impacts PSC and how PSC can help address common challenges in teaching and enable conditions that support teacher wellbeing. Given this focus on understanding the links between these complex phenomena, an explanatory single case study was an appropriate design, and is consistent with Yin's (2014) assertion that such investigations are suitable for examining relationships within organisational settings.

Explanatory single case studies provide deep and unique insights, allowing researchers to extend theory and develop practical measures to support conclusions (Farquhar, 2012). By focusing on a single school, relevant phenomena related to leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing could be examined in greater depth within a specific setting and a more manageable scope. Single case studies are also effective when examining distinctive cases (Yin, 2018). As noted in Section 1.5, the participating school was organised according to a comprehensive house system, which differs from most secondary schools, where teachers are typically grouped into subject departments or learning areas based on subject specialisation. The school's distinct organisational structure provided a unique context for examining the links between leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing.

As an explanatory single case study, this research benefited from collecting multiple types of data over an extended period. Data were collected mostly sequentially over six months (April–October 2023), as illustrated in Figure 3.1. This approach, as Gillham (2000) asserts, facilitates triangulation while also breaking the research process into distinct time periods. It also enabled the identification of potential changes over time and the confirmation of findings through multiple data collection methods (Scholz & Tietje, 2002), which are discussed further in Section 3.4.

Figure 3.1 *Data Collection Components*



The school’s distinctive house system and multilevel leadership structure provided a valuable setting for exploring how PSC is operationalised and transferred across organisational levels and how leadership competence enables its implementation. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the research aimed for analytical generalisation by generating theoretically informed insights that may relate to similar educational contexts. This approach enabled a detailed and contextually grounded understanding of the processes under investigation.

3.3 Case Study Configuration and Sampling

This section outlines the configuration and sampling method of the case study. A case study boundary and a protocol document were developed to provide guidance, manage the research scope, and mitigate potential risks to participants. A data collection schedule was co-constructed with school leadership to align with the school’s calendar. This section also describes the sample frame and sampling method of this case study. The sample frame included participants with a representative range of roles at the school to capture diverse perspectives. Purposive sampling was employed to include individuals from different houses (teams) and roles within the school. A total of 26 participants were recruited for the interviews, while 13 participated in the three focus groups.

3.3.1 Case Study Boundary and Case Study Protocol

A case study boundary was established to ensure that the scope of this research was suitable and manageable for the investigation. This involves clearly defining the case and outlining its participants, focus, and setting (Miles et al., 2020). Key leadership and staff (see Section 3.3.3) who could speak knowledgeably about the phenomena examined in this research were included. The setting for this case study was the participating Aotearoa New Zealand school, where all interviews, participant observation, and focus group data were collected on-site. Organisational documents were collected both on-site and online.

The case study boundary also included the research questions and objectives, which, as Yin (2012) suggests, were regularly revisited to ensure they accurately reflected the research's aims. For example, the case study began with a broad research question: How does school leadership impact PSC? As the boundary was developed, two objectives were formulated for greater focus:

1. To explore how leadership (principal and line managers) operationalises existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams.
2. To examine how leadership competence enables school leaders to implement PSC by investigating how specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours support its implementation.

The second research question was also refined and narrowed from How does PSC impact teacher wellbeing? to How does PSC help address common challenges in teaching and enable conditions that support teacher wellbeing?

The case study protocol specified how this research reduced potential risks to participants and to me, as the researcher, and outlined the necessary steps to protect participant

confidentiality and school anonymity. Because the research focused on teacher psychological health and wellbeing, the protocol also detailed the external support services available to participants. It emphasised that participation was voluntary and open to all staff, resulting in an inclusive, non-judgmental process that helped minimise potential division amongst staff.

3.3.2 School Contact and Data Collection Scheduling

After gaining the principal's approval to conduct research at the school and receiving ethics approval (explained further in Section 3.6), I liaised with a school leader, who served as the primary contact throughout the data collection phase. Soon after, I met with the liaison to learn about the school's practices and procedures regarding teacher wellbeing. Additionally, I outlined the research process and the case study boundary in greater detail and discussed potential data collection dates. While the school agreed that document analysis could begin in April 2023, on-site data collection for Stage 1 (semi-structured interviews) was scheduled for May that year, coinciding with the start of Term 2.

3.3.3 Sample Frame

A sample frame consists of individuals who, as Lichtman (2014) and Savin-Baden and Major (2013) advise, are carefully selected for specific characteristics to facilitate the development of analytic generalisations. Accordingly, the sample frame for this case study included teachers, leaders, and support staff from various houses who could speak knowledgeably about the relationships between school leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing. Participant variation maximises the range of perspectives (Creswell, 2013), which was crucial for this research since all school leaders were previously classroom teachers, and most (except the principal) continued to teach on a reduced timetable. This differs from some other industries, in which leaders have not always carried out the roles of their direct reports. Staff such as receptionists, the school nurse, IT technicians, the school's executive administrator, and finance

personnel were excluded because they did not work as closely with teachers and were less knowledgeable about PSC specifically in relation to daily teaching, school leadership practices and teacher wellbeing.

The largest group in the interview and focus group sample was subject teachers (see Table 3.1). Note that, as discussed below, interview participants were subsequently invited to take part in the focus group. Participants' experience ranged from beginning teachers with less than two years of teaching to fully registered teachers with over 30 years of experience. The second-largest group of participants were school leaders, who held significant line management responsibilities. School leader roles varied from the principal to house leaders (line managers). Support staff (e.g., school counsellors) were also included in the sample, as they often worked closely with teachers, leaders, and students.

Table 3.1 Roles Involved in Interviews and Focus Groups

Role of participants	Number of participants involved in interviews	Number of participants involved in focus groups
Subject teachers	18	10
School leaders (principal and house leaders)	6	3
Support staff (e.g., school counsellors)	2	—
Total participants	26	13

Table 3.2 reports participants' demographic data encompassing gender, age, ethnicity, house/team representation, length of tenure at the school and in the profession overall, employment status (comprising full-time and part-time), and weekly hours spent completing work. The demographic data suggest that Stage 1 participants were broadly representative of the school's general staff. For example, 23% of participants were school leaders, which is

similar to the 20% of the school's total staff who are leaders. Likewise, the participant gender distribution was 65% female and 35% male, closely matching the school's 67% female and 33% male split. Some demographic data also reflected the broader Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school teacher population, even though generalisability was not an objective of this research. For instance, 62% of participants were aged 40 years or older, and teachers aged 45 or older accounted for 56% of the nation's secondary school teachers in 2023 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2024e).

Table 3.2 *Participant Demographics*

Gender	Female: 17			Male: 9	
Age	20–29: 4	30–39: 6	40–49: 8	50–59: 5	>60: 3
Ethnicity/nationality (may have identified with more than one ethnicity/nationality)	Māori: 2 Fijian: 2 South African: 3	NZ European: 12 Indian: 6 Another ethnicity/ nationality: 4		Chinese: 1 Samoan: 1	
Participants/representation from each team (excludes principal and support staff)	House A: 6	House B: 6	House C: 6	House D: 5	
Time employed at school	0-3 years: 6		4-10 years: 11	More than 10 years: 9	
Years employed as a teacher in total (includes previous employment in schools)	1–3 years: 3	4–10 years: 5	11–20 years: 6	>20 years: 12	
Employment agreement	Full-time: 23			Part-time: 3	
Average hours spent completing work per week (full-time staff only)	46 hours				

3.3.4 Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the semi-structured interviews. Given the semi-autonomous leadership and functioning of each house, the different roles within them, and the need to explore PSC within and across house settings, purposive sampling was deemed the most appropriate method. It allows for participant variety, so that they differ in key characteristics and in their relevance to understanding the social phenomena under investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The present case study included proportional representation of employees and leaders from across the school's four houses. This ensured that subgroups within the population of interest were represented. It also enabled clear comparisons, and helped me identify potential variations in participants' insights (Farrugia, 2019; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Participant recruitment began with an invitation email sent on my behalf to all school leaders and staff across the school's four houses, outlining the research topic and objectives and detailing participants' potential involvement in the research. The intention of the all-staff email was to select participants based on their role and house affiliation to ensure representation across different roles (leaders and staff) and houses within the school. The email included a Google Form link inviting staff to select a suitable time for the interview. Participants who expressed interest received a follow-up email containing the participant information sheet (see Appendix D), outlining their potential involvement in the semi-structured interview and the focus groups, as well as the case study's objectives, ethical obligations, and possible risks of participation.

The all-staff email generated only nine responses. However, once on site, the principal introduced me to the staff at an all-staff meeting, allowing me to briefly discuss the research objectives and participants' involvement in the investigation. Following this, a further all-staff email was sent, prompting additional interest from a wider range of participants (in terms of

role, seniority, and house affiliation). I also spent time in the school's staffroom between interviews, which enabled me to recruit additional participants.

Teachers and leaders who participated in the interviews were invited to attend a 55-minute lunchtime focus group to elaborate on and clarify initial findings. Including the same participants offered methodological advantages (discussed further in Section 3.4.2), as focus groups are most effective when members are knowledgeable, willing, and able to discuss the topic (Carey & Asbury, 2012). Only 13 ultimately participated in the focus groups due to scheduling conflicts, resignations, and personal choice. Two focus groups were held for teachers, while a single focus group was organised for school leaders, which, as Morgan (2019) posits, enables participants to discuss sensitive topics and minimise concerns about being judged by "outsiders". The principal was deliberately excluded from the school leaders' focus group to ensure that participants could speak freely.

3.3.5 Interview Sample Size

Initially, I was guided by Guest et al.'s (2012) indicative suggestion that interviewing 12 participants of moderate homogeneity can achieve theoretical saturation. However, as "new" data on topics such as teachers' dissatisfaction with organisational communication continued to emerge during the 12th interview, I interviewed additional participants to capture it. As pragmatism allows researchers to redesign sampling methods during data collection (Emmel, 2013), the sample size was increased until no new data emerged (Schwandt, 2007), with data saturation reached by the 21st participant. Although data saturation had been reached by the 21st participant, Stage 1 data collection continued for 5 additional interviews to ensure representativeness across the school's four teams and different participant roles. A predetermined sample size was not set for the number of focus group sessions, as their central purpose was not to develop new themes or achieve saturation, but to deepen understanding of

the themes identified through organisational documents, interviews, and participant observation data.

3.4 Case Study Data Collection Process

This section outlines the data collection process used for this research. Four types of data were gathered over a six-month period (see Table 3.3). The process began in April 2023 with document analysis (see Appendix E) and continued until October that year. The sequential data collection process was performed in three stages, with each stage informing the next. Stage 1 consisted of 26 semi-structured interviews. Stage 2 involved participant observation, during which I served as an unpaid reliever (not formally employed or associated with the school), working alongside staff and observing behaviours and phenomena related to school leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing. Stage 3 consisted of three focus groups: the first two involving teachers, while the third was run specifically for school leaders.

Table 3.3 *Data Collection Methods and Timeframes*

Data collection activity	Occurrence/ number	Dates scheduled
April (document analysis begins)		
Stage 1 – Semi-structured interviews Semi-structured interviews	26	May to mid-June
Stage 2 – Participant observation - Number of lessons delivered (in hours) - Total days of relieving - All-staff meetings attended - Staff duties (student supervision) completed - Interval breaks spent in the staffroom with staff - Lunchtime breaks spent in the staffroom with staff	28 6 6 5 6 6	Late June to mid-August
Stage 3 – Focus groups - Teachers' focus groups - Leaders' focus group	2 1	September
October (document analysis ends)		

Document analysis (concurrent)
(April to October)

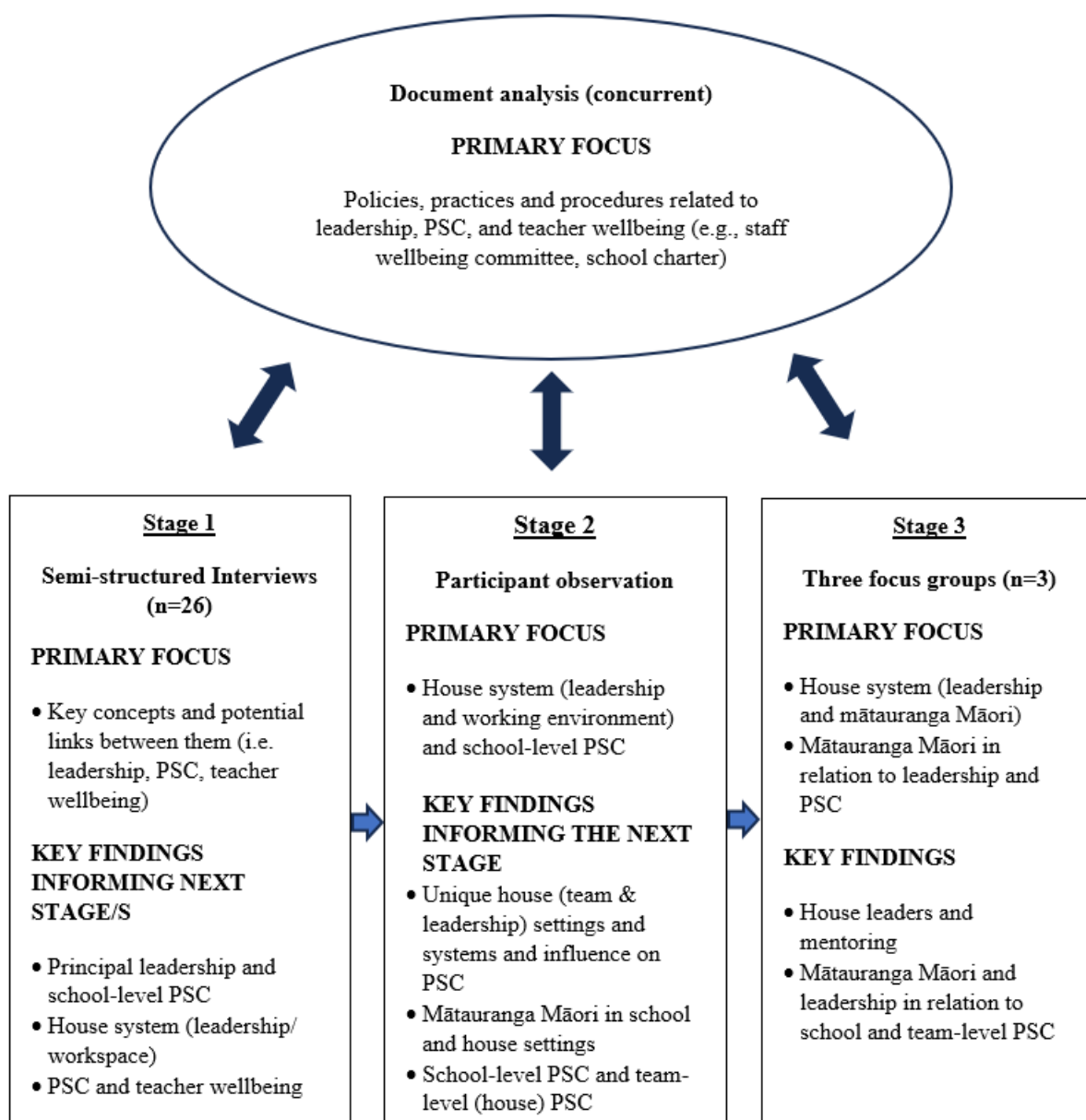
Publicly accessible documents, practical documents, (staff use only) photos and schoolwide artefacts were analysed as part of the document analysis

3.4.1 Document Analysis

The primary purpose of the document analysis was to support the other forms of data collection and to interpret school policies, practices, and procedures related to school leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing. Figure 3.2 illustrates the relationship between the four forms of data collection. Including document analysis in qualitative research is common (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), as it helps cross-check other forms of qualitative data (Silverman, 2017). It involves three crucial steps: skimming, reading, and analysis, which enables a careful and focused review of the data's characteristics to uncover themes related to the studied phenomena (Bowen, 2009). The document analysis was informed by and, in turn, informed other types of data, as indicated in Figure 3.2. For example, the school's wellbeing committee and mentoring programme were frequently mentioned in interviews and at all-staff meetings during participant observation. Relevant documents, such as those relating to the wellbeing committee, the school charter, and health and safety (H&S), were subsequently analysed to clarify and verify the interview, participant observation, and focus group data throughout the data collection period.

Document analysis can also offer partial insights into previous leadership decisions and actions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). An example of how leadership decisions were influenced within the school emerged from the analysis of the leadership framework and mentoring documents, which may have shaped leaders' decisions regarding the enactment of the four domains of PSC and relevant policies, practices, and procedures. Document analysis can also be used to analyse information on unobservable activities (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), such as house curricula documents, which offered valuable perspectives on house leadership, collaboration, and collegiality within house settings and could be explored in greater depth through participant observation. As such, documents relating to the school's house system and leadership decisions could be corroborated by findings from other data sources, such as interviews and the operationalisation of PSC through participant observation.

Figure 3.2 Document Analysis and Sequential Data Collection Process



In total, 19 types of publicly accessible and practical documents were analysed (see Appendix E for a complete list). The collection and analysis of documents began in April 2023 and continued through to October that year, as some documents were published or became accessible later. For example, although the school charter was accessible in April, other documents, such as those posted on the staff wellbeing stand in the staffroom, were introduced progressively and were regularly updated during the data collection period. Additionally, some organisational documents were not shared with me until I either requested them or became

aware of their existence. For instance, board meeting minutes were available only after the meeting had taken place and after they were posted online. Similarly, documents such as house curricula plans were accessible only after I recognised their relevance to this research, while serving as a relief teacher during participant observation. Therefore, it was less practical for this case study to include document analysis in the sequential data collection process.

3.4.2 Three-Stage Sequential Data Collection Process

A sequential approach occurs when the analysis from one stage of the data collection meaningfully informs the next, offering a more thorough understanding of specific phenomena by combining multiple qualitative approaches (Darlington & Scott, 2020). Since a sequential process enables the identification of knowledge gaps (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), gathering additional data on related phenomena from varied sources and subsequent stages helped the present investigation address these gaps and triangulate data. There were also specific reasons for the order of the sequential data collection process of this research. Interviews were conducted in Stage 1 to identify and examine key concepts in significant depth. This enabled me to identify key interview findings and explore these through participant observation in a more targeted and experiential way. Time spent interviewing also helped me establish a strong rapport with a large proportion of the school's staff, making it easier to work alongside them and to have informal conversations during participant observation. Holding focus groups in Stage 3, after completing the participant observation and approximately three months had elapsed since the interviews, provided participants and me with time to reflect on what had been covered in the interviews. Additionally, it allowed me to verify the accuracy of the participant observation data and contributed to more in-depth focus group conversations.

As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the semi-structured interviews conducted in Stage 1 identified key themes relating to principal leadership, the school's house system (e.g., house leadership and workspace), and teacher wellbeing, which required closer examination through

subsequent participant observation and focus groups. These findings from the interviews guided the focus of the participant observations in Stage 2, which resulted in the exploration of key settings (e.g., staffroom and house workspaces), leader practices and behaviours (e.g., the principal in staff meetings, house leaders in house settings), important relationships (e.g., teachers and house leaders), the school's wellbeing committee, and mātauranga Māori. These observations were directly related to the research's objectives, such as examining how different levels of leadership operationalise and transfer PSC across school teams, and how the leadership competence of school leaders supports the implementation of PSC at the school, team and individual levels. These earlier insights shaped the design of focus group questions, which centred primarily on house systems and mātauranga Māori in relation to leadership and PSC.

Stage 1: Semi-structured Interviews. Participants completed a short familiarisation task before commencing the semi-structured interviews. This task was designed to “set the scene” for participants by outlining the purpose of the PSC framework, as most participants were unfamiliar with the construct. To aid their conceptual understanding of the framework, all participants were shown a visual aid summarising PSC's four domains (see Appendix F), to support their discussion of PSC in relation to leadership and teacher wellbeing.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit and understand participants' perceptions of leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing, and to explore how these concepts relate to one another. Interviews were selected because they are well-suited to case study research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017) and enable in-depth exploration of the topics under study (Jaber et al., 2012). Interview data were analysed before proceeding to Stage 2 (participant observation), allowing each stage to be informed by the previous stage(s). For example, as shown in Figure 3.2, interview data highlighted the influential role of the school's house system and house leadership in relation to PSC. These findings from the interviews guided a deeper investigation through participant observation and focus groups, which, as Kamberelis and

Dimitriadis (2013) emphasised, facilitates the researcher's reflexive practice and shapes the sequential data collection process. The sequential nature of this process gave me considerable time and opportunities to reflect and compare findings across the different datasets during the analysis.

To assist in the development and refinement of interview questions and their alignment with the research questions (Yin, 2018), five pilot semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who were not employed at the school. Completing pilot interviews before on-site interviews, as advised by R. Weiss (1994), allowed me to test the interview schedule for question clarity and topic coverage. Three pilot study participants were current Aotearoa New Zealand school teachers with varying levels of experience, but all were familiar with the secondary school education system. The remaining two participants were School of Management academics at Massey University, one of whom had an intricate knowledge of the PSC framework and both of whom had a good understanding of the Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school system.

Suggestions from pilot participants and observations from pilot interviews enabled me to make changes before conducting the interviews. For example, pilot participants sought clarification on which leaders the interview questions referred to when discussing the impact of leadership on PSC. This led me to clarify in subsequent on-site interviews that "leadership" referred to both the principal and other school leaders who held significant line management responsibilities. The pilot interviews also identified areas requiring follow-up answers to ensure responses were clear, rich, and descriptive. For example, a pilot participant noted that their line manager emphasised the importance of teachers' psychological health and wellbeing in various ways. Such answers prompted me to ask participants to elaborate on these experiences by providing specific examples of how their line manager had prioritised teacher psychological

H&S or provided organisational communication, and subsequently how these actions impacted perceptions of PSC and teacher wellbeing.

One hour was allocated to each participant for the semi-structured interview as school staff were released from their class while a fully registered teacher covered their lesson at no cost to the school. The interviews averaged 41 minutes and were conducted over nine school visits. Guided by Creswell and Guetterman's (2019) edict, all interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms to ensure participant confidentiality. Participants completed consent forms (see Appendix G) that outlined ethical obligations and included permission to audio-record the interview session using Microsoft Teams transcription software. The interview began with an icebreaker (see Appendix H), such as, "Please tell me what you teach and how long you have been working at this school?" Icebreaker questions were followed by questions that directly addressed the research questions (Galletta, 2013). For example, participants were asked, "Why do you think it is important for teachers to have competent leaders?" and "How satisfied are you in your role?" These types of questions enabled participants to provide relevant examples of leadership competence and teacher wellbeing. Further questions prompted a discussion of the potential link between the different concepts (i.e., leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing). For instance, all interview participants were asked, "Do you have any views on how leadership competence may contribute to making your school a psychologically healthy and safe workplace?" and "I'm also interested in your views as to whether you think there's a link between a psychologically healthy and safe workplace and your wellbeing as a teacher?"

Stage 2: Participant Observation. During this stage, I worked temporarily as an unpaid reliever (fully registered teacher) at the school to conduct participant observation. The participant observer approach was appropriate for this research because it involves significant contextual interaction and is often used alongside other data collection methods (Bow, 2002). Therefore, the participant observation served three purposes: first, to deepen understanding of

data collected through document analysis and interviews (e.g., house leadership and school and house working environment); second, to verify document analysis and interview findings; three, to examine and observe how existing key policies and procedures (e.g., leaders' announcements at staff meetings and leader–teacher interactions) were operationalised which could not always be captured through other data sources.

Conducting relief teaching within the school's house settings and observing its leadership functions in action enabled me to explore these areas more deeply and to enhance data triangulation. Participant observation also strengthens the validity of interview findings and enriches the research process (Billups, 2021). For example, interviews revealed that the staffroom was a welcoming and collegial setting that may have positively influenced perceptions of PSC, and that house settings were generally collaborative workspaces. These findings were reaffirmed through informal conversations with teachers in the staffroom and through observations of staff and leaders' behaviours during all-staff meetings and while relieving in different houses.

Importantly, data from the document analysis and participant observation also informed the structure and formulation of the focus group questions. For example, I became aware that *mātauranga Māori*, which is incorporated into the school's leadership framework, is practised by school leaders, as evidenced by frequent references in staff meetings and through the analysis of prominently displayed artefacts throughout the school. These insights into the house system and *mātauranga Māori*, which emerged from document analysis and participant observation, were revisited in focus groups to elicit participants' perceptions of how these phenomena might relate to leadership, PSC, and teacher wellbeing.

My identity as a participant observer was known to staff, and my observational role was secondary to my participation role, as it involved teaching students and collaborating with staff

and leaders, primarily within house settings. I introduced myself to each school employee as a doctoral researcher and sought their verbal permission to include anything they shared with me in the research during the participant observation. Participant observation involved six full days spread over two months. This timeframe was determined by the scope of data collection and practical considerations, such as the school calendar. The length of the participant observation was also shaped by previous insights from document analysis and interviews, which helped to provide a clear direction for its focus. This targeted approach ensured that the observation period was purposeful, efficient, and manageable within the six-day period, as by the sixth day, observations were no longer adding variation to the data I had already collected.

By the end of the participant observation period, I had worked across the school's four houses, spending approximately eight hours in each, which allowed me to develop an understanding of each house's microculture, working conditions, and co-leadership arrangements. The school's open-plan design and house physical settings, shared learning areas, and glass walls facilitated meaningful observations and regular interactions with staff and leaders throughout the day. Importantly, observation extended beyond the classroom and house settings to informal conversations in corridors, during duties (supervision of students during breaks, and before and after school), and in the staffroom, where I attended all-staff meetings and engaged with staff during breaks (see Table 3.3). For ethical reasons, all information gathered during participant observation was anonymised, deliberately generalised, and rendered non-identifiable in my fieldnotes. These notes were revised at the end of each day (an example of one day is shown in Appendix I), when I could reflect on what I had seen and compare my observations with what participants had discussed during interviews. As students were not within the scope of this research, no data from individual students were collected.

Stage 3: Focus Groups. Stage 3 of the data collection process involved focus groups, which had two primary objectives. The first objective was to develop a more intricate

understanding of the school's house system and its leadership structure. While these topics were discussed in interviews and explored during participant observation, the focus group participants were given the opportunity to examine them in greater depth and clarify how the house system and leadership structure may relate to PSC. The second objective was to understand how integrating mātauranga Māori into leadership practice and decision-making might impact PSC and teacher wellbeing. Although mātauranga Māori was frequently included in documents, discussed in staff meetings, and displayed on school artefacts, I sought participants' perspectives on its relevance to leadership and PSC in focus groups. This is because focus groups are valuable for exploring specific topics and individuals' views and experiences through group interaction (Litosseliti, 2003), which the interview setting did not allow for. The questions used in the focus groups differed from those in the interviews (see Appendix J), enabling participants to elaborate on topics requiring further investigation, such as mātauranga Māori and house leadership in relation to PSC and teacher wellbeing. For example, participants were asked: "What impact could mātauranga Māori have on how a leader carries out their role?"

Consent forms (see Appendix K) were completed, and permission to audio-record the focus group was obtained before the session commenced. Prior to beginning each session, participants were reminded of the four domains of the PSC framework using the same visual aid used during the interview stage (Appendix F). To generate rich and insightful data, focus groups were structured using Billups's (2021) sequencing approach, consisting of an icebreaker, an opening question, a transition question, key questions, and a debriefing question. This format facilitated the flow of discussion and encouraged active participation, while group dynamics influenced how I moderated and guided the sessions. Employing strategies suggested by Hennink and Leavy (2014), such as active and passive listening techniques and applying non-

verbal cues and motivational probes, enabled the discussion to flow more naturally and encouraged contributions from the diverse group of participants.

3.5 Data Analysis

This section explains the measures taken to ensure the research followed a trustworthy and transparent process. Central to these aims was the balancing of reflexivity and subjectivity, which helps mitigate researcher bias (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Member checking, continuous comparisons with existing literature, coding tables, and triangulation techniques facilitated these reflexive practices. Most data were collected on-site and securely stored/managed in NVivo computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. A deductive and inductive thematic analysis identified separate codes for each data type and for relevant themes to explain and justify this research's contextualised conclusions.

3.5.1 Data Management and Preparing for Data Analysis

Once each interview and focus group session was completed, the Microsoft Teams transcription file was immediately stored, reviewed, and checked for accuracy against the audio file and handwritten notes. All data (including most organisational documents and participant observation field notes) were stored on a password-protected computer and in an encrypted cloud system. Transcript errors were corrected manually, and all identifying details of individual participants and the school were anonymised. The immediate revision of transcripts and notes prevents critical words from fading from memory (Gibbs, 2018) and mitigates changes in the meaning of the data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). This timely task helped me reflect and make greater sense of the data, ensuring that important patterns were not overlooked. The continuous identification of potential themes and emergent patterns during transcript revision (Patton, 2015) and document analysis led to the emergence of mātauranga Māori and the school's house system as significant themes.

3.5.2 Research Transparency and Trustworthiness

This research employed multiple strategies to ensure the transparency and trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis throughout the case study. For example, key concepts should be defined and clarified in research (Aguinis et al., 2018). This recommendation guided me to include a dedicated section of definitions at the beginning of the thesis and to provide explicit and supplementary explanations where necessary. Additionally, in line with Aguinis and Solarino's (2019) advice, unexpected challenges and events encountered during the research were addressed and disclosed as they arose. For instance, the teachers' industrial action, which temporarily disrupted interview data collection, resulted in the postponement of some interviews.

Participant eligibility criteria and sampling strategies to enhance participant variability and mitigate potential sampling biases (Aguinis et al., 2018; Patton, 2002) were incorporated to enhance transparency and the trustworthiness of data collection, as explained in Section 3.4. Interactions with participants in interviews, participant observation, and focus groups need to be clearly documented, and the point of saturation in interviews identified (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019), as detailed in Sections 3.3 and 3.4. Continuous engagement with participants and on-site presence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) at the school was achieved through repeated interactions across the various stages of data collection, further strengthening the credibility of the data collection process. Additional strategies that enhanced the transparency and trustworthiness of this research, including reflexivity, triangulation, and member checking, are discussed individually below.

3.5.3 Employing a Reflexive Practice

Researcher bias in qualitative research may arise from past experiences, assumptions, sampling decisions, and methodological choices, which must be actively managed through

reflexivity to strengthen the research's credibility (Morse, 2015). As a former teacher, I brought preconceptions and biases regarding school leadership and teacher wellbeing. While bias cannot and should not be eliminated in qualitative research, as it can prevent researchers from developing knowledge and theory (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Lichtman, 2014; Yin, 2011), important safeguards should be implemented to mitigate data misinterpretation (Darlington & Scott, 2020). For instance, during interviews, participant observation, and focus groups, I followed Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) advice and mitigated researcher bias by maintaining a neutral stance and avoiding leading questions that might reflect my own assumptions and influence participants' responses. Furthermore, code tables, triangulation strategies, continuous data comparisons, and the re-examination of transcripts were effective techniques for addressing potential researcher bias and subjectivity, facilitating reflexive practice (Gibbs, 2018), and ensuring a transparent and trustworthy research process. These measures, discussed in greater detail in later sections, also ensured that the data analysis and interpretation were corroborated and well-balanced.

The interpretation and analysis of this research also involved regularly comparing its findings with those of the extant research, as data credibility is enhanced when findings are compared with the literature (Gibbs, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2017). Thus, the findings of the present research were often compared with those from the literature throughout the data collection, data analysis, and coding processes. These techniques were fundamental for verifying the links between PSC and the indicators of teacher wellbeing. For instance, the present research could confirm its finding that positive PSC settings can facilitate teachers' access to job resources, thereby enabling job crafting and supporting job satisfaction, consistent with the literature.

The three-stage sequential data collection process supported my reflexive practice, as I could identify and critique key findings from one data source and compare them with those from another. For instance, semi-structured interview data highlighted the important role of

house leaders and their impact on PSC at the team and individual levels. These findings could then be further investigated and corroborated through participant observation while also informing the development of focus group questions.

Participant observation is susceptible to researcher bias and assumptions (Kirner & Mills, 2019) and therefore adopting a reflexive approach is essential (Flick, 2018). To effectively exercise reflexivity, I kept a daily journal of my observations to support the review and interpretation of the findings. These brief notes, as discussed in Section 3.4.2, were then followed by more detailed contextualised notes completed at the end of the day, while they were still fresh in my mind. This approach enabled me to reflect critically on my observations as I wrote lengthier notes, while also making them as objective as possible.

Since participant observation may affect the behaviours and actions of those being observed (Darlington & Scott, 2020), I also had to be mindful of the impact that my presence had on staff and leaders. For instance, I often asked myself whether the principal would have discussed teacher wellbeing issues at the all-staff meeting had I not been present at the school that day, given that I was researching teacher wellbeing. Similarly, would the level of collaboration between teachers and house leaders have been as strong had I not been present as a participant observer? Consequently, these reflexive thoughts prompted me to carefully reflect on my presence and its potential impact on participants' behaviours, prompting me to compare the findings from participant observation with data from other sources to facilitate objectivity.

I also had to be aware of how the preceding data source, through the sequential data collection process, might influence any newly formed perceptions and assumptions I might have developed, including what I chose to observe during participant observation and how that might shape the questions I would then ask in the focus groups. For example, data from interviews and participant observation indicated that house leaders working closely together

may be an important factor in relation to team and individual-level PSC. While it was important for me to verify such findings in focus groups, I could not do so at the expense of maintaining objectivity or neglecting to identify and analyse other valuable and emergent findings.

3.5.4 Triangulation

One of the core strengths of this research is the triangulation of multiple data sources, which, as Köhler (2016) claims, can support an investigation's findings and provide richer descriptions. Substantiating evidence from multiple sources to shed light on various themes and perspectives (Creswell, 2013) contributes to conclusions that are a comprehensive and accurate reflection of the case (Stake, 1995). Since no single method can accurately capture the scope of an issue (Fisher & Ziviani, 2004), data were collected from various sources (as shown in Figure 3.2) to strengthen the validity of the present research's findings and conclusions.

Triangulation enabled the analysis and comparison of various data types, which helped verify the development of themes. For example, when I co-taught with several teachers in various houses, it generally felt like a collaborative and supportive environment. I could corroborate these participant observation findings by revisiting the interview transcripts and preliminary codes. Similarly, when the principal discussed a psychological H&S initiative at an all-staff meeting, this observation could be cross-checked against earlier interview data to corroborate findings from participant observation.

Additionally, the triangulation process was enhanced by including staff and leaders from different houses within the sample frame. This facilitated interaction and observation amongst different types of participants and captured perspectives from both teachers and leaders. Collecting data from multiple sources (data and participant types) also reduced the potential for respondent bias (Creswell, 2014; Lichtman, 2014), as the robust triangulation framework of the research encompassed diverse participant perspectives. Finally, triangulation also allows

researchers to examine phenomena more deeply (Köhler, 2016). For example, investigating the impact of house leadership on PSC and the house working environment through participant observation and focus groups not only substantiated findings from the semi-structured interviews but also generated deeper insights, including house microcultures and co-leadership.

3.5.5 Member Checking

Member checks are a valuable strategy for establishing trustworthiness and data integrity because they enable researchers to identify their own biases and to ensure the accuracy of participants' experiences (Kornbluh, 2015). Data relating to school policies and procedures that required clarification were regularly reviewed by school staff and leadership for accuracy during the analysis. For example, this included verifying the proportion of school leaders holding accredited mentoring qualifications and the number of assessments each subject set in an academic year (see Appendix L for an example).

The focus groups provided an additional form of member checking, as the questions I formulated were largely based on findings from participant observation. Therefore, participants' responses in focus groups could corroborate much of the data I had collected through participant observation, such as the impact of mātauranga Māori on leadership and, consequently, on PSC. In addition, I met with the principal and another leader to share my preliminary themes and results and to ensure that further member checking of the school's policies and procedures took place. For instance, they clarified the extent to which school leaders received professional development training and the degree of prioritisation the MoE places on teacher wellbeing, emphasising that the responsibility largely rested on the school.

3.5.6 An Inductive and Deductive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected to enable the analysis and explanation of rich, descriptive data while also promoting critical reflection. Additionally, thematic analysis is

effective at capturing the complexities of meaning found in textual (e.g., document analysis) and participant observation data (Guest et al., 2012; Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) stages: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generation of codes; (3) combining codes into themes; (4) reviewing themes; and (5) determining the significance of the resulting themes.

This case study employed both deductive and inductive approaches to coding and theme generation. Deductive analysis, which applies existing theory to guide coding (Terry & Hayfield, 2021), was used to identify primary codes related to the domains of the PSC framework (e.g., *management commitment and support*). This deductive process for assigning primary PSC codes (see Chapter 4) enabled the exploration of PSC-related research questions with greater specificity and in direct alignment with these domains. This approach also ensured that each domain of the PSC framework could be examined not only independently but also comprehensively, within the school's unique setting.

Inductive analysis, which captures and explores people's perspectives and contextual understanding of the topics (Braun & Clarke, 2022), was used to develop the subcodes of each PSC domain. Combining the deductive PSC primary codes with inductive PSC subcodes was methodologically beneficial. The deductively informed primary codes ensured that PSC theory remained central during theme identification and analysis. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) note that combining a deductive orientation with an inductive approach allows the contextual elements of the data to be included in the analysis, which for pragmatist researchers is an important consideration. Thus, adopting a hybrid approach ensured that the richness of the inductive analysis was strengthened by the clarity of the deductive orientation, which enhances theoretical rigour (Naeem et al., 2023). An entirely inductive analysis was used to develop primary codes and subcodes relating to school leadership, teacher wellbeing, and the emergent findings around the school's house system, and mātauranga Māori. The inductive approach

facilitated a deep understanding of participants' perspectives, as they were knowledgeable about these phenomena, having frequently interacted with them in the workplace.

To ensure that the coding process is a credible interpretation of the data, where possible a separate coding system should be created for each data type (Bazeley, 2021). For example, a distinct code related to *house leadership* was developed from data collected from document analysis, interviews, participant observation, and focus groups. An iterative process of renaming and annotating the code tables with corroborating explanations ensured that code labelling accurately reflected the data (an example of which is shown in Appendix M). This enabled the identification of common findings across datasets and the substantiation of codes through triangulation.

NVivo 15 software was used to manage data and develop codes across the various datasets. It makes coding tasks, such as identifying frequencies and applying a single code across similar pieces of text and data, more manageable (O'Kane et al., 2021), while enabling multiple codes to be reliably stored and retrieved efficiently for analysis, code, and theme development (Maher et al., 2018). For example, text chunks from interviews and participant observation fieldnotes were colour-coded and linked to relevant codes in NVivo, enabling their identification and use throughout the data analysis phase. NVivo was particularly useful for identifying which subcodes needed to be merged with other similar subcodes when they were too narrow in scope.

Initial coding involved labelling data using distinct and defining features, such as keywords and common participants' phrases, to identify patterns (Miles et al., 2020). The code count peaked at 272 items. Codes that were overly narrow in scope were merged, while some overlooked codes were elevated in the coding hierarchy. For instance, the school's house structure became an increasingly important code during the participant observation and was

therefore prioritised and further explored in focus groups. The codes changed and evolved as the research progressed, necessitating multiple revisions (Miles et al., 2020). Once the process of adjusting code labels was exhausted, theme development commenced (Braun & Clarke, 2022), with overarching patterns across data types indicating connections that led to the creation of themes and subthemes. For example, the interview subcode *connecting with staff* was combined with the participant observation subcodes *visibility* and *holistic approach* to form the *role model* subtheme (see Appendix N).

The present research applied selected components of Eisenhardt's (1989) theory-building process for case study research, which involved a continuous approach to data analysis. For example, the identification and continuous analysis of patterns and interconnections (Galletta, 2013; Simons, 2009) highlighted the research's findings (e.g., the school's house system in relation to PSC), which facilitated theory-building. This involves looking beyond initial impressions and viewing evidence through multiple perspectives (Farquhar, 2012). For example, a primary aim of this research was to explore how the competence of school leaders enabled the implementation of PSC. As indicated by the interview data, this focus provided a complementary lens for examining the relationship between leadership and PSC within a school context. This finding was revisited and further corroborated through participant observation and focus group data, enabling diverse perspectives and ongoing analysis.

The temporal spread of data collection from multiple sources enabled continuous reflection and the comprehensive interpretation of findings, facilitating case study theory-building. For instance, I initially identified that *mātauranga Māori* may impact school leadership and PSC during the analysis of the school charter in May 2023. This analysis was subsequently examined during participant observation of staff meetings in late June and the analysis of the leadership framework in July, and further explored in the focus groups conducted in September. This iterative approach enabled the examination and development of new,

relevant contextual concepts related to PSC, consistent with Eisenhardt's (1989) theory-building process for case study research.

3.6 Ethics Approval

A full ethics application was submitted to Massey University's Human Ethics Committee in December 2022. This process was peer-reviewed by my supervisors, who advised on mitigating potential risks to participants and me, as well as on the necessary steps to maintain participant confidentiality. Since the research focused on teacher wellbeing, the case study protocol also outlined the external support services available to participants.

The application highlighted that participation in the study was voluntary and open to all leaders, teachers, and support staff. It also noted that the school was led by a competent, experienced leadership team that supported the project and could help prevent potential staff dysfunction. While the internal anonymity of individuals could not be assured, the external anonymity of participants and the school could be ensured by anonymising identifying details. The ethics application included documentation such as a supporting email from the school's principal, the participant information sheet, and consent forms. I also consulted Massey University's Associate Dean – Māori, Professor Matt Roskrug, during the ethics application process, to acknowledge the university's status as a Tiriti o Waitangi¹ | Treaty of Waitangi-led institution and the research taking place in Aotearoa New Zealand. Approval to conduct research was granted by the Human Ethics Committee in February 2023 (see Appendix O).

¹ Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) is Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document, signed on 6 February 1840 between representatives of the British Crown and over 500 Māori chiefs. It established the relationship between Māori and the New Zealand Government, based on principles of partnership, protection, and participation (Waitangi, Tribunal, n.d).

3.7 Organisation of Results

The results and discussion of this thesis are spread across Chapters 4–7. Each chapter has a specific focus and includes a separate results section, followed by a discussion section for each primary theme, ensuring a clear connection between the research findings and the relevant literature. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the school’s PSC across the framework’s four domains. Chapter 5 then addresses the first research question of this case study: How does school leadership impact PSC? The chapter is divided into two key sections that address the first research question’s two objectives: (1) To explore how leadership (the principal and line managers) operationalises existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams; and (2) To examine how leadership competence enables school leaders to implement PSC by investigating how specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours support its implementation. Chapter 6 addresses the second research question: How does PSC help address common challenges in teaching and enable conditions that support teacher wellbeing? The chapter begins by exploring how a positive PSC environment addresses some of the challenges that teachers regularly face in the workplace before examining how PSC supports common indicators of teacher wellbeing (e.g., teacher stress). Chapter 7 then presents the research’s emergent findings, including how the house system and mātauranga Māori contributed to PSC. Chapter 7 also proposes two novel practical leadership tools developed in this research: the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4) and the Leader Competence–PSC Framework (see Figure 7.5), both informed by the findings of Chapter 5 on leadership’s impact on PSC.

The different data sources and their identifying acronyms used in Chapters 4–7 are listed in Table 3.4. There are instances in which participants are distinguished by their role. When referring to participants in leadership roles, the term *leaders* is used. To protect the identities of the small number of support staff ($n = 2$) involved, teachers and support staff have been grouped

into a single subgroup, referred to as *teachers*. This term is appropriate given that the support staff who participated in the research were also registered teachers.

Table 3.4 *Types of Data and Identifying Key*

Type of data	Identifying key
Organisational document	OD = organisational document located in Appendix E (numbered 1–19)
Semi-structured interview	P = participant – employees, such as teachers or support staff (numbered 1–20) SL = school leader (numbered 1–6)
Participant observation	PO = participant observation
Focus group	TFGP = teacher focus group participant (numbered 1–10) SLFGP = school leader focus group participant (numbered 1–3)

3.8 Chapter Summary

In alignment with the pragmatist paradigm, this qualitative research employed an explanatory single case study to collect rich, contextual data from a secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand. A case study boundary and protocol were established to define the research's sample frame, purposive sampling method, and participant risk-mitigation techniques. Data collection began with document analysis, which continued while other data sources were being collected sequentially. The sequential data collection process comprised three distinct stages: 26 semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and three focus groups, thereby enabling methodological triangulation. Multiple, ongoing measures were exercised to ensure researcher reflexivity, research trustworthiness, and transparency throughout the investigation. For instance, triangulation, the use of coding tables, member checking, and continuous comparisons with the literature throughout the data analysis ensured the trustworthiness of the data and that researcher reflexivity was extensively practised.

An inductive and deductive thematic analysis led to the development and identification of codes, created separately for each data type and revised iteratively in NVivo. This led to the

development of themes and subthemes that reflected data from all sources, enabling the identification of patterns across datasets. The analysis involved explaining how and why events and interactions occurred, allowing the development of meaningful conclusions that address the research questions and generate valuable theoretical insights and implications for practice.

Chapter 4: An Assessment of the School's Psychosocial Safety

Climate – Results and Discussion

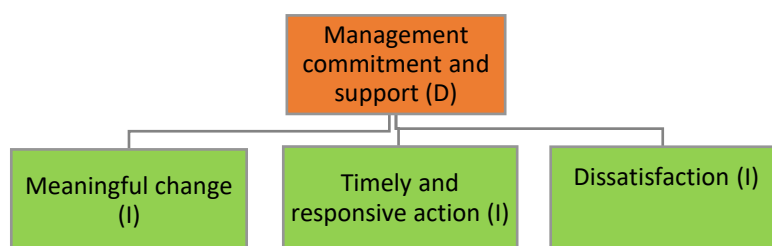
4.1 Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a holistic analysis of the participating school's psychosocial safety climate (PSC). The chapter is organised into four deductively derived primary themes, each representing one of the four domains of the PSC framework: *management commitment and support*, *management priority*, *organisational participation in health and safety (H&S) activities and policy*, and *organisational communication*. These primary themes were interpreted through the lens of PSC to examine how organisational policies, practices, and procedures shape psychological H&S at the school. Each primary theme comprises inductive subthemes derived from data collected through document analysis, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and focus groups. This combined approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the data while also engaging with established PSC theory.

4.2 Management Commitment and Support

Within the school's context, the deductively informed primary theme of management commitment and support was split into three inductive subthemes: *meaningful change*, *timely and responsive action*, and *dissatisfaction* (see Figure 4.1). The purpose of this primary theme was to examine the extent to which participants perceived management commitment and support at the school. Organisational documents detailed school policies and procedures, while in interviews, participants generally evaluated this domain based on the policies, practices, and procedures they felt contributed favourably or adversely to PSC.

Figure 4.1 *Management Commitment and Support Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Key: Orange – primary theme; green – subthemes.

(D): Deductive analysis; (I): inductive analysis.

4.2.1 Meaningful Change

This subtheme reflected participants’ perceptions of tangible and meaningful changes that exemplified management commitment and support for teachers’ psychological H&S within the participating school. One example was the adjustment to the school’s extracurricular programmes, which reduced the workload by allowing teachers to choose the level of commitment that suited their personal circumstances. As P3 highlighted, “They [leadership] wanted to take into consideration that if you have kids, how much can you actually prepare to give? And I thought that was really good, that they’ve started to take steps like this.” In turn, these changes appeared to have given teachers greater autonomy and latitude in the amount of time and commitment they could dedicate to extracurricular activities.

Teachers also appreciated the school’s flexible working arrangements, which allowed staff to work from home when not scheduled to teach classes: “You’re not required to stay on site, so I think people appreciate the opportunity to be able to go home to complete other tasks” (P4). The changes described above aligned with the school’s Policies and Procedures document (OD15), which outlines the school’s commitment to flexible working arrangements for staff where possible. Importantly, teachers perceived these changes as meaningful improvements to their role’s autonomy and working conditions, while also offering greater flexibility in how and where they could complete some of their work.

4.2.2 Timely and Responsive Action

The speed and responsiveness of school leaders in addressing issues were central to this subtheme, particularly when interventions helped prevent adverse impacts on teachers' psychological H&S. Such actions were often enabled by management commitment and support during periods of heightened stress and workload. Teachers were dependent on this type of support due to the various demands of their role (see Section 5.3). One teacher gave this example of how her colleague received swift and effective management commitment and support:

Just recently, another teacher said, "This is the first break I've had. I've got 12,000 things to do, and I don't have enough time," and then she got teary-eyed ... So, I went to the teacher's house leader [line manager] and explained the situation. The house leader immediately took the teacher's duties for that week. It wouldn't have helped as much if the teacher was stressed the whole week and then the duties were taken off her a week or more later. It [support] needs to be when the trouble is happening. (P9)

The quote illustrates the criticality of timing in mitigating potential psychosocial risks. The house leader's immediate action not only demonstrated responsiveness to a stressful situation but also an understanding of the urgency required in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment. This finding indicates that timely interventions can prevent stress escalation, underscoring the importance of prompt support from school leaders.

4.2.3 Dissatisfaction

While most participants appreciated leadership's efforts to make meaningful changes and demonstrate timely, responsive action, a sizeable proportion of teachers raised concerns that management commitment and support was lacking in some areas. These unfavourable perceptions were predominantly the result of ongoing workload issues and arduous tasks, which

may offset the favourable impact of other policies, practices, and procedures intended to protect psychological H&S. Teachers often mentioned having to take on newly implemented, time-consuming tasks. As P10 pointed out:

One big thing that the leaders are driving is the holistic report.² The documentation is a lot of work, it's very time-consuming, and creates a lot of stress for teachers, as well as having to monitor it ... So this [initiative] is going against staff wellbeing ... And then they [leaders] want us to have [good] wellbeing, but at the same time, they keep on piling things [tasks] and needing us to fulfil extra meetings or responsibilities.

Therefore, teachers' positive perceptions of management commitment and support described earlier were often juxtaposed with, or at times easily superseded by, unfavourable perceptions when school leaders assigned burdensome tasks, such as new pedagogical and pastoral initiatives.

4.2.4 Discussion

In the present context, management commitment and support were demonstrated through the implementation of meaningful changes to teachers' roles that generally improved working conditions and mitigated psychosocial hazards, including excessive workloads and work pace. As such, monitoring workloads and having greater control over one's work schedule (Leka & Jain, 2010) allows employees to decide when and how to undertake specific tasks (Huyghebaert, Gillet, Lahiani, et al., 2018; Yulita, Idris, & Dollard, 2022). The *meaningful changes* subtheme supports the findings of quantitative research, which indicates that PSC may mitigate job demands and increase job resources through the enactment of policies, practices,

² The holistic reporting system requires teachers to monitor the progress and collect relevant data of individual students throughout the course of the year, which parents/caregivers have real-time access to through the school's portal. This approach differs significantly from traditional reporting systems, which are published two or three times a year.

and procedures (Bailey et al., 2014; Law et al., 2011). By identifying these meaningful changes, the present research provides novel insights that illustrate how specific actions can contribute to tangible improvements in the management commitment and support domain within school settings. For example, the findings show that a positive PSC environment can facilitate flexible working arrangements, which in turn can support an improved work–life balance and more manageable teacher workloads.

While prior research has emphasised that timely and responsive action by leaders is a pivotal indicator of management commitment and support (Zadow & Dollard, 2016), this research extends this understanding by illustrating *how* and *why* responsiveness is pivotal in everyday school settings. Multiple teachers valued leaders who acted promptly and responded effectively, particularly when de-escalating stressful situations, as timely actions can help prevent or mitigate psychosocial hazards. This finding is especially important in educational settings, where teachers are often isolated from their colleagues and leaders (Schipper et al., 2020), making timely and responsive action a critical component of effective PSC in practice.

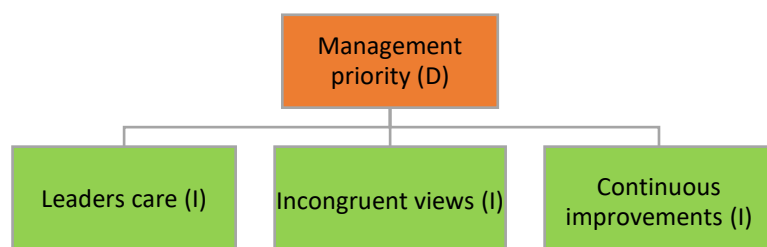
The design of work roles influences employees' psychological experiences (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013) and can also reflect management commitment and support (Idris et al., 2014). Therefore, teachers being allocated time-consuming and stressful tasks in quick succession, such as holistic reporting and new pedagogical and pastoral initiatives, often led to negative perceptions of management commitment and support. Such perceptions of dissatisfaction can arise because management commitment and support may reflect leaders' willingness to address potential threats to psychological H&S (Loh et al., 2020) and the extent to which leaders provide adequate resources and employee support to buffer job demands (Abdi et al., 2023; Dollard & Karasek, 2010). This research highlights how quickly teachers' perceptions of management commitment and support can deteriorate when new policies,

practices, and procedures intensify work demands and consequently compromise teachers' psychological H&S.

4.3 Management Priority

The second deductively derived primary theme examines the extent to which school leaders prioritise teachers' psychological H&S over learner outcomes, including students' academic achievement and their pastoral and cultural needs. Three subthemes emerged from an inductive analysis: *leaders care*, *incongruent views*, and *continuous improvements* (see Figure 4.2). Most participants thought that the leadership team showed a genuine interest in teachers' psychological H&S, largely due to the caring and sustained efforts since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these positive perceptions, some teachers' views of management priority differed from those of their leaders, resulting in the *incongruent views* subtheme.

Figure 4.2 Management Priority Primary Theme and Subthemes



4.3.1 Leaders Care

This subtheme reflects the favourable views held by multiple participants regarding the management priority of teachers' psychological H&S. There was near-consensus amongst teachers that, generally, the leadership team did not focus solely on student outcomes, which appeared to impact how leaders treated teachers. As one teacher explained, "I think they're not just saying they care about wellbeing, they're actually doing things to show that they do. And they're putting in things that make a difference ... Like they actually are trying" (P2).

Teachers explained how leadership demonstrated care for teachers' psychological H&S by providing examples of how it is prioritised. For instance, some after-school meetings that had been replaced with "personal time" were cited by multiple participants as evidence of management priority. In addition, a teacher focus group participant noted: "The number of assessments that we have to set each year and have to mark has almost halved [from four to two assessments per class] since I've been here" (TFGP5). Teachers believed that leadership recognised the impact of excessive marking on teachers' workloads, prompting actions to address these concerns and positively shaping perceptions of management priority.

4.3.2 Incongruent Views

However, there is also evidence of differing views between teachers and leaders concerning management priority. Leaders generally believed they prioritised teachers' psychological H&S, whereas teacher participants were less convinced, perceiving that student outcomes usually took precedence. A teacher provided the following example of how student outcomes often take priority over teachers' psychological H&S:

We always start the year off OK. You hear [from leadership], we're going to prioritise mental health ... They've gone back on their word with almost all of that. So, I feel they always have good intentions, but as soon as things get busier and we have more things to do, that's when it kind of falls apart a little bit, and it's more about what we need to get done for the students' benefit rather than for the staff's benefit. (P18)

Concerns regarding workload were expressed predominantly by teachers, who were assigned additional tasks as the academic year became more demanding.

In contrast, leaders believed that teacher psychological H&S was generally as important as student outcomes. SL1 gave this perspective:

If a teacher was to approach me, or if I were aware of challenges that the teacher is under, I would put it on the same level as a student. Because ultimately, if our teachers are not safe or our teachers are not in a position to teach or are not healthy, then the outcomes are not going to be right for students. And so, I'd put it [teachers' psychological H&S] on par with students'.

Similar comments were made by other school leaders, suggesting that leaders' interpretations of management priorities may focus more on corrective action than on implementing preventive measures. Hence, employing preventive measures to address threats to teachers' psychological H&S appeared to be less emphasised by school leaders.

4.3.3 Continuous Improvements

Despite the incongruent views between leaders and teachers described above, most teachers acknowledged that there had been an increased focus on management priority in recent years at the school. Teachers noted significant improvements during the COVID-19 pandemic and indicated that the measures introduced had either remained in place or even improved. For example, as P7 explained:

I think it's a gap [between student and teacher priority] that's closing. I think in a school, you'll always have that primary objective relating to students and their success. But I think our leadership does recognise that success doesn't happen without staff being in the right place – mentally. And I think they definitely value how we feel. And they take steps to try to ensure that we are feeling good about this place.

This quote suggests that teachers were aware of the competing priorities that schools and leaders face. Nevertheless, most believed that leaders had taken incremental steps to place greater emphasis on management priority. This view was also shared by one school leader, who noted:

Although students usually in the past have always been at the absolute apex of priorities, I think that's really shifted in recent years. We're less apologetic in recent years to say, no – our teaching staff and retention and wellbeing and happiness, enjoyment, fulfilment at school, you know – these are all a high priority ... I think in terms of psychological health ... perhaps it's been a bit neglected in the past.

(SL2)

The continuous improvements in management priority were recognised by most participants, suggesting that the recent focus on teacher psychological H&S has been viewed as a “step in the right direction”. In fact, even teachers who were critical of leadership for assigning time-consuming tasks, such as the holistic reporting, that contributed to heavier workloads (as noted in Section 4.2), acknowledged that working conditions had improved, primarily due to ongoing improvements in management priority.

4.3.4 Discussion

Management priority refers to the importance that leaders place on employees' psychological H&S relative to other organisational objectives (Afsharian et al., 2016). Most teachers believed that leaders cared and therefore prioritised teachers' psychological H&S in relation to student-related outcomes (e.g., academic, cultural, pastoral, and sporting), as leaders sought to reduce workloads through the enactment of management priority. For example, marking fewer assessments was seen by participants as school leaders recognising that previous assessment practices were contributing to excessive teacher workload, prompting leaders to act accordingly to mitigate these impacts. This finding builds on existing PSC scholarship by demonstrating that, in school settings, leaders can prioritise teacher psychological H&S over other outcomes even when such decisions risk impacting student learning and eliciting negative responses from parents/caregivers. From the teachers' perspective, changes in assessment

policies and procedures were a clear indication of management priority and a deliberate effort by leadership to alleviate job intensification and workload pressures.

Despite recognising leadership's efforts to prioritise teacher psychological H&S, most teachers believed that student outcomes took precedence over teachers' psychological H&S. This perception was reinforced when leadership failed to follow through on what they said they would do (espoused PSC) by not enacting policies and procedures that protect psychological H&S (enacted PSC) (Yulita et al., 2017), and instead replaced teachers' personal after-school planning time with staff meetings as the academic year became busier. Consequently, management priority may influence how and when leaders assign tasks and design jobs, which, in turn, can adversely shape teachers' perceptions of PSC, particularly when tasks related to student outcomes are prioritised over teachers' psychological H&S. However, most teachers also acknowledged that a school's purpose is to educate children, emphasising Zohar's (2010) assertion that leaders may have to choose between balancing employee safety against other competing demands.

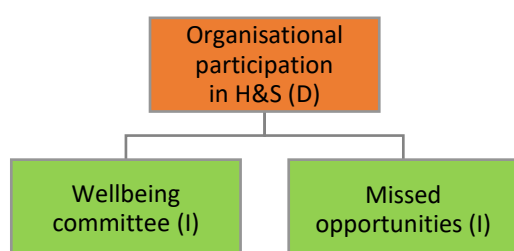
In contrast, most leaders believed they prioritised teachers' psychological H&S equally with student outcomes, highlighting the *incongruent views* subtheme. Consistent with the recent research, improving PSC is challenging when leaders do not share their employees' views on psychological H&S (McLinton et al., 2025). The findings of the present research offer a more nuanced understanding of how incongruent views can shape the enactment of PSC in school settings, with some leaders adopting a more reactive approach that can influence both the types of policies and practices developed and the thresholds required for their implementation. These insights suggest that incongruent views may impede the development of effective preventive policies and procedures, as they can result in less proactive responses to psychosocial risks rather than preventative action.

Despite the existence of incongruent views, most teachers believed that leadership has made continuous improvements to management priority. These improvements were responsible for what some participants described as a diminishing “gap” between the prioritisation of student outcomes and teacher psychological H&S. The changes made during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to improve perceptions of management priority, which, as Sjöblom et al. (2022) and Juutinen et al. (2023) report, are critical during challenging times. The findings of the present research also align with the literature, which has shown that PSC strengthened during COVID-19, leading to a more supportive and caring workplace (Loh et al., 2021; Tappin et al., 2023), and that, since the pandemic, relevant policies have become more effective at not only addressing employee concerns but also mitigating job demands like excessive teacher workloads.

4.4 Organisational Participation in Health and Safety Activities and Policy

The deductively informed primary theme of *organisational participation* concerns the extent to which different stakeholders within the school engaged in H&S activities and policy. This primary theme comprises two inductively developed subthemes: *wellbeing committee* and *missed opportunities* (see Figure 4.3). Most participants identified the wellbeing committee and the individual staff members serving as the H&S representative, union representative, and board representative as key examples of organisational participation within the school. Other platforms and systems that facilitated organisational participation within the school are explored further in Section 5.2.

Figure 4.3 *Organisational Participation in Health and Safety Primary Theme and Subthemes*



4.4.1 Wellbeing Committee

Coordinated by a group of teachers, with participation open to all staff, the wellbeing committee was perceived by most participants as an effective means of encouraging teachers' engagement in and awareness of H&S activities and policy. For example, the committee has a "Wellbeing" stand in the staffroom for everyone to view and suggest ideas to improve teacher wellbeing, such as tips on managing stress through mindfulness and physical exercise, and on seeking support and advice when involved in workplace disputes. The stand also has staff feedback boxes on what the school is "doing well" and "how it can improve" (PO/OD17). In addition, a digital document accessible to staff outlines the committee's upcoming events, ranging from staff dinners to physical activities, which have been well attended by staff (OD18). Additionally, members of the committee frequently spoke at staff meetings, reminding staff and leaders how to support one another and make use of the support systems and social initiatives the committee offers (PO).

In particular, participants recognised the committee's efforts to make the school a more inclusive and welcoming place to work, as well as its role as an important communication channel for teachers to express concerns and receive support. One teacher described the committee this way:

They are an easy [group of] people to talk to, that you can go to, and then they can approach the leaders and say, "Hey, this staff member is feeling ... We need this ..."

So, they do have a system built in that you can talk about how you're feeling. That is effective because it's just regular teachers. (P3)

The wellbeing committee is also responsible for coordinating the wellbeing survey and subsequent focus groups, which sought staff views on working conditions, the challenges they face, and the mentoring and leadership support they receive (OD19). Teachers appreciated that

staff could provide feedback anonymously, which could lead to meaningful change in areas such as workloads and job design aspects of their roles. As P17 outlined: “We’ve done surveys, and they [leaders] actively try to change things. Like they made some of our meetings personal wellbeing time.”

Staff could also participate in post-survey focus groups that discussed the main patterns and issues identified in the survey results, enabling frontline staff to be directly involved in H&S activities and policy. As SL3 highlighted:

The thing that strikes me most about the focus groups is that the communication isn’t just coming from top down; we’ve got teachers, right from beginning teachers through to more experienced teachers and leaders, feeding back information through the focus groups. (SL3)

The results of the surveys and focus groups have directly informed the development of new policies, practices, and procedures, contributing to meaningful change (as discussed in Section 4.2). This includes reducing the number of assessments teachers must mark each year, decreasing the frequency of weekly meetings, increasing flexibility for extracurricular commitments, and allowing work-from-home options.

4.4.2 Missed Opportunities

When asked about staff representation in the interviews, participants often identified three key roles within the school that, in their view, related to participation in H&S activities and policy. Like most public schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, the school had a H&S representative, a board representative, and a union representative, all of whom are full-time staff members. However, the findings indicate that none of these roles directly addressed teacher psychological H&S concerns, leading to the creation of the *missed opportunities* subtheme.

The absence of a psychological focus in the H&S staff representative role was evident when participants could freely discuss the role's physical component but not its psychological H&S component. A participant made this salient point: "The H&S aspects are communicated. But when you look at health, do they include psychological health? And from what I see, I get the feeling that psychological health is not as promoted" (P17). This was confirmed during staff meetings, which included weekly announcements by the H&S representative that focused solely on physical safety, such as warnings about a nearby fire, urging staff to stay alert on the last day of term, and reminding teachers to promptly report faulty classroom equipment to their house leaders (PO).

The findings also suggest that the board's staff representative (who attends all school board meetings) is rarely involved in teacher psychological H&S matters. An analysis of the minutes from 28 board meetings found that none of the items discussed during this three-year period pertained to teacher psychological H&S (OD12). Rather, meetings focused on operational expenditures, staffing requirements, student achievement data, and the school's strategic vision and charter. This finding was corroborated by a school leader in an interview, after being asked whether the psychological H&S of staff was discussed at board meetings: "No, not to my knowledge. The only time it might be is if it is in our work plan. Indirectly it might be ... you have things like leave, which will be looked into" (SL5).

Similarly, the union representative was not directly involved in matters related to teachers' psychological H&S. The role appeared primarily administrative, with the representative largely responsible for relaying employment negotiation information to union members. As P7 explained, "I have never heard the union representative being asked or involved in any safety or policies and procedures in terms of staff mental wellbeing. I think it's probably the principal and school leaders' responsibility." Overall, the three representative roles appeared to make a negligible contribution to promoting teachers' psychological H&S,

resulting in these roles being identified as missed opportunities to support organisational participation.

4.4.3 Discussion

The school's wellbeing committee offered teacher mediation services and administered the staff wellbeing survey and subsequent focus groups to implement meaningful change, as discussed in Section 4.2. Surveys and focus groups encouraged organisational participation by identifying psychological threats and developing solutions (Inoue et al., 2025; Loh, Dollard, et al., 2024). Similarly, the wellbeing committee promoted teacher voice, enabling them to raise concerns and be actively involved in the consultative process regarding potential changes that may improve working conditions and, subsequently, teachers' psychological H&S. These findings also support the literature, which indicates that collaboration and consultation between leadership and staff facilitate effective problem-solving and the exchange of information and understanding between these groups, which are essential to achieving a healthier workplace (DeJoy et al., 2010; Dollard & Gordon, 2014; Nielsen & Brough, 2023).

However, the success of any policy or procedure depends not only on its content but also on *how* it is developed (Abildgaard et al., 2020; Biron et al., 2012). Employee participation promotes agency and engagement in addressing psychosocial risks (Cooper & Cartwright, 1997; Tappin et al., 2023), particularly amongst teachers, who are both exposed to these risks and best positioned to contribute towards the development of an effective intervention. As demonstrated in this research, teacher participation in running the wellbeing committee and completing surveys and focus groups enabled staff to influence leadership decisions relating to teacher psychological H&S and to play an active role in shaping and enacting new policies, practices, and procedures. This finding enhances understanding of the *organisational participation* domain within a school setting, which the literature identifies as facilitating a “bottom-up” approach that allows employees to be directly involved in developing

organisation-specific responses that detect, assess, and manage potential risks (Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Tappin et al., 2023). From a contextual perspective, this is especially important within schools, given that each school has a distinct culture, vision, student cohort, charter, and local community.

Participation through staff representation can increase buy-in and control in the workplace, potentially shaping positive work conditions (Dollard, 2019; Loh, Dollard et al., 2024). However, the findings of the present research demonstrate that staff representative roles typically do not focus on teachers' psychological H&S, potentially inhibiting organisational participation through these key roles. For example, the H&S representative appeared to focus primarily on physical safety, which, while not uncommon within organisations (Loh et al., 2019; McLinton, Zadow, et al., 2018), suggests that organisational participation could improve if the role placed a greater emphasis on teachers' psychological H&S. Relatedly, while the union representative advocated for teachers' working conditions under the triennial collective agreement, ongoing consultation with the school's leadership team on teachers' psychological H&S issues remained limited. Similarly, although school boards are responsible for H&S legislation in schools (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2024a, 2024b), teacher psychological H&S concerns were generally not advocated by the staff representative at the board level, nor were they discussed at board meetings. This absence is detrimental to organisational participation, as representatives can play a critical role in facilitating employee voice, addressing poor working conditions (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2022), and informing employees about how policies and procedures are developed and enacted (Bailey et al., 2014).

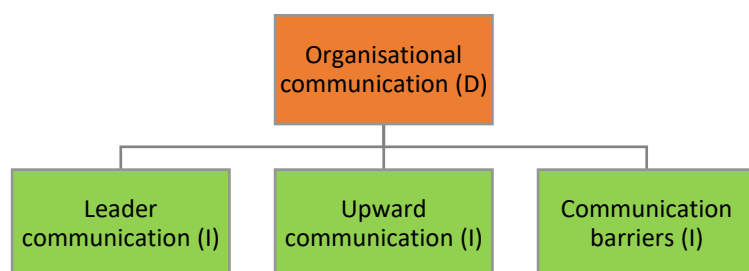
From an organisational participation perspective, the three staff representative roles represent significant missed opportunities, as they could serve as valuable drivers of teacher psychological H&S and as intermediaries between teachers, leadership, and the wider board. Hence, these findings extend existing literature by highlighting how these staff representative

roles could enhance organisational participation in H&S activities and policy, specifically within school settings. Greater dialogue and cooperation between staff representatives and leadership regarding teacher psychological H&S could strengthen organisational participation by representing teachers' views and interests across various platforms. For example, involving the union representative in co-constructing policies and procedures in selected leadership meetings and during the development of the school's charter could enhance the consultation process and help improve teachers' working conditions and psychological H&S through meaningful change. Therefore, this research highlights that the three staff representative roles discussed here could increase organisational participation in school settings.

4.5 Organisational Communication

The deductively derived primary theme of *organisational communication* centres on how effectively psychological H&S issues were communicated to teachers and the extent to which they could express their concerns to leaders. This primary theme comprises three inductively developed subthemes: *leader communication*, *upward communication*, and *communication barriers* (see Figure 4.4). The leader communication and upward communication subthemes represent effective modes of communication that can promote positive perceptions of organisational communication. Conversely, the communication barriers subtheme encompasses factors that may hinder organisational communication between these key groups.

Figure 4.4 *Organisational Communication Primary Themes and Subthemes*



4.5.1 Leader Communication

The findings indicate that school leaders play an instrumental role in enabling effective organisational communication. The various communication methods available to leaders at the school allowed them to reinforce their commitment to and prioritisation of teachers' psychological H&S. Participants often evaluated organisational communication based on how the principal emphasised the importance of teachers' wellbeing. For example, SL3 commented: "We hear our principal talking about wellbeing ... Acknowledging teachers but also expressing care for teachers." These regular reminders underscore the principal's genuine concern for and importance placed on teachers' psychological H&S.

Teachers also appreciated leader communication when they faced challenging work or personal situations. They reported that school leaders often initiated contact via email, text message, or phone to check on their wellbeing. P9 described this as follows:

I got an email while I was away. My leader asked if everything was ok. Like they genuinely care about you. I get the feeling that it's out of a genuine place of care rather than just that employee relationship.

Not only does this type of contact by school leaders exemplify effective leader communication, but it also signals to teachers that their psychological H&S is important. Furthermore, it sends a strong message that the care leaders provide is for both personal and professional reasons, making the relationship feel less impersonal.

4.5.2 Upward Communication

This subtheme underscores the importance of teachers' ability to express their concerns to school leaders, rather than solely having top-down channels of communication. Teachers recognised the importance of upward communication and its impact on perceptions of organisational communication, particularly within team and individual settings. This type of

communication was critical for teachers, given that they worked closely with house leaders to whom they reported. As P14 commented, house leader (line manager) receptivity is a key factor of effective upward communication:

If I do need to talk about something, I know I can go straight to one of our [house] leaders and have that dialogue with them at any time. And that's something I do really like, and in terms of it being reciprocal, they can even talk to me, and so it goes both ways, and they are receptive.

Similarly, I regularly observed teachers speaking with house leaders about challenges they encountered throughout the day, exemplifying upward communication. In most situations, teachers appeared comfortable approaching house leaders for various reasons, not only while actively teaching but also in more informal settings, such as in the staffroom during breaks (PO). Positive perceptions of upward communication appeared to increase a teacher's willingness to approach school leaders and seek support, knowing that their leaders were understanding of their concerns.

4.5.3 Communication Barriers

Some teachers and leaders reported varying levels of dissatisfaction with organisational communication, prompting the development of the *communication barriers* subtheme. Generally, these participants perceived leaders' messaging to staff as placing limited emphasis on teachers' psychological H&S concerns, which adversely impacted perceptions of PSC. One teacher perceived this lack of explicit messaging as follows:

I don't think they [leaders] have very clear messaging ... There's never been anything as obvious as "It's alright to do this" or "Prioritise your health – that comes first." So, there's never anything too outwardly. Like, "We see that your mental health or

wellbeing is important.” So, there is nothing that is very obviously communicated about.
(P11)

Some leaders also expressed concerns that not all individual leaders were effectively exercising organisational communication, suggesting a need for greater consistency and stronger intent across the school’s leadership team. An experienced leader reflected, “I think I’ve rated it as an area that could still improve. I think communication around psychological health and wellbeing ... perhaps from some of our leadership team, could be more visible” (SL4). This quote suggests that there were variations in organisational communication amongst individual leaders, which may have not only contributed to communication barriers but also adversely shaped perceptions of organisational communication.

4.5.4 Discussion

Participants agreed that leader communication can be influential in promoting and normalising organisational communication, as it increases staff awareness of psychosocial risks and enables employees to assess and respond when their health or the health of a colleague is under threat (Idris et al., 2012; LaMontagne et al., 2012; Plimmer et al., 2022). School leaders were also instrumental in reaching out to individual teachers who required support, aligning with earlier research which found that direct contact with employees plays an essential role in supporting psychological H&S and preventing risks (Yarker et al., 2022; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022). Most teachers valued leader communication, as it demonstrated genuine concern and served as an indicator of support when tackling both personal and professional challenges. This is because organisational communication not only demonstrates leaders’ care but also reinforces management commitment to psychological H&S, and is a critical factor in determining whether an intervention achieves its intended outcome (Dollard & Bailey, 2021; Ipsen et al., 2015; Nielsen & Brough, 2023). Furthermore, when exercised well, regular

organisational communication by leaders reinforces the perception that adequate resources are available and accessible (Mansour & Azeem, 2024; Mellor et al., 2012).

Teachers also appreciated upward communication, as it enabled them to safely express their concerns relating to psychological H&S. When employees initiate organisational communication, it normalises discussions about psychological H&S (Dollard & Bailey, 2021). Hence, upward communication may minimise hierarchical barriers that could otherwise limit communication and reduce teacher participation in decision-making. This is because upward communication not only provides employees with opportunities to receive appropriate support (Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Idris & Dollard, 2011) but also fosters an environment where teachers feel their suggestions are considered and that they contribute to valuable changes in the workplace (Athanasios, 2024). Findings from the wellbeing survey and focus groups (as discussed in Section 4.4) also provide a deeper understanding of how upward communication functions within a school setting and enables teacher voice and influence over decisions relating to the protection of teachers' psychological H&S. Through these systems of upward communication, teachers are better equipped not only to seek support but also to articulate their views and suggest improvements, which can lead to meaningful changes in working conditions and more effective psychosocial risk management.

However, some teachers and leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the level of organisational communication, as it was not central to all leaders' messaging. A contributing factor to communication barriers in the school was that the eight house leaders had varying degrees of management priority, resulting in different levels of organisational communication. As such, leaders who infrequently exercised organisational communication were likely to also stifle upward communication, which limited teachers' willingness to seek help from an unsupportive leader. This is problematic, as accessible and varied communication channels

enable employees to report issues, making them feel safe, even in challenging circumstances (Dollard et al., 2024; Lintanga & Rathakrishnan, 2024).

Ensuring that individual leaders prioritise teachers' psychological H&S is crucial for achieving consistent and effective organisational communication across multiple teams in schools. When leaders consistently highlight psychosocial risks with a clear purpose, they send a strong message to staff that they are genuinely concerned about their psychological H&S and that threats are being actively addressed (Afsharian et al., 2025; McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018; O'Keeffe & Tuckey, 2014; Zadow & Dollard, 2016). However, the findings indicate that organisational communication was not consistently exercised amongst the school's line managers, potentially weakening perceptions of management priority, especially at the team and individual levels. This finding offers new insight by demonstrating how inconsistencies in line managers' organisational communication can undermine team-level PSC and extends knowledge of the role of line management in shaping PSC through everyday communication practices within school settings.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that management commitment and support is clearly enacted when policies, practices, and procedures drive meaningful and responsive changes that positively impact teachers' working conditions, such as workload, autonomy, and flexible working arrangements. However, teachers also expressed concerns that the positive impact of these meaningful and responsive changes was sometimes overshadowed by the introduction of new, time-consuming administrative tasks and pedagogical initiatives, which could, in turn, foster unfavourable perceptions of management commitment and support and management priority. These findings further reinforce the idea that while formal policies and procedures provide a foundation for psychological H&S, their effectiveness depends on how leaders

implement them and how staff experience them. Overall, PSC was not static but dynamic and context-dependent, and it varied across different areas and levels of the school. This emphasises the importance of examining PSC as a multilevel, relational construct, which is explored further in Chapter 5 on leadership.

Most teachers perceived that while leaders cared about their psychological H&S, this concern did not always receive the same priority as student outcomes; a perception not shared by most school leaders, revealing the impact of incongruent views on management priority. This finding builds on the PSC literature within school settings by demonstrating how incongruent views shape how leaders interpret and apply policies and procedures, the thresholds for implementation, and their willingness to address the psychological threats that teachers face. Despite these incongruent views, most participants acknowledged that management priority had improved in recent years, indicating a narrowing of the perceived gap between the priority placed on student outcomes and teachers' psychological H&S.

Organisational participation in H&S was primarily demonstrated through the wellbeing committee's initiatives, which emerged as a key mechanism for showing how participation can lead to tangible improvements in teachers' working conditions. While the school's H&S representative, staff board representative, and union representative roles had the potential to enhance organisational participation, they played a limited role in supporting teachers' psychological H&S. Rather than enabling greater organisational participation, these roles were identified as missed opportunities to facilitate teacher voice and involvement in H&S activities and policy. These findings highlight that effective organisational participation by staff representative roles depends on how meaningfully they bridge the gap between teachers, school leadership, and the school board.

Participants recognised the positive impact of regular organisational communication from leaders and acknowledged the value of upward communication in reinforcing management priority. However, dissatisfaction amongst some participants indicated that not all leaders demonstrated a clear intent and purpose in promoting organisational communication. This finding extends existing PSC research by showing that a lack of clear messaging from some leaders may have been contributing to the perception that not all leaders were fully committed to promoting teachers' psychological H&S, potentially leading to notable variations in PSC across the school's four houses.

Chapter 5: The Role of School Leadership in Shaping Psychosocial Safety Climate – Results and Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This research employed a fully inductive analysis to explore how school leadership impacts psychosocial safety climate (PSC). This chapter is divided into two main sections, which reflect the first research question's two objectives. Section 5.2 addresses the first objective by exploring how school leadership (principal and line managers) operationalised *existing* key specific policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of PSC across school teams (houses). Section 5.3 then addresses the second objective by examining how leadership competence enabled school leaders to implement PSC, focusing on the specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours that support PSC implementation.

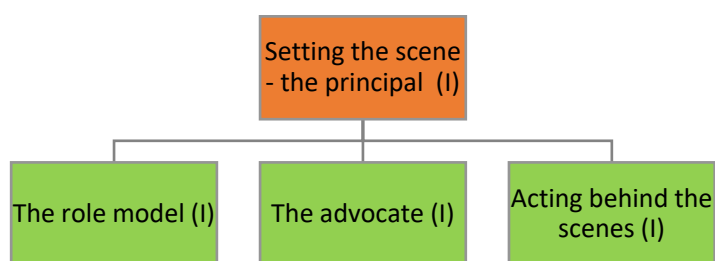
5.2 School Leaders Operationalising Existing Key Policies, Practices, and Procedures to Transfer PSC across Teams

This section comprises two inductive primary themes that reveal how school leaders at different levels operationalised existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of PSC across school teams: *setting the scene – the principal and house leader influence*. Section 5.2.1 investigates the principal's pivotal role in setting the scene to promote school-level PSC and empower house leaders (line managers) to support teachers' psychological health and safety (H&S) amongst their respective teams. Section 5.2.3 then examines how house leaders influence PSC at the team and individual levels within the school's house settings. While this research acknowledges other policies, practices, and procedures, those discussed in Section 5.2 appeared to have the greatest impact on facilitating the transfer of PSC across school teams.

5.2.1 Setting the Scene – the Principal

This primary theme highlights the principal's lead role in establishing school-level PSC and supporting house leaders (line management) to operationalise and transfer PSC within team settings. This primary theme comprises three inductively developed subthemes: *the role model*, *the advocate*, and *acting behind the scenes* (see Figure 5.1). Each subtheme represents an essential leadership approach that the principal exercises to operationalise existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC.

Figure 5.1 *Setting the Scene – the Principal: Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Key: Orange – primary theme; green – subthemes.

(I): Inductive analysis.

The Role Model. This subtheme highlights how the principal promoted teachers' psychological H&S while in the presence of other leaders and teachers. Practices and procedures, such as leading all-staff meetings and taking part in staff duties, allowed the principal to model these priorities by regularly emphasising the significance of teacher psychological health in all-staff meeting announcements and in daily conversations. I attended six all-staff meetings led by the principal, two of which specifically mentioned psychological wellbeing and outlined available support for teachers. The regular delivery of these announcements at all-staff meetings was a powerful way to model the principal's ongoing commitment and support and to provide a clear, consistent message while staff and other leaders were present (PO). While the principal may have been influenced by my presence as a

researcher attending the staff meetings, my observations were affirmed in an interview with SL4, who emphasised the principal's messaging to staff: "There'll be statements [in all-staff meetings by the principal] like 'No work, keep off the computers, let's enjoy the long weekend.' I think that's more visible in the school than it has been in the [recent] past."

Participants believed that the principal's role-model approach influenced how house leaders (line managers) treated and cared for their staff. Such role-modelling by the principal may have transferred PSC from the school level to the team and individual levels, as other school leaders adopted the principal's leadership approach. TFGP1 made the following point:

What is modelled at the top trickles down to other leaders. What the principal is modelling from the top – in terms of how they speak to the teachers, the tone, and the way they go about speaking to us.

Staff duty (supervising students outside lesson times) was another procedure that allowed the principal to regularly serve as the role model in the presence of both leaders and teachers. Participants appreciated the principal's informal connections with staff and mentioned that these interactions reflected the principal's interest and care for teachers. An experienced house leader gave this perspective:

One of the practices that I really value is the principal's help with the morning duty ...

You know, the opportunity for so many connections. It wouldn't be there if the principal's model was, "I'm leadership, I stay at the office." (SL5)

Genuinely connecting with staff not only influenced teachers' perceptions of the principal's commitment to and prioritisation of psychological H&S, but may also have shaped how house leaders interacted with their own staff, which then appeared to influence teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. When SL5 was asked whether the principal's leadership approach impacted their own, the response was: "I think undoubtedly, because the

principal would be my model, and that would be one avenue where I would learn, is through my principal.” During participant observation, the principal was highly visible during staff duties, which enhanced opportunities for staff to interact and discuss matters and concerns related to their roles. The principal’s involvement in staff duties may have facilitated not only commitment and support for teachers’ psychological H&S but also organisational communication with teachers, which can be challenging in schools with large staff sizes.

The Advocate. This subtheme focuses on how the principal promoted psychological H&S by endorsing the school’s charter and its wellbeing committee. The school’s charter includes a “Staff Wellbeing as a Good Employer” section, which highlights the individual needs of teachers through mentoring programmes and includes the development of a staff wellbeing strategy (OD13). However, for this section to effectively protect teachers’ psychological H&S, strong endorsement by the principal was required to ensure that house leaders incorporated and operationalised it in their own practices and procedures.

The “Staff Wellbeing as a Good Employer” section was vital for facilitating the transfer of PSC to school teams, as it provided the principal with a clear reference point and a strong rationale for promoting and integrating these elements into discussions, decision-making, and goal-setting with other school leaders and staff. Therefore, as the advocate for the school charter, the principal must ensure there is buy-in from house leaders for it to be successfully practised across team settings. However, as one leader pointed out, persuading house leaders to adopt and implement these policies and procedures can be challenging, mainly due to the semi-autonomous nature of the house system:

When we [house leaders] come to senior leadership meetings, it’s one thing to nod and say, “Yeah, we will be committing to it.” But when you go to your little fiefdom [house] in the school, you run it as you wish. We have so much autonomy. (SL2)

This quote underscores that the principal must not only visibly endorse the “Staff Wellbeing as a Good Employer” section of the school charter but also actively influence house leaders to embed it within their own practices and procedures.

Participants perceived the school’s wellbeing committee as another school-level policy and procedure that could support teachers’ psychological H&S, but which also relied on the principal’s advocacy to ensure effective operationalisation by house leaders within team settings. The committee’s scope and influence had increased significantly, largely because the principal supported its strong focus on teachers’ psychological health:

The fact that we have lifted it [the committee] out of a middle leadership role to a senior leader role shows you that this is important, this is a priority ... We had a middle leader doing well for a little while, and that was good ... in terms of doing things like arranging staff socials. But it wasn’t getting to grips with what the senior leader in charge and the [wellbeing] team have been able to do. That comprehensive [wellbeing] survey last year is part of what the senior leader did. (SL3)

The principal’s active involvement in expanding the wellbeing committee’s scope, through surveys and subsequent focus groups, prompted meaningful school-wide changes (see Chapter 4), including fewer meetings, greater flexibility with extracurricular commitments, and remote work options during non-contact periods. This advocacy was aligned with the school charter’s “Human Resources Capacity Development” criterion, which emphasised the importance of funding teacher wellbeing initiatives to attract and retain high-quality applicants, noting that the education sector was experiencing staff shortages (OD13).

Acting behind the Scenes. This subtheme underscores the principal’s influence on other school leaders in settings where teachers were not present. It recognises the principal’s mentoring sessions and leadership meetings with house leaders as key practices and procedures

that focus on teacher psychological H&S behind the scenes. The house leaders who led the school's four houses reported directly to the principal and met regularly, both in one-on-one mentoring sessions and in group leadership meetings with the principal. The principal's mentoring sessions were an integral part of the house leaders' appraisal process and an opportunity to discuss student, house leadership and personnel matters. An important purpose of these behind-the-scenes sessions was to encourage school leaders to support teachers' psychological health within their respective teams. Consequently, the structure and objectives of leadership meetings and principal mentoring sessions could have shaped the extent to which house leaders prioritised teachers' psychological H&S in their own professional learning community (PLC) meetings and mentoring sessions with teachers (discussed further in Section 5.2.3). As the school principal noted:

We have leadership meetings and a mentoring structure... which involves meeting regularly with the people [house leaders] who have influence over others. So, the way I approach that, I feel, then sets the tone for how they, in turn, mentor and support their members of staff.

A house leader who had experienced regular principal mentoring sessions explained how the principal ran them and the impact they could have on house leaders and their teams. Furthermore, the goals that house leaders set during principal mentoring sessions often included elements related to teachers' psychological H&S, which could lead to the implementation of a new policy or procedure within their house setting. As SL5 explained:

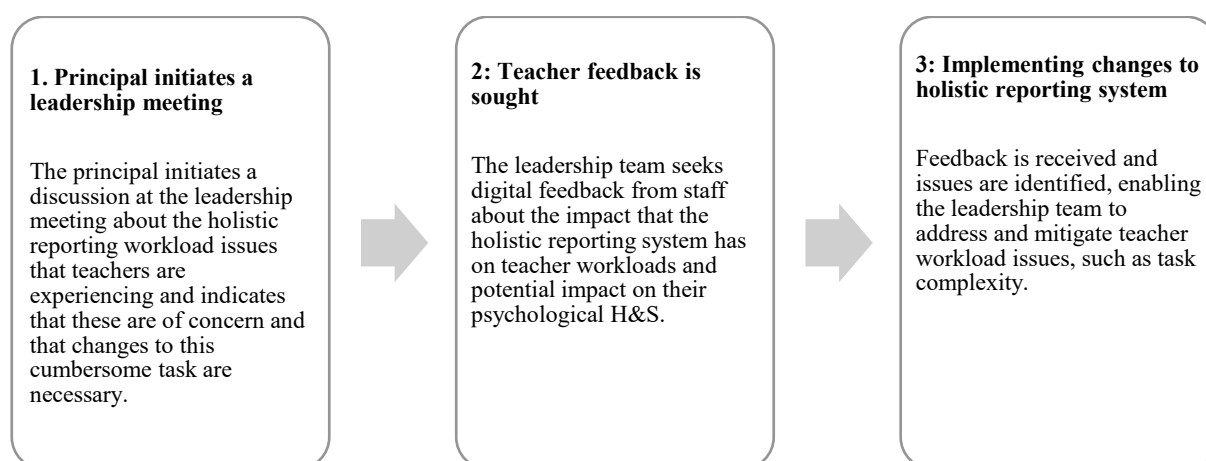
The current principal is very big on wellbeing. I think it definitely becomes something that is of high priority in the house it's dealt with, and teacher psychological health is considered to be quite important ... And when I speak to the principal, he'll ask, "How's things?" And it's not only about how things are at school, but also how everything is:

“What’s going on?” ... We’ll have that chat. Then we’ll go into some of the goals that are set up, but it’s that check-in – what’s hot, what’s not?

As this quote suggests, the principal’s care and interest in matters extended beyond student-focused outcomes. This demonstrates that the principal was interested in the welfare of house leaders and their teachers, but also that there is an expectation that house leaders take a similar approach when mentoring and leading their own staff (see Section 5.2.3).

Leadership meetings were another behind-the-scenes practice and procedure that enabled the principal to reinforce the prioritisation of teachers’ psychological H&S in the presence of other leaders. They were effective settings for the principal to initiate discussions on teacher health and for leaders to collectively consider ideas and solutions to mitigate psychosocial hazards. For example, at an all-staff meeting, the principal shared that recent leadership meetings had discussed workload concerns relating to the school’s holistic reporting system and that teacher feedback was being collected to inform improvements. The principal commented that once feedback was received, the leadership team would make appropriate changes to mitigate the impact of the holistic reporting system on teachers’ workloads (PO). Figure 5.2 illustrates how the principal initiated a behind-the-scenes process with house leaders during a leadership meeting to address ongoing issues that the holistic reporting system posed for teachers’ workloads. It also shows how the principal first sought and secured house leaders’ support before engaging in wider consultation with the staff, enabling the development and implementation of an effective intervention to address the workload concerns.

Figure 5.2 *An Example of a Principal-initiated Behind-the-Scenes Process*



5.2.2 Discussion

Regular all-staff meetings provided the principal with an effective platform to role-model a visible and active commitment and prioritisation of teacher psychological health. Consistent signalling by top leadership indicates the prioritisation of employee safety and wellbeing (Biron et al., 2019), which the principal did by raising important issues during all-staff meetings and in the presence of staff and leaders. This messaging, via the role-model leadership approach shaped perceptions amongst other leaders and staff that the principal was proactive in promoting psychological H&S. Such displays of commitment and support from top leadership are associated with health-promoting practices (Parent-Lamarche & Biron, 2022).

Regular participation in staff duties facilitated connections with teachers and enabled the principal to role-model commitment and support for teachers' psychological H&S in highly visible areas of the school. When top leadership shows concern for psychological H&S, a health-focused climate reduces exposure to psychosocial hazards (McLinton, Zadow, et al., 2018), and the principal's actions encouraged house leaders to act similarly while fulfilling their staff duties and broader house leader-teacher interactions. Additionally, participants widely acknowledged that connecting with staff reinforced the principal's management priority and facilitated organisational communication, and that these meaningful interactions were

appreciated. Daniëls et al. (2020) and Wiklund (2023) found that such connections led to greater openness and a sense of safety amongst school staff. Furthermore, these informal interactions may have mitigated the perception of a disconnect between frontline staff and top management (McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018), as the principal developed high-quality relationships with staff and was receptive to concerns raised directly by individual teachers.

The principal also set the scene as the leading advocate for the “Staff Wellbeing as a Good Employer” section in the school’s charter. Since active top leadership involvement is crucial for facilitating PSC across an organisation (Dollard & Bakker, 2010) and for ensuring that policies are implemented and sustained (Biron et al., 2019; Inoue et al., 2023), the principal played an integral role in advocating the charter, ensuring it was practised throughout the school by house leaders and staff. These findings offer new insights into PSC transfer by illustrating how the principal’s advocacy for this critical document ensured that teacher psychosocial H&S remained central to house leaders’ decision-making and during the operationalisation of key policies, practices, and procedures within house settings. Without the principal’s continuous advocacy, the “Staff Wellbeing as a Good Employer” section of the charter might have been overlooked by house leaders, potentially hampering PSC transfer.

The principal’s advocacy in this instance led to the development of an additional practice and procedure: the staff wellbeing committee (see Section 4.4). With the principal’s active support, the committee’s remit expanded from its original purpose of organising social events to developing preventive and supportive measures to protect teachers’ psychological H&S. This represents a shift that Tappin et al. (2023) describe as moving from peripheral “nice-to-have” wellness activities to more effective measures that assess and address psychosocial risks. This expanded remit enabled the committee to provide mediation services for staff, conduct a wellbeing survey, and hold subsequent focus groups. These activities enabled

teachers and leaders to discuss and address issues that influenced teachers' perceptions of school, team, and individual-level PSC.

While all organisations have competing imperatives (McTernan et al., 2016), the principal's advocacy for prioritising teacher psychological health facilitated the development of new interventions. For example, the school charter's explicit focus on teacher wellbeing and the expanded remit of the wellbeing committee exemplify the principal's advocacy, which had enabled meaningful changes to teachers' working conditions (as discussed in Chapter 4). Actions by "power actors" can determine how PSC is transferred from the organisational level to the team and individual levels (Dollard & Jain, 2019; Tuckey et al., 2022). Consequently, this finding clarifies how the principal's advocacy for existing key policies and procedures, such as the school charter and wellbeing committee, enhanced the extent to which house leaders (line managers) endorsed and operationalised them within their house settings.

The findings of the present research build on empirical evidence linking PSC to the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) by illustrating how a positive PSC environment can facilitate "resource caravan passageways", enabling resources to accumulate and to acquire and protect additional resources (Loh et al., 2018). Resource caravan passageways are organisational and individual resources that exist within ecological conditions that foster and sustain resource creation (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The present research also demonstrates how a positive PSC setting facilitates resource caravan passageway processes when leadership actively supports the school's policies, practices, and procedures that lead to the accumulation and protection of resources for staff. For instance, the wellbeing committee, through its initiatives (such as the mediation service, wellbeing survey, and focus groups), generated additional resource gains, including fewer weekly meetings, increased flexibility around extracurricular commitments, and opportunities for remote work. The combined influence of the wellbeing committee and the principal's ongoing advocacy for teachers'

psychological H&S led to resource gains, which participants associated with improvements in their working conditions and their perceptions of school, team and individual-level PSC.

The principal's mentoring sessions and leadership meetings were effective behind-the-scenes practices that enabled house leaders and principals to collectively address house-level issues related to teachers' psychological H&S. Since line management can both drive and impede organisational health interventions (LaMontagne et al., 2012; Nielsen, 2013), top leadership plays a key role in encouraging line managers to support and implement practices and procedures that reduce emotional demands on employees (Biron et al., 2019). Principal mentoring and leadership meetings were valuable settings and mechanisms for initiating and sustaining influence over house leaders, and for shaping the extent to which they prioritised teachers' psychological health. High organisational-level PSC has been shown to influence the health-promoting practices of line managers (Berglund et al., 2024; Parent-Lamarche & Biron, 2022) by granting them greater decisional latitude and job control to act on employees' psychological H&S (Biron et al., 2018; Gan & Kee, 2024). Findings from this research deepen understanding of how principal mentoring and leadership meetings allowed the principal to emphasise the protection of teachers' psychological H&S by managing psychosocial hazards. In turn, the principal's behind-the-scenes leadership approach enabled line managers to establish and operationalise PSC-related goals within house settings, with positive implications for team and individual-level PSC.

Mounting evidence suggests that PSC positively impacts job design, resulting in jobs with manageable demands and a variety of tasks that allow adequate discretion (Afsharian et al., 2025; Lawrie et al., 2018; Loh, Dollard, et al., 2024; Zadow et al., 2023). However, further research is needed that examines how school-level PSC relates to line management job design and the extent to which it impacts line managers' ability to prioritise teachers' psychological H&S. This is important in educational contexts for two reasons: first, because line managers

have heavy workloads and multifaceted roles; and second, because principals play a pivotal role in setting the tasks and portfolio responsibilities of other school leaders (Goldring et al., 2021).

Figure 5.3 illustrates how each subtheme discussed in this section represents a principal leadership approach (in bold text and grey boxes). When successfully exercised, these leadership approaches enabled the principal to operationalise the corresponding policies, practices, and procedures (italicised). Once effectively operationalised, they promoted teachers' psychological H&S and facilitated the transfer of PSC across school teams, as house leaders felt empowered to adopt the principal's approach to address potential psychosocial hazards in team settings.

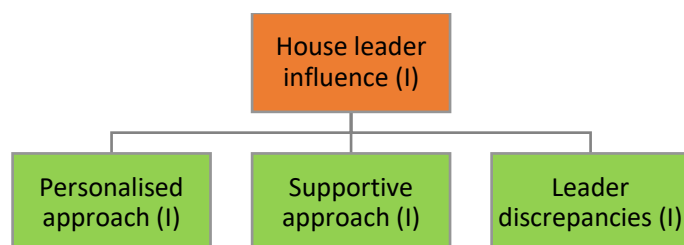
Figure 5.3 Existing Key Principal-initiated Policies, Practices, and Procedures



5.2.3 House Leader Influence

During analysis of the interview data, the school's house setting emerged as an important finding regarding team and individual-level PSC (see additional discussion in Section 7.2), prompting further investigation through document analysis, participant observation, and focus groups. The data collectively suggested that house leaders (line managers) were influential in operationalising policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of team and individual-level PSC. This led to the inductively developed primary theme of *house leader influence*, comprising the subthemes of *personalised approach*, *supportive approach*, and *leader discrepancies*, which also emerged inductively from the data (see Figure 5.4). The subthemes represent the leadership approaches of house leaders that either facilitated (personalised approach and supportive approach) or hindered (leader discrepancies) the operationalisation of existing key policies, practices, and procedures and the transfer of team and individual-level PSC.

Figure 5.4 House Leader Influence Primary Theme and Subthemes



Personalised Approach. This subtheme explores how house leaders operationalised and transferred team and individual-level PSC through the school's house leader mentoring programme. House leader mentoring involved face-to-face sessions with teachers, in addition to supporting teachers on a day-to-day basis within house settings and was structured according to each teacher's individual needs. For example, beginning teachers (with less than two years of service) met with their assigned mentor (house leader) once a fortnight, while teachers with more than two years of experience met about once or twice a term.

Through a personalised approach, effective mentoring could provide individual guidance and opportunities for teachers to set relevant goals related to their teaching practice. When effective, house leader mentoring sessions were especially valued by beginning teachers, who required frequent and personalised support. As TFGP5 highlighted: “Although mentors have specific things on their agenda, their goal is also to help you grow. My mentor is really great, such as giving lots of feedback.” The mentoring documentation that house leaders and teachers use for these sessions was a pivotal component of the teachers’ appraisal process, enabling both parties to monitor and assess various aspects of teacher practice (OD10).

Updated throughout the year, the mentoring documentation highlighted the importance of teachers being able to freely discuss their professional and personal needs with their mentor, voice concerns, and seek appropriate assistance. The documentation also addressed other aspects of the role, such as collegiality and collaboration, as well as seeking and acting on mentor feedback (OD8). Through a personalised approach, the mentoring relationship could encourage individual teachers to discuss matters that impacted their psychological H&S, such as workload and work–life balance concerns, as well as requests for specialist curriculum support.

Supportive Approach. This subtheme is exemplified by house leaders’ consistent and ongoing support for teachers. In interviews and focus groups, participants discussed PLCs as a practice and procedure through which house leaders could offer a supportive approach by collectively addressing issues that may also relate to teachers’ psychological H&S. PLCs consist of house leaders and teachers who meet weekly to discuss student achievement and staff concerns. A beginning teacher highlighted the advantages of PLCs: “Having PLCs means that many of our discussions are around teachers being able to identify issues. For example, ‘It’s not just happening in my class’, and then being able to identify and have discussions about which strategy might work” (P16).

The findings indicate that house leaders were responsible for setting a positive PLC environment, which helped teachers feel safe expressing the challenges they faced in their roles. Some of those challenges, such as low student engagement, may also have impacted their psychological H&S. Therefore, a supportive approach in weekly PLC meetings fostered organisational communication and participation in everyday house settings. As an experienced leader explained: “At PLCs [meetings], so that a teacher is not feeling isolated when they are talking about Johnny being a difficult child in their class, a house leader will pipe up and say, ‘Yeah, I know exactly what you mean’” (SLFGP1). This level of understanding and support in PLC meetings allowed teachers to speak more freely and openly, knowing that house leaders and their colleagues were receptive to their concerns. Furthermore, a supportive approach facilitated the operationalisation of effective policies and procedures, including measures to address low student engagement and achievement.

Interview data and observations also revealed how a supportive approach was experienced through regular positive interactions between teachers and house leaders, such as at the beginning of the day or while sharing a learning space during teaching. These ongoing interactions helped strengthen relationships and allowed teachers to share concerns about teaching, learning, and other issues by promoting organisational communication and fostering commitment and support within PLCs. As P13 explained, “My [house] leader acknowledges my presence, calls me by my name. She asks me how I am, whether she can be of any support, and how my students are doing.” Even brief interactions could foster safe, open dialogue in which teachers voiced concerns, such as administrative burdens and student behavioural issues. These everyday discussions enabled the exchange of ideas and further exploration during mentoring or PLC meetings, so that issues could be shared and addressed amongst colleagues.

I observed multiple teacher–house leader interactions that were consistent with participants’ descriptions from interviews and focus groups. Teachers generally appreciated the

close presence of house leaders, which normally encompassed regular positive interactions. These interactions could inform the development of timely interventions for both teams and individual teachers. For example, while on lunch duty one day, I worked alongside a teacher who noticed increased litter in her house and raised the issue with the house leader, who agreed to discuss and develop a policy to address it with staff at the next PLC meeting (PO).

Leader Discrepancies. The findings show that the prioritisation of teacher psychological H&S varied across the school's four houses, as each house was led by different co-leaders. Consequently, varying levels of management priority influenced how individual house leaders interpreted and implemented the school's policies and procedures. For example, some participants raised concerns about inconsistent mentoring practices amongst some house leaders, which had led to unfavourable outcomes and varied perceptions amongst teachers and leaders. As P8 explained:

I think there are differences between mentors in terms of who definitely makes sure they have time for you ... As a new teacher, I really needed that consistency because my workload had increased, and I felt my mental health was under stress, and it wasn't supported.

However, the frequency of mentoring did not appear to be the only deciding factor in a mentoring programme's success in supporting teacher psychological H&S and addressing potential psychosocial hazards. One focus group participant who had worked with multiple mentors provided valuable comparisons on their mentoring and remarked:

It really depends on the leader [mentor]. Some are really good at helping teachers out, and they can tell when you need help. Some, you need to go up and ask for help, be really explicit, and then perhaps that might still not happen. And some are really good

at just being a listening ear. But my mentor this year – I’m struggling with him because he constantly talks over me. (TFGP7)

The way mentoring sessions were structured, and the relationship and daily interactions a teacher had with their mentor outside those sessions, influenced teachers’ perceptions of the mentor’s effectiveness and the extent to which they prioritised teachers’ psychological health.

Similarly, participants noted significant discrepancies in how house leaders conducted the weekly PLC meetings and the potential impact it could have on perceptions of PSC. One teacher drew distinctions between house leaders:

With some leaders ... we’re just like, right, how can we do better? Whereas, with others, it always opens up to, “How are you doing? How are we feeling with our classes?” – in terms of how you feel you’re doing as a teacher – and “What can we [house leaders] do to support that?” (P16)

These inconsistencies in how house leaders operationalised policies, practices, and procedures, such as mentoring and PLC meetings, led to varied perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. While some house leaders incorporated teacher psychological H&S objectives into their mentoring and PLC sessions, others focused primarily on student outcomes, which participants recognised as an indication that teachers’ H&S were not prioritised.

Since house leaders were responsible for interpreting and relaying the school’s charter and vision to house staff, how they ran PLC meetings and mentored teachers influenced whether PSC was effectively transferred across their respective teams. As SLFGP1 noted, house leaders’ willingness to adopt and effectively implement policies and procedures often determined how well PSC transferred within a house:

If you have a house leader who doesn’t buy into a particular initiative, that house will never gain momentum in that particular initiative ... If my buy-in isn’t there [as a house

leader], it translates into PLC discussions [with staff] in terms of how much time I give it on my agenda, and it translates then to teachers and the learners, and what they [house leaders] prioritise.

The findings indicate that if a house leader did not prioritise teachers' psychological H&S in PLC meetings and mentoring sessions, teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC were likely to be adversely impacted. What occurred during these interactions also influenced teacher behaviour, as they may have been more hesitant to seek support if the issue they faced concerned their psychological H&S. The above quote also emphasises the degree of autonomy that house leaders had in leading their PLC meetings and mentoring sessions and how that might have impacted perceptions of team and individual-level PSC, potentially restricting PSC transfer.

5.2.4 Discussion

This research reveals that when house leaders (line managers) adopted a personalised leadership approach, they intentionally embedded a psychological H&S focus into their mentoring practice. This approach facilitated regular one-on-one conversations and goal-setting activities that not only targeted student outcomes and teacher performance but also addressed potential risks to teachers' psychological H&S. Leaders who exhibit health-centric behaviours and practices have also been found to provide a psychosocial safety net for employees (Mirza et al., 2023) by allowing them to utilise resources and express concerns to line management (Loh et al., 2019). In the current context, a personalised leadership approach signalled to teachers that house leader mentoring prioritised their professional and psychological needs through regular and collaborative interactions. This could involve a beginning teacher freely requesting curriculum support because lesson planning is contributing to their excessive workload. Measures that explicitly focus on management priority, commitment and support, and organisational communication contribute to individual-level PSC over time through healthy

work practices and principles (Loh, Dollard et al., 2024). As such, the personalised approach described in this research highlights how effective mentoring promotes these domains of PSC, illustrating how house leaders can shape positive perceptions of individual-level PSC.

The findings also demonstrate that establishing a supportive approach, in which an inclusive, cooperative, and psychologically safe environment enabled teachers to participate in PLC meetings and daily interactions, could strengthen perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. These insights reinforce recent literature highlighting the importance of social dialogue, listening to individuals' views, practising reflection, and involving employees in identifying and addressing psychosocial risks (Afsharian et al., 2025; Backström & Berglund, 2022; Sjöblom et al., 2022). Line management plays a crucial role in balancing competing demands, mitigating risks to staff safety, and informing employees about potential hazards (Berglund et al., 2024; McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018). The present research extends this literature by showing *how* these processes operate within school teams. Specifically, teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC were shaped when house leaders encouraged teachers to raise issues related to teachers' psychological H&S during PLC meetings and daily interactions, so these could be addressed collectively and in a timely manner. This demonstrates a clear process through which PSC was operationalised in practice and underlines the importance of empowering teachers to propose ideas and raise concerns, supporting Afsharian et al.'s (2025) findings that teacher empowerment has the greatest impact on improving PSC in schools.

Line management also sets expectations for staff behaviour (Escartín et al., 2021) and is responsible for prioritising employees' psychological H&S through the implementation of interventions (Backström & Berglund, 2022; Potter et al., 2019; Sjöblom et al., 2022). Through personalised and supportive leadership approaches, house leaders promoted regular exchanges and upward communication in mentoring and PLCs, which could lead to the development of house and individual-level policies and procedures. However, positive daily interactions were

unlikely to thrive unless the house leader encouraged teachers to participate freely in discussions and teachers felt safe in doing so. These findings build on Athanasio's (2024) claim that teacher leaders can be instrumental in mentoring colleagues, facilitating PLCs, and encouraging peer collaboration. The present research advances this insight by demonstrating how these practices function when operationalised by school leaders with more formal and substantial line management responsibilities. Unlike Athanasio's (2024) study, which focuses on teacher leaders with fewer formal responsibilities, this research shows how PSC-related policies, practices, and procedures were embedded in the everyday work of house leaders who held significant line management authority. This distinction highlights a broader leadership mechanism that shapes and sustains PSC in schools.

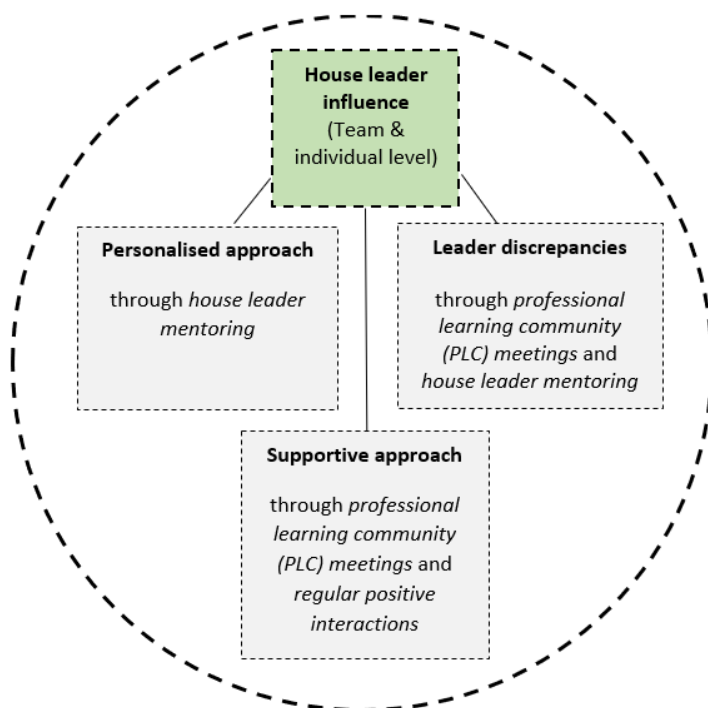
Although there appeared to be no significant PSC concerns across the school's four houses, participants noted variations in PSC amongst them. These variations often stemmed from discrepancies in how leaders mentored teachers and facilitated PLC meetings. For example, when mentoring and PLC meetings lacked a specific focus on employee psychological H&S, participants generally interpreted this as a reflection of the house leader's management priority. These perceptions may have developed because line management was responsible for implementing practices and procedures, which, in turn, as Escartín et al. (2021) suggest, shaped perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. Participants in the present research generally viewed house leaders who did not adopt personalised and supportive leadership approaches as adversely impacting perceptions of team and individual-level PSC.

Line management plays an essential role in establishing team and individual-level PSC (Krasniqi et al., 2019; Loh et al., 2021). In the present setting, house leaders were generally empowered by the principal and had significant autonomy to operationalise practices and procedures that protected teachers' psychological H&S. This aligns with earlier evidence that positive organisational PSC enables line managers to effectively enact policies (Loh et al.,

2021), while low line manager commitment or resistance can threaten intervention success (Biron et al., 2019; Ipsen et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2013; Schuller, 2019). This research, however, sheds light on how the school's house system and the subsequent autonomy granted to house leaders (as noted in Section 5.2.1) may also have contributed to variations in PSC across houses (teams). While PLC meetings and mentoring were key school policies and procedures, PSC transfer also depended on house leaders' willingness and management commitment and support, which could act as either a barrier to or a conduit for PSC transfer.

As shown in Figure 5.5, the *personalised approach* and *supportive approach* subthemes (in bold text and grey boxes) represent essential leadership approaches of house leaders. When exercised actively, these leadership approaches enabled the effective operationalisation of policies, practices, and procedures (italicised), which facilitated the transfer of PSC within team settings. Conversely, the *leader discrepancies* subtheme highlights that when PLC meetings and house leader mentoring sessions were not operationalised with an intentional focus on psychological H&S, they negatively influenced perceptions of team and individual-level PSC due to the restrictions they imposed on PSC transfer.

Figure 5.5 *Existing Key House Leader–initiated PSC-related Policies, Practices, and Procedures*



Note. Each house represents a team of two house leaders, 12 teachers, and a house assistant.

Section 5.2 contributes to the PSC literature in school settings by articulating the dual role of the principal and house leaders in operationalising existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of PSC across school teams. Extant literature has primarily focused on the principal’s role in influencing school and individual-level PSC (Afsharian et al., 2025; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Winwood & Kramer, 2020; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), while focusing less attention on the crucial role of line management and its impact on team and individual-level PSC. The present research explains how the principal sets the scene by championing PSC as the role model and demonstrating management commitment and priority towards employee psychological H&S through organisational communication at all-staff meetings and while developing relational connections during staff duties. The principal’s advocacy for the school charter and wellbeing committee led to positive changes in working conditions and the mitigation of excessive job demands, such as workload and job

intensification. Leadership meetings and principal mentoring were practices and procedures that took place behind-the-scenes but which emphasised to house leaders that teachers' psychological H&S was a priority at the school. The principal's operationalisation of these key initiatives facilitated the transfer of PSC across teams, enabling house leaders to prioritise PSC at both the team and individual levels within their teams.

House leaders' personalised approach to mentoring, and supportive approach in PLC meetings and through regular positive interactions, created an inclusive and caring environment that fostered valuable connections and enabled goal-setting in support of teachers' psychological H&S. Collectively, these leadership approaches, along with the principal's empowerment facilitated the development of resource caravan passageways (Hobfoll et al., 2018), enabling multiple resources to interact, accumulate and be protected. However, noticeable variations in team and individual-level PSC occurred when mentoring and PLCs did not incorporate personalised and supportive leadership approaches, potentially contributing to negative perceptions of PSC. These variations may reflect the semi-autonomous nature of the school's house system and the critical role that house leaders played in enabling or hindering the operationalisation and transfer of PSC.

5.3 Exercising Leadership Competence

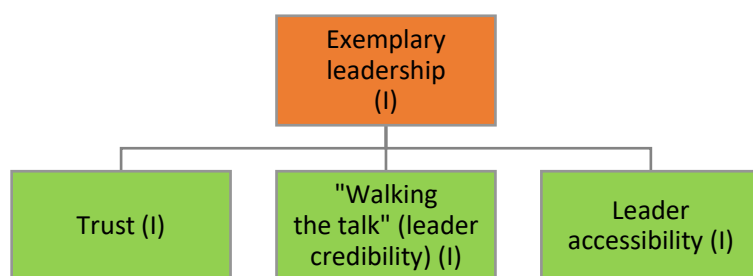
This section examines how leadership competence may enable school leaders to implement PSC by understanding how specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours support its implementation. An inductive analysis of the data revealed three primary themes: *exemplary leadership*, *navigating complexity*, and *the multiskilled leader*. These primary themes and their respective subthemes represent broader and more specific leadership competencies that could enable PSC implementation. While other leadership competencies might contribute to PSC

implementation, the competencies discussed in this section were identified as having the greatest impact.

5.3.1 Exemplary Leadership

The findings indicated that school leaders who practised exemplary leadership were more likely to be perceived by participants as possessing competencies that have positive outcomes for PSC implementation. As illustrated in Figure 5.6, the *exemplary leadership* primary theme consists of three subthemes: *trust*, “*walking the talk*” (*leader credibility*), and *leader accessibility*. Moreover, participants considered these three competencies to be essential for demonstrating exemplary leadership and, in turn, enabling PSC implementation.

Figure 5.6 Exemplary Leadership Primary Theme and Subthemes



Trust. An essential leadership competency that participants associated with exemplary leadership and overall competence was leader trust. Participants emphasised its importance because of how it made teachers feel supported in their roles, especially when facing challenging situations or needing leadership assistance. However, teachers stressed that they would seek support or voice their concerns to a leader only if their trust in that leader was strong. As TFGP5 commented:

Whether it's to do with the kids, organising trips or anything such as workload, but also personal struggles, such as mental health or something else ... hopefully the relationship that you have with your leaders is one of trust – that you know you can go to them and you know you're going to feel supported.

Line managers also emphasised the importance of establishing trust with their direct reports. As the following quote emphasises, trust can also determine the degree to which a teacher feels secure enough to confide in a leader:

The first thing that you need to establish is that you are trustworthy and that you have empathy and understanding for where they [teachers] come from and what they struggle with. If you don't display those things, they'll never become comfortable with you.
(SLFGP2)

Teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC may have been shaped by their trust in their house leaders (line managers), reinforcing earlier findings in Section 5.2.3 that perceptions of team and individual-level PSC varied across different houses:

If you're in a house where you get treated like a child, you feel that you are walking on eggshells ... You don't feel that you are trusted. You don't feel that you can use your own initiative – you are always scared (P15).

Therefore, even when school-level PSC was perceived positively and is primarily shaped by the principal's leadership, team and individual-level PSC could be low if trust between teachers and house leaders was lacking.

“Walking the Talk” (Leader Credibility). Evidence from interviews and subsequent participant observations indicated that credibility was also a key competency of exemplary leadership. This usually involved leaders undertaking and addressing the challenging tasks that teachers frequently faced. For example, during participant observation, I observed two house leaders working directly with students requiring remedial support, making every effort to provide them with the individual attention they needed to build their numeracy and literacy skills. By working tirelessly with these students, these house leaders were “walking the talk” and demonstrating their competency in completing challenging tasks.

Conversely, when teachers' perceptions of a leader's credibility were poor, they were often viewed as less competent. For instance, when leaders were unable to demonstrate competence in a specific area of their role, perceptions of their credibility deteriorated. P5 gave this example:

I had these kids that were absolutely horrendous. It was like this for the whole house. There wasn't proper intervention on the leaders' part, which made me question whether they were competent in this area. It told me that in the future, if anything is happening, you aren't the person I want to go back to. I need to find somebody else, because I wasn't happy with the way they dealt with it.

Here, poor perceptions of credibility influenced the teacher to not seek support from the leader in a similarly challenging situation in the future. However, this could have implications for the teacher's psychological H&S, leading them to absorb the pressure and try to address all challenges alone.

Leader Accessibility. This subtheme emphasises that participants valued having accessible leaders. Accessibility was perceived as particularly important when assistance with a range of matters (both pastoral and pedagogical) was needed. One teacher explained how leaders who were accessible were also often approachable and ready to support staff with their problems: "They're [leaders] really approachable, the door's always open, and you can talk to them. They've got time to address any issues and are really good at working through problem-solving" (P14).

I was able to affirm the interview findings on leader accessibility during participant observation in the different houses. School leaders' office doors were rarely closed, and they often spent time outside their office, reinforcing their presence and preparedness to support teachers' practice and respond to unexpected issues. This degree of accessibility could be

interpreted by teachers as school leaders' prioritisation of teachers' psychological H&S and organisational communication within house settings, as often house leaders were present and willing to lead interventions (PO). Leaders also acknowledged the importance of being accessible, so that teachers typically felt well supported and cared for. As SL5 commented, "I think if you've got a leadership team who are accessible, seem to care and know their staff – I see that as the foundation for an emotionally and physically safe worksite."

5.3.2 Discussion

This research found that teachers only sought leader support when trust existed in the relationship. Similarly, the literature emphasises that trust is vital for strong teacher–leader relationships (Manning et al., 2020) and for improving PSC, since the *management commitment and support* domain reflects perceptions of leaders' reliability and trustworthiness (McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey 2018; Plimmer et al., 2022). Only when leaders signal trust and create conditions that support safety behaviours (Wong et al., 2016) do teachers feel safe seeking their leaders' support, especially in challenging situations. This is because, when leadership takes concerns seriously, employees are more likely to develop greater trust in their leaders (Sjöblom et al., 2022). Therefore, in highly interactive team settings, school leaders should foster trusting environments so that teachers feel safe suggesting ideas and raising issues, including those related to psychological H&S, to promote organisational participation and communication.

Conversely, when trust was perceived as weaker within a specific house setting, it shaped not only perceptions of leader competence but also of team and individual-level PSC. Given that teachers spent most of their time in their assigned house, experiencing distrust in line management impacted teachers' day-to-day working conditions. Trust is a social resource essential to the successful implementation of policies, practices, and procedures (Garrick et al., 2014; McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018), and in less-trusting environments, employees are discouraged from seeking support because they perceive their psychological H&S as not valued

by their leaders (Kwan et al., 2016). This insight demonstrates how diminished trust in line managers can create barriers to teachers' access to valuable job resources (e.g., line management, collegial support, and organisational communication), thereby hindering the implementation of PSC at the team and individual levels. Hence, greater emphasis should be placed on leaders' trust as a foundational competency that underpins credibility, strengthens relationships, and enables open communication, all of which are critical to fostering a positive PSC environment.

Perceptions of “walking the talk” (leader credibility) can depend on employees' having observed their leaders' competence in the relevant area (Mayer et al., 1995). Teachers in the present research reported a greater willingness to seek assistance from house leaders (line managers) who had demonstrated the ability to address specific issues, as this often led to more successful outcomes. This finding aligns with the literature that an intervention's success often rests on the leader's credibility (Mellor & Webster, 2013) and that school leaders who regularly experience the realities of classroom teaching are more likely to remain attuned to the demands of the teaching role (Sergis et al., 2018). Thus, teachers' perceptions of individual and team-level PSC were influenced by their evaluations of their leaders' credibility based on the success of prior interactions and decision-making, as this determined whether teachers sought their support. Accordingly, this research shows that leader credibility influenced teachers' willingness to engage in organisational communication and the likelihood that the interventions leaders implemented would successfully mitigate psychosocial hazards.

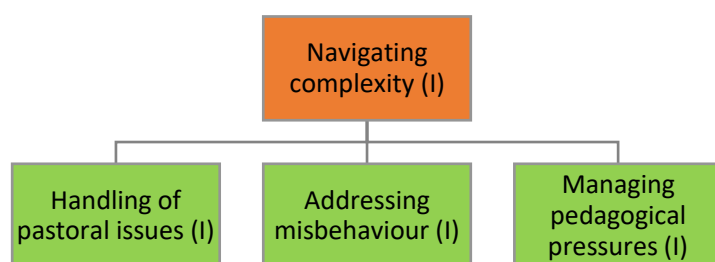
The findings on leader accessibility align with Potter et al. (2019), who reported that open-door policies enable employees to approach line managers with concerns, potentially facilitating organisational communication and participation. Consistent with this, most house leaders in the present research promoted leader accessibility through an open-door approach, which appeared to increase upward communication. Accessible leaders foster a climate of

safety for teachers (Garrick et al., 2014), enabling staff to report threats to health before they escalate (Dollard, Opie, et al., 2012). Leader accessibility also made leaders more responsive to teachers' concerns, which they perceived as demonstrating commitment to teachers' psychological H&S. These behaviours were most evident in house settings, where teachers often worked alongside their house leaders, enabling close and meaningful interactions. These findings support those of Laloo et al. (2025), who found that passive-avoidant leadership, characterised by unresponsive and inaccessible behaviours, is negatively associated with PSC, whereas PSC-oriented leaders enact positive practices (Loh et al., 2021), such as being accessible and promptly addressing teachers' psychological H&S concerns.

5.3.3 Navigating Complexity

This primary theme concerns the need for leaders to understand and address complex issues that are prevalent in schools. It comprises three subthemes: *handling of pastoral issues*, *addressing misbehaviour*, and *managing pedagogical pressures* (see Figure 5.7). Given the nature of these issues, participants considered these to be essential competencies in a constantly demanding and continuously evolving school environment.

Figure 5.7 Navigating Complexity Primary Theme and Subthemes



Handling of Pastoral Issues. This subtheme underscores the importance of school leaders being aware of the daily pastoral challenges students face at home and at school. Most of these challenges appeared to stem from broader societal issues that are increasingly prevalent

in 21st century educational settings. Some of the pastoral challenges that were impacting schools were outlined by SL3:

I think our classrooms mirror society ... with lockdowns and financial crises, I think socialisation has taken a little bit of a whack ... I've noticed that more parents are struggling at the moment, and perhaps for some of our students, school is the most stable part of their life – an opportunity to connect with peers.

However, participant observation data suggested that school leaders may be able to mitigate the impact of some of these challenges on student learning and, consequently, on classroom teaching. I observed house leaders consistently supporting students with pastoral issues, speaking with parents/caregivers by phone, and assisting teachers with pastoral challenges. Thus, competence in pastoral care appeared to partly relieve teachers of this pressure, allowing them to place greater focus on classroom teaching (PO). Consequently, the findings indicate that school leaders require skills that minimise the negative impacts of these pastoral challenges on student learning and the potential flow-on effects on teachers' psychological H&S.

Addressing Misbehaviour. This subtheme draws on interviews and participant observation data, which suggested that incidents of classroom management and poor student behaviour continue to rise. Ongoing behavioural issues can impact teachers' psychological H&S (see Section 6.2) and often require prompt support from school leaders. In the staffroom, on several occasions, teachers expressed concern that an increasing proportion of their lessons was spent addressing behavioural issues rather than actual teaching (PO). Thus, teachers recognised the impact that student misbehaviour had on student learning and their capacity to teach effectively, which may also have impacted their psychological H&S. These informal conversations were supported by a comment made by an experienced house leader: "I think

definitely behaviour within the classroom is something that perhaps has become more challenging over time” (SL5).

Teachers highlighted in interviews that they relied on school leaders’ support when behavioural issues arose. For example, P9 said: “You might have a student behaviour issue, and sometimes there’s a problem. When you don’t have the support in the classroom, then we look for our leaders to come and help out.” Leaders who effectively addressed student behavioural issues were not only valued by teachers but also perceived as possessing a specific competency to address problems that teachers believed were increasingly impacting teaching and learning. Having this skill and knowledge enabled leaders to provide timely and effective support, which positively impacted perceptions of management commitment and support for teachers’ psychological H&S, especially within house settings.

Managing Pedagogical Pressures. Large class sizes and a growing proportion of students with significant pedagogical needs meant that leaders needed to be competent in supporting teachers to address these challenges. Data from interviews and focus groups indicated that pedagogical pressures were impacting student learning and staff at the school. Multiple participants explained how this was placing significant pressure on teaching and learning. SLFGP2 spoke about the increasing learning needs of students:

Now, at least 10% of students either have severe needs or learning needs such as gaps in learning or neurodiversity. So, as classroom teachers – especially as a beginning teacher, how do you deal with that, and with 34 kids in your class?

This quote suggests that pedagogical pressures were increasing and that teachers were requiring more support, as they often could not address these challenges alone. Because schools are resourced-constrained, this type of support is often provided by school leaders. A teacher shared

the following perspective on the pedagogical pressures they regularly faced in the classroom and the need for having a school leader whom they could regularly call for support:

In many classes, there are over 30 kids, where you'll have kids who may have a learning challenge of some kind, such as a processing challenge, where they're a lot lower than where they're supposed to be ... Then there's the kid who can't speak English. Did I say a word to them? No, because I was too busy dealing with the other kid ... The kids are bringing something new to you every day ... Things pop up, so I'm always like, "OK, where's the leader?" [or] "What do I do with this?" ... You really do have to have that higher-up person to go to. (P17)

These findings suggest that teachers need school leaders who are not only aware of the pedagogical pressures they face but who can also promptly intervene and provide appropriate support. Such skills and knowledge may also help ensure that current and future policies and procedures take into account pedagogical pressures while also facilitating management commitment and support.

5.3.4 Discussion

The increasing social and economic challenges that schools face and their impact on learning and teacher practice, as identified by Brady and Wilson (2021), were reflected in participants' accounts, which emphasised that leaders must be capable of navigating complexity. External factors often create additional organisational demands that can adversely affect working conditions, staff health, and PSC (Dollard & Neser, 2013; Potter et al., 2024). In educational contexts, these external challenges have led to increasing pastoral and behavioural issues in schools. While teachers are usually the first responders to pastoral and behavioural matters, they rely on leaders' skills to address misbehaviour and manage pedagogical pressures when more complex or serious concerns arise. However, the increasing pastoral care

responsibilities and the prevalence of student misbehaviour can increase workloads and create role ambiguity, both of which are potential psychosocial hazards (Skinner et al., 2021). Since PSC buffers the impact of excessive job demands in teaching (Garrick et al., 2014), this research demonstrates that leaders who mitigate pastoral and behavioural issues can relieve or prevent pressures that teachers face in the classroom. Therefore, the extent to which a complex pastoral or behavioural issue affects teachers' psychological H&S may depend in part on the leader's ability to address it before it escalates. Conversely, when such issues are not adequately addressed, this burden may fall entirely on teachers, undermining their ability to teach effectively and, in turn, weakening perceptions of management commitment and support, as well as management priority.

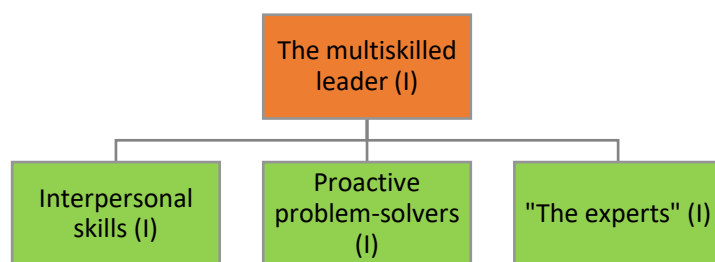
These findings also reinforce the need for leaders to support teachers in managing pedagogical pressures, which is consistent with the literature (Granziera et al., 2020; Montgomery, 2017). A recent report highlighted that 15–20% of the students in Aotearoa New Zealand are neurodivergent, yet only 6–7% of students receive public funding for learning support, which strains teachers, who work “well beyond their role trying to support these kids” (Aiono, 2025, p. 23). The present research found that leaders who understood the pedagogical pressures teachers faced could respond swiftly and, where possible, employ interventions that supported both learning and teachers' psychological H&S, therefore enabling management commitment and support and organisational participation. For example, at the start of the year, the house leader might go through the class register with a beginning teacher, identify the learning needs of individual students, co-develop personalised learning programmes for those at greatest risk of underachievement, and provide ongoing support. This facilitates the development of effective interventions, which, as Loh et al. (2021) claim, are often accompanied by job resources that improve working conditions. The extension the present research offers is that individual school leaders need to be knowledgeable and skilled in

managing pedagogical pressures *before* they can design and implement effective PSC-related policies and procedures that safeguard teachers' psychological H&S.

5.3.5 The Multiskilled Leader

This primary theme reflects participants' perspectives that school leaders needed a variety of key skills, knowledge, and behaviours to demonstrate leadership competence. While there was no set of competencies that defined a competent leader, participants believed that individual leaders required a range of leadership skills to implement PSC effectively in school settings. As shown in Figure 5.8, *the multiskilled leader* primary theme comprises *interpersonal skills*, *proactive problem-solvers*, and *"the experts"* as its subthemes.

Figure 5.8 *The Multiskilled Leader Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Interpersonal Skills. Participants agreed that leaders must possess the necessary interpersonal skills to effectively support teachers and address the numerous challenges prevalent in schools, as discussed in Section 5.3.3. Therefore, the degree to which participants valued interpersonal skills also had implications for how school leader competence impacted their perceptions of management commitment and support, as well as management priority. As SLFGP3 noted:

I think in the past, you could have gotten away with a leader who was quite confident in subject knowledge. Now you need a competent leader in soft skills ... You need to be able to deal with different staff and students in different ways ... What works for one doesn't work for the other.

This quote recognises that interpersonal skills enable leaders to respond to current school challenges, necessitating a greater focus on developing leaders' interpersonal skills to support teachers and potentially mitigate threats to teachers' psychological H&S. As such, strong interpersonal skills may provide teachers with various forms of care, which might encourage teachers to seek support from their leaders.

Communication skills and empathy were commonly regarded as key interpersonal skills that enabled the implementation of PSC. Participants often saw these attributes as prerequisites for building trust and fostering open dialogue with leaders:

I put communication skills and empathy over and above just about everything I think – because the rest follows. So if you can connect ... that communication aspect, if you feel that you can go and chat to a senior leader or you can go and have a transparent conversation with them and they don't close the door behind them or can make you feel at ease, to me that's a really good leader. (P20)

This perspective highlights the relational nature of leadership and its impact on teachers' perceptions of PSC. When leaders exercised effective communication and empathy, they created conditions and opportunities that were conducive to dialogue and could mitigate psychosocial hazards.

Proactive Problem-solvers. Teachers indicated that competent leaders addressed issues proactively and decisively. This subtheme presents a clear link with the *addressing misbehaviour* and *managing pedagogical pressures* subthemes in Section 5.3.3. However, addressing misbehaviour and pedagogical pressures required leaders to possess context-specific knowledge and expertise. Conversely, the current *proactive problem-solvers* subtheme focuses on leaders who possessed the skills to address issues immediately as they arose. For instance, P7 gave this perspective:

It's much better if the leader is proactive and listens to what you've said and does something straight away. Leader A is really good for that – she'll help you the same day. For some leaders, it takes them maybe a couple of weeks ... But yes, some leaders are more proactive, which is nice.

Leaders were also perceived as proactive problem-solvers, particularly when they had interventions in place before an issue arose. Therefore, teachers appreciated leaders who not only listened to their concerns and responded with appropriate measures but also prevented issues from arising. As P11 commented:

Competent leadership means that they're [leaders] not only able to resolve problems but also have things in place that stop these problems from happening in the first place. Being able to handle things and being proactive – taking the necessary steps to do whatever it means to be done.

“The Experts”. Participants also perceived competent leaders as teaching and learning experts. A leader's expertise in these areas could address curriculum-related difficulties a teacher may have been experiencing, which, if left unaddressed, could lead to adverse health outcomes. *“The experts”* subtheme has clear links with the *pedagogical pressures* subtheme. However, while the latter relates to leaders' knowledge of classroom challenges arising from students' diverse learning needs and large class sizes, the former focuses on leaders' teaching and learning expertise that they could use to mentor or coach other staff. As P3 mentioned:

They keep up to date with all the research and so they're really knowledgeable and they're really excited and dedicated. I do think that does feed through because you're more likely to be like – “I'm excited too ...” And so, I just think it's that natural knock-on effect potentially.

Pedagogical expertise was identified as pivotal for supporting beginning teachers or those teaching a new subject. As P5 stated: “Some leaders are really good at helping, if you’re struggling with what you want to teach.” Utilising this knowledge may lead to the development of effective policies, practices, and procedures that benefit individual teachers. However, it also exemplifies the provision of teaching and learning expertise to a teacher who requires additional support, which may mitigate some of the pressure teachers experience when teaching a new subject or when they are new to the profession.

5.3.6 Discussion

While a positive PSC environment is a leading indicator of better working conditions, with manageable demands and adequate resources (Dollard, Opie, et al., 2012), the present research shows that interpersonal skills represent a critical leadership competency that supports organisational communication and participation. Leaders who demonstrated empathy and strong communication skills were better able to facilitate teacher participation in daily PLC interactions, mentoring sessions, and staff meetings, as they were more capable of sharing ideas and making teachers feel psychologically safe in both team and individual settings. While organisational communication is essential for enhancing organisational participation and promoting psychological H&S (Plimmer et al., 2022), the present investigation highlights a relational process through which leaders’ interpersonal skills allowed the clear articulation of management priority and fostered teachers’ upward communication, even when discussing and addressing challenging issues. Although recent evidence suggests that empathy and listening amongst teacher leaders could be pivotal to building PSC (Athanasios, 2024), the present research extends this insight by demonstrating that these interpersonal skills are potentially more important for leaders with substantial line management responsibilities, given their level of discretion and influence when designing and implementing policies, practices, and procedures in team and individual settings.

Given the growing complexity of the teaching role (Arnold et al., 2023), teachers reported that leaders who are receptive to suggestions and concerns are more mindful of the challenges staff face and are more likely to act promptly. Participants described proactive problem-solvers as leaders who swiftly responded to suggestions and concerns and were more mindful of the challenges teachers face, thereby facilitating management commitment and support, and management priority. Existing literature suggests that in positive PSC environments, leaders are more likely to manage situations and take quick action when serious problems arise (Berglund et al., 2024; Loh, Dollard, et al., 2024). The current research deepens this understanding in school settings by showing that teachers value leaders not only for their awareness of working conditions but also for having clear and effective policies and procedures in place to prevent or mitigate psychosocial hazards. This emphasis is consistent with the literature suggesting that preventive measures are more effective than reactive efforts that modify working conditions or address the emotional impact once it manifests (Zadow & Dollard, 2016; Zadow et al., 2017). Thus, teachers appreciated leaders who are skilled at devising robust policies and procedures that anticipate or minimise the impact of incidents. These findings advance existing knowledge by demonstrating that proactive leadership behaviours play a central, previously under-examined role in reinforcing a positive PSC environment in school settings.

Finally, this research shows that pedagogical expertise is another essential leadership competency, as it may enable management commitment and support, and organisational communication through timely pedagogical interventions. School leaders were often viewed by participants as experts in pedagogy, which they could use effectively to mentor and coach teachers who needed support in various aspects of their roles. Pedagogical expertise may include motivating students, applying a variety of learning strategies, possessing strong classroom management skills, and differentiating lessons, all of which can take time to acquire

(Lauermann & König, 2016). When leaders openly shared these valuable skills and knowledge with staff and implemented effective teaching strategies, this expertise may not have only put teachers at ease but also addressed job demands that support teachers' psychological H&S. The sharing of knowledge between leaders and employees is a job resource that reduces risks associated with unexpected work peaks and emotional demands (Loh et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). This is particularly the case in teaching, whereby a leader may mitigate these risks by discussing suitable assessment and engagement strategies for specific courses and students.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the impact of school leadership on PSC and revealed novel findings. Section 5.2 explained the pivotal dual role of the principal and house leaders (line managers) in operationalising existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of PSC across school teams. It highlighted the principal's critical role in championing PSC, supported by specific leadership approaches. Serving as the school's role model and advocate for the protection of teachers' psychological H&S, the principal actively worked behind the scenes to empower house leaders. Through personalised and supportive approaches, house leaders could foster a house environment in which teachers felt safe raising concerns and co-developing policies, practices, and procedures that identified psychosocial hazards, while facilitating the accumulation of resources, as conceptualised in COR theory. However, the semi-autonomous structure of the house system and variations in house leaders' willingness to prioritise teachers' psychological H&S in mentoring sessions and PLC meetings led to differing perceptions of team and individual-level PSC across the school's houses. The findings from Section 5.2 inform the first novel practical tool presented in this thesis: the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4), presented in Section 7.4, which conceptually illustrates the operationalisation of existing key policies, practices, and procedures, and the transfer of PSC across school teams.

As a complementary lens on leadership styles, this chapter contributes to the literature by exploring how leadership competence enables school leaders to implement PSC in a continuously evolving educational workplace and its implication for teachers' psychosocial work environment. Exemplary leadership (e.g., trust), navigating complexity (e.g., managing pedagogical pressures), and the multiskilled leader (e.g., interpersonal skills) represented actionable competencies that could support the implementation of PSC and protect teachers' psychological H&S. Leaders who exhibited these competencies enhanced perceptions of PSC by increasing job resources and mitigating psychosocial hazards that teachers encountered in their daily work. The findings also suggest that house leaders who did not consistently exhibit these competencies were more likely to lead houses with lower perceptions of team and individual PSC. The findings from Section 5.3 – Exercising Leadership Competence are revisited in Section 7.5, as they inform the Leader Competence–PSC Framework (see Figure 7.5), which is presented as a second novel practical tool for enhancing school leader capability.

Chapter 6: Psychosocial Safety Climate as a Framework for Addressing Teaching Challenges and Its Implications for Teacher Wellbeing – Results and Discussion

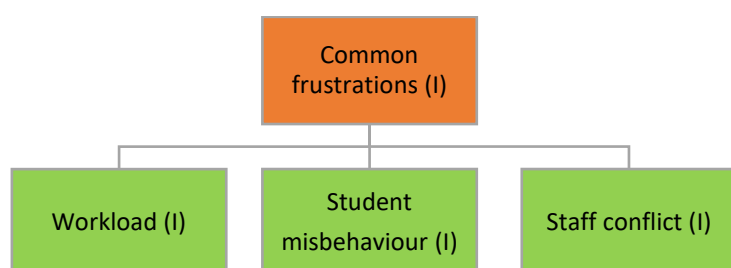
6.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter 4 discussed the school's psychosocial safety climate (PSC), while Chapter 5 explored the impact of school leadership on PSC. A fully inductive analysis was conducted to examine the second research question: How does PSC help address common challenges in teaching and enable conditions that support teacher wellbeing? Three primary themes were inductively derived from the data: *common frustrations*, *working environment*, and *teacher capability*. A close examination of these themes (and associated inductive subthemes) enabled this research to shed light on how PSC impacts four common indicators of teacher wellbeing – namely, teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy. As such, each subtheme is examined below in relation to these indicators of teacher wellbeing. While each subtheme may relate to multiple indicators of teacher wellbeing, this chapter focuses on the most significant connections between PSC and the subthemes.

6.2 Common Frustrations

This primary theme explores how a positive PSC environment creates organisational conditions that address common teaching frustrations that participants perceived as negatively impacting their wellbeing. These common frustrations are represented by three inductively derived subthemes: *workload*, *student misbehaviour*, and *staff conflict* (see Figure 6.1). The findings suggest that PSC may play a key role in addressing these common frustrations and in positively contributing to teacher wellbeing.

Figure 6.1 *Common Frustrations Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Key: Orange – primary theme; green – subthemes.

(I): Inductive analysis.

6.2.1 Workload

Participants highlighted that workload issues could adversely impact teacher stress and the degree of satisfaction staff have in their roles. Participants across all roles emphasised the importance of effectively managing teacher workloads, given their potential impact on teacher wellbeing. As P7 explained, heavy workloads could impact teachers’ work–life balance and the number of hours they spend on their work outside school hours:

I think the most stressful thing with teaching is the time that goes into it. It depends on the time of the year, but it can consume our whole lives for a period of time, and that can be very stressful.

While heavy workloads remained a concern amongst participants, the *workload* subtheme suggests that a positive PSC environment may mitigate its associated pressures. For example, the findings indicate that having greater opportunities to participate more freely in health and safety (H&S) activities supported teachers’ efforts to address some workload problems. As SL5 reflected, “Having opportunities for teachers to discuss stressful workloads and for our leadership to listen to such issues and be accessible – I think that all supports teachers’ wellbeing” (SL6).

One teacher shared the view that prioritising teachers' psychological H&S through effective management commitment and support can mitigate workload issues and have positive implications for teacher wellbeing:

There are certain things they [leadership] can do to reduce or even out the teaching workload. In terms of teacher wellbeing, providing planning templates, clarifying professional expectations, changing things that take up a lot of time, such as the way we [currently] do extracurriculars. Maybe if you're a very busy person with two kids, you can't commit after school [extracurricular] – so that's cool. (P5)

When asked if the changes made by leadership had had an impact, the teacher replied: "Yes, to an extent – thinking about tasks that can take up our time." As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the enactment of the *management commitment and support* and *organisational participation* domains facilitated the development of collaborative strategies to manage and mitigate the preponderance of time-consuming tasks.

6.2.2 Student Misbehaviour

While this subtheme is similar to the *addressing misbehaviour* subtheme discussed in Section 5.3, it differs in its focus. The addressing misbehaviour subtheme centres on how leaders' competence can mitigate behavioural issues and enable PSC implementation through effective management commitment and support. In contrast, the *student misbehaviour* subtheme examines how higher levels of PSC may reduce behavioural problems and their impact on teacher wellbeing. Participants often emphasised how poor student behaviour could impact teacher stress and job satisfaction. For example, P4 succinctly stated: "Students are definitely what make or break the day. If students are really acting up, they can raise my blood pressure."

This subtheme also highlights how higher levels of PSC may correspond to the development of more effective behavioural policies and procedures to address student behavioural concerns. The findings show that leadership competence in addressing student misbehaviour and the presence of effective policies, practices, and procedures that arise within a positive PSC environment are both equally essential. They also indicate that in a positive PSC environment, teachers feel comfortable raising behavioural matters with school leaders and are more confident in making critical classroom decisions when issues arise, knowing they will be supported by clear student behavioural policies and procedures that protect teachers' psychological H&S.

In previous schools I worked at, behaviour management was dealt with very differently. There wouldn't be any firm policies in place to deal with the impact on students or teachers. Whereas here, I feel like we are supported around what happens, so there's no anxiety ... Knowing those policies and procedures are in place helps clarify what's happening in your mind and clarifies the situation in front of you. (P6)

Having clear and consistent student behaviour policies and procedures sent a strong signal to teachers that their H&S was prioritised and that they were supported by leadership when confronted with challenging behavioural incidents.

6.2.3 Staff Conflict

The third common source of frustration with negative implications for teacher wellbeing is staff conflict. A significant number of participants noted that conflict between staff is not always effectively addressed at the school, which impacted perceptions of PSC and, subsequently, teacher wellbeing. The findings suggest that leaders who did not adhere to the school's policies and procedures were ineffective at resolving staff conflict or at eliminating

the potential threat to affected staff. As SL3 explained, this could adversely impact the safety of those affected:

If the issue is outside of work [e.g., family issue] and it's having an impact, we're [leadership] very supportive – "What do you need?" But when the issue is because of [staff] conflict, I'm not sure how well we actually deal with it. I don't even know whether, at times, we follow our policy and procedure. I do wonder how effective that is when we have this repeat pattern of behaviour by a minority of individuals who seem to just be allowed to behave in ways that I would deem unprofessional and therefore affect other people's safety.

A similar discussion was held in the teachers' focus group, which highlighted that perceptions of PSC were positive across multiple areas but were also adversely impacted by how staff conflict was handled. Some participants agreed that certain school leaders were incapable of resolving staff conflict. Although no specific teacher wellbeing indicators arising from unresolved conflict were identified, there were signs of stress and frustration amongst some participants when the topic was discussed.

TFGP1: "Some [leaders] can be incredibly indecisive at times [of conflict], and I've had many occasions where there are negatives with that."

TFGP3: They [leadership] need to be more forthright – they're not taking charge of that aspect. But from a human point, giving you compassionate leave and other stuff, I think they're there. They listen and will try and come up with a solution.

The school's "Policies and Procedures" document includes a "Bullying and Harassment" section designed to address staff conflict (OD15). The document clearly outlines how the school and leadership have a responsibility to take proactive, immediate measures if a member of staff is subjected to bullying or harassment. In addition, there is a "Staff Conduct" section that

explains staff expectations around ensuring other employees are physically and emotionally safe in accordance with the Education and Training Act 2020. This section includes links to the “Code of Professional Responsibility” and Standards for the Teaching Profession” webpages, which reinforce Aotearoa New Zealand’s code of professional expectations for teachers (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2025). Despite these policies and procedures, the findings indicate that some participants were dissatisfied with how certain school leaders handled staff conflict due to inadequate enactment, which, in turn, appeared to have impacted teacher wellbeing.

6.2.4 Discussion

Heavy workloads are job demands that can contribute to teacher stress and adversely impact job satisfaction (De Carlo et al., 2019; Lawrence et al., 2019). The *workload* subtheme suggests that a positive PSC environment encourages teachers and leaders to engage in organisational participation and communication to address workload issues. This is because PSC-related policies, practices and procedures inform teachers when to safely utilise job resources and manage excessive job demands, such as workload (Garrick et al., 2014; Viseu et al., 2025). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, participants emphasised that they could raise workload concerns through various school and house-level practices and procedures (e.g., professional learning communities [PLCs], mentoring sessions, and the wellbeing survey) that enabled organisational communication and participation. As such, these measures had facilitated meaningful changes by reducing workload-related job demands and, consequently, increasing job satisfaction in some aspects of the role (e.g., fewer administrative tasks) and alleviating stress, which is consistent with the literature (Loh, Dollard, & Friebel, 2024). However, the present study provides novel qualitative insights in a school context that highlight and elaborate on how specific changes in teachers’ workloads and job design positively contribute to these teacher wellbeing indicators.

The school's student behaviour policy and procedures, embedded with PSC principles that intentionally prioritised teachers' psychological H&S, appeared effective in reducing teachers' stress while supporting job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy. Student misbehaviour is highly resistant to resolution (Armstrong, 2018) and is a significant and common job demand in teaching (Granziera et al., 2020) that adversely affects teacher stress (Montgomery, 2017), job satisfaction (Sass et al., 2011), and self-efficacy (Shernoff et al., 2011). While student behavioural policies generally endorse effective classroom control (Maguire et al., 2015), their design and implementation may not prioritise teachers' psychological H&S, making teachers feel reluctant to voice concerns or seek appropriate support. The present study demonstrates that a positive PSC environment can provide teachers with greater clarity in managing challenging classroom situations, and feeling safer seeking support and sharing concerns about how such issues may impact their teaching practice and wellbeing.

Additionally, a positive PSC environment may enhance teachers' discretion and confidence in addressing behavioural incidents, therefore mitigating adverse impacts on teacher stress, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy. These findings extend the quantitative literature within educational settings, which has reported that PSC is negatively related to student misbehaviour (Afsharian et al., 2025; Bourgoin Boucher et al., 2024; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Garrick et al., 2014; Viseu et al., 2025). While the literature has investigated the impact of PSC on student behaviour, there is insufficient clarity on how a positive PSC setting may shape student behaviour policy and the implications it has for teacher wellbeing. Therefore, the present research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that a positive PSC environment establishes organisational conditions that support effective organisational communication and participation in H&S when developing an effective student behavioural framework. This ensures that the framework not only focuses on classroom learning and physical safety but also

prioritises teachers' psychological H&S. Applying a PSC lens during the development of new student behaviour frameworks and when reviewing existing ones may also increase school leaders' awareness and responsibility to ensure that the proposed measures actively support teachers' psychological health and wellbeing.

Perceptions of PSC can vary depending on how effectively leaders mitigate specific psychosocial hazards (Idris et al., 2012). For example, while participants' perceptions of PSC were generally positive when leaders accommodated staff leave for personal reasons, perceptions related to leaders' ability to manage and resolve staff conflict were often negative. Conflict can quickly escalate when inadequately managed and can undermine employees' confidence in seeking help and in knowing how to act (Kwan et al., 2016; Zahlquist et al., 2019). In turn, a lack of leadership action in conflict resolution weakened perceptions of PSC, even though the same school leaders were perceived as protecting teachers' psychological H&S by enhancing job resources and managing job demands in other areas, such as workload and student misbehaviour. The PSC literature outside of educational settings suggests that staff conflict can lead to bullying and harassment, which may have significant implications for employee stress (Dollard & McTernan, 2011; Tuckey et al., 2022) and job commitment (Kwan et al., 2016). While participants in the present research did not identify which wellbeing indicators were impacted by unresolved staff conflict, those who did experience or discuss the school's conflict-resolution practices often displayed visible signs of stress and frustration when reflecting on how conflict was handled.

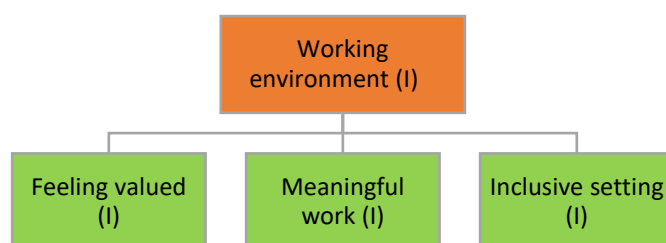
Leaders' discretion in implementing policies and procedures can vary across teams (Afsharian et al., 2018; Dollard, 2012; Krasniqi et al., 2019), as was evident at the participating school, partly due to the autonomy that house leaders had in interpreting and implementing school policy. Tuckey et al. (2022) reported that the risk of bullying increased when leaders repeatedly implemented ineffective people-leadership practices. Thus, negative perceptions of

PSC, in relation to poor conflict resolution, could be addressed by minimising leaders' discretion (Dollard, 2012) to ensure conflict management policies are consistently applied across school teams, and, as Kwan et al. (2016) suggested, by promoting employee voice and practising safety signals. In turn, such measures may mitigate staff conflict and teacher stress and positively impact teacher commitment, so that issues are addressed before they escalate into harassment or bullying. Participants' concerns about some leaders' inability to address conflict suggest that these leaders may require training in proactive conflict resolution – a critical competency for mitigating conflict and preventing escalation. These findings build on existing PSC research by highlighting the importance of proactive problem-solving skills (as discussed in Section 5.3) for establishing a stronger PSC environment that supports consistent and effective conflict-resolution practices across school teams.

6.3 Working Environment

This primary theme explores how PSC may establish a working environment that promotes the positive indicators of teacher wellbeing. It consists of three subthemes: *feeling valued*, *meaningful work*, and *inclusive setting* (see Figure 6.2). Each subtheme illustrates how PSC shaped participants' perceptions of their working environment and, subsequently, impacted teacher wellbeing.

Figure 6.2 *Working Environment Primary Theme and Subthemes*



6.3.1 Feeling Valued

The majority of participants reported feeling valued and appreciated by leaders for their work, which appeared to improve job satisfaction and teacher commitment. Teachers, in particular, felt they could actively and meaningfully contribute to their teaching practice in ways that were genuinely recognised by leaders and colleagues. The following quote illustrates how a positive PSC setting promoted teachers' involvement in teaching and learning decisions, strengthening their sense of value and enhancing role fulfilment:

In a psychosocially safe environment, you feel that you can say, “Hey, I’d like to try these new things, or I’d like to run a new programme, or I would like to do a slightly different style of assessment for these reasons.” It’s nice to know that you’re valued, that your opinions matter, and that people [leaders and staff] are happy to try new things.
(P1)

The comment above affirms what I observed in all-staff meetings, where teachers' contributions were often encouraged, leading them to feel valued and to have their views incorporated into the development of the school's policies, practices, and procedures. For example, on three separate occasions, school leaders and members of the staff wellbeing committee sought staff feedback on matters related to assessment and timetabling, often through anonymous digital feedback systems (PO). Therefore, encouraging organisational participation and communication may have positively impacted teachers' job satisfaction, knowing their suggestions could lead to valuable and positive changes in their working environment.

6.3.2 Meaningful Work

Participants appreciated engaging in meaningful work because it often positively impacted not only their job satisfaction and commitment to the role but also student

achievement. When work is perceived as meaningful, it typically involves aspects of the role that relate directly to teaching and learning, and to improvements in student outcomes that are visible and for which teachers are directly responsible. For instance, P4 noted: “I love what I’m doing, and I love the changes that I can see happening in the students. That gives me great satisfaction.”

However, for teachers to engage in the work they find most meaningful, a supportive work environment is required. In supportive settings, teachers appeared to contribute more freely to the teaching and learning strategies they believed best suit their students’ pedagogical and pastoral needs. In turn, this degree of teacher input, within a collaborative and collegial setting, may have contributed favourably to job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and self-efficacy, as teachers were given greater agency and control over their work. As P4 pointed out:

You can try new things and new initiatives, so that makes it quite a fun place to work. For example, a particular strategy isn’t working for this group of kids, so I’d like to try another strategy. I don’t think I’ve ever been told, “No, you absolutely can’t try that.” It’s always been a really supportive environment.

The findings indicate that, through management priority, leadership could play a key role in reducing the number of unrewarding tasks, therefore enabling teachers to focus on what they consider the most meaningful and important aspects of their role – teaching and learning. Given that most teachers expressed a dislike for the administrative burdens of the job, having fewer such tasks may positively contribute to job satisfaction and teacher commitment. The quote below from a house leader could also be interpreted as a demonstration of management commitment and support, which may have led to higher job satisfaction for teachers:

I know the other leaders and myself try to retain a lot of the administration elements in the non-teaching workload [followed by laughter] – in a sense, to protect our teachers to do a very important job, which is to focus on the teaching and learning. (SL4)

In addition, each house had a house assistant who provided administrative support to teachers. The house assistant's office was in the central house area and was visited by students and teachers throughout the day. The house assistant was highly visible within the house, making it easy for teachers to call on them for support, particularly when a house leader was absent. They handled administrative and pastoral tasks, such as contacting parents/caregivers about student progress, following up on attendance issues, collecting payments for school trips, and issuing school devices to students who might not own one (PO). While this level of support did not cover all teacher administrative and pastoral responsibilities, it helped teachers to focus more on teaching and may also have had positive implications for job satisfaction.

6.3.3 Inclusive Setting

The school's PSC also appeared to shape participants' perceptions of the school as an inclusive workplace for staff. This perception of inclusivity made most participants feel they belonged to the school, which appeared to have subsequent implications for job satisfaction and teacher commitment not only to the role but also to the school itself. As P9 stated, "I've connected with people across the school. It's really nice because everyone is inclusive." Relatedly, in the focus group, TFGP7 noted: "I come and feel good here, because I've worked in a couple of other schools, and the atmosphere and vibe we have in our staffroom and even with people [here] is so positive." TFGP9 responded: "You know, that's probably why I'm still [working] here."

As a reliever, I spent several intervals and lunchtimes in the school's staffroom, and my observations corroborated the inclusive setting most participants described. Similarly, as

participants explained in the focus groups, staff hierarchy did not seem to determine where or with whom people sat. This appeared to make the staffroom a more welcoming and inclusive environment, helping it become a lively, well-used space for socialising, regardless of individuals' status or seniority. Furthermore, the staffroom functioned as a key site where the wellbeing committee and the principal exercised organisational communication and staff participation in H&S activities and policy, potentially reinforcing perceptions of a positive PSC environment and fostering a sense of staff belonging (PO).

The findings also indicate that a positive PSC shaped the school's support systems that contributed to an inclusive setting for teachers. Participants appreciated that these systems not only had positive implications for staff belonging but also enabled school leaders to actively promote inclusion and foster a supportive environment, which supported job satisfaction and teacher commitment. As P6 commented:

It's like a culture established at the school, where you belong. They [leadership team] put these systems [e.g., house/PLC, learning area, wellbeing committee] where you have your house. But then, if you don't feel you belong in your house, you've got your [subject] learning area as well. So, there are multiple areas across the school where you can find a place to belong ... I think it makes things more approachable and supportive, so you always have someone to talk to.

6.3.4 Discussion

The findings indicate that the school's positive PSC environment helped teachers feel valued, which enhanced their job satisfaction and commitment. Teachers believed that the school's policies, practices and procedures allowed them to offer suggestions and provide feedback on teaching and learning matters, which made them feel appreciated as they completed tasks and met expectations. This recognition affirmed their abilities and reinforced that their

contributions and ideas mattered, which strengthened their sense of satisfaction, connection to the school, and commitment to supporting its goals. These findings can be understood in relation to previous research, which suggests that supportive work environments foster employees' sense of mastery and control over their roles and tasks, and that a positive PSC cultivates environments in which employees feel valued and supported (Laloo et al., 2023; M. Lee & Idris, 2019). Studies conducted in school settings have also linked PSC more broadly to higher levels of job satisfaction (Viseu et al., 2025) and teacher commitment (Winwood & Kramer, 2020). The present research builds on this existing quantitative literature (Viseu et al., 2025; Winwood & Kramer, 2020) by demonstrating how a positive PSC environment creates conditions in which teachers feel valued for their contributions relating to teaching and learning, and how these experiences can support both job satisfaction and teacher commitment.

Building on these findings, the connection between PSC, feeling valued, job satisfaction and teacher commitment may also be understood through social exchange theory (SET), which suggests that one party's actions will be reciprocated by the other, fostering high-quality relationships based on mutual trust, loyalty, and commitment (Blau, 1964). Therefore, employees who feel that leadership and the organisation value their work (via positive PSC) are more likely to reciprocate with positive behaviours and responses (Blau, 1964; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), such as commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006) and job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Consistent with SET, teachers in the present research described feeling valued by leaders within a positive PSC environment as contributing to their feelings of job satisfaction and teacher commitment.

The findings from the present research on the link between PSC and teacher commitment differ somewhat from those reported by Casely-Hayford et al. (2025), who found that, although higher PSC was associated with teacher turnover, external factors, such as municipal decisions and labour dynamics, had a stronger influence on turnover. These

differences may be attributable to variations in national contexts and to Casely-Hayford et al. (2025) focusing on turnover rather than teacher commitment, the latter which also encompasses one's dedication to the teaching profession and to the school in which they are employed (Morin et al., 2015). Moreover, these findings indicate that PSC may relate differently to teacher turnover and teacher commitment outcomes.

Teachers identified two ways in which a positive PSC environment contributed to meaningful work, and which, in turn, might support job satisfaction and teacher commitment: (1) by reducing administrative tasks and (2) by promoting job crafting. Teachers' increasingly burdensome administrative tasks (Jerrim & Sims, 2021) were perceived by teachers in the present research as the least meaningful aspect of their role, potentially contributing to excessive job demands and lower satisfaction and teacher commitment. However, teachers reported that in PSC-oriented settings they could undertake more meaningful tasks (e.g., related to teaching and learning), which may constitute sources of "challenge stress" (Stiglbauer & Zuber, 2018, p. 707) – job stressors that can also have beneficial effects – and may positively influence teachers' job satisfaction and commitment. Since PSC reflects the extent to which employees' psychological H&S is prioritised (Afsharian et al., 2021; McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018), the present research found that in settings characterised by positive PSC (e.g., individual houses/PLCs), leaders were more likely to act as "gatekeepers" by assigning fewer administrative tasks and providing greater administrative support within teams. This finding reinforces the importance of leaders driving impactful changes that support teachers' psychological H&S (Garrick et al., 2014), which, as teachers in the present research described, contributed to job satisfaction and teacher commitment.

Meaningful work was also supported by a positive PSC environment, in which the school's working conditions and policies allowed teachers to engage in regular job crafting. This finding aligns with earlier literature from other sectors (Hubert et al., 2025; Loh et al.,

2020; Potter et al., 2019), whereby a PSC-supportive setting facilitates job crafting because employees have access to greater resources, enabling them to put more effort into shaping work that interests them (Hu et al., 2022). In such settings, leaders recognise the importance of meaningful work and create conditions conducive to employee growth and development (Idris et al., 2015). In a school context, this may positively impact teacher satisfaction and job commitment, as it could involve teachers designing their teaching and learning activities and evaluating students' learning outcomes via a bottom-up approach to work design, which is consistent with job crafting literature (Demerouti, 2014).

The *inclusive setting* subtheme suggests that a positive PSC workplace contributed to teachers' perceptions of employee belonging, with favourable implications for job satisfaction and teacher commitment. These findings also align with the literature, which reports that PSC may serve as a social support system that increases feelings of belonging (McCusker & Dollard, 2019). Building on this work, the present research offers further insight into how PSC-informed policies, practices, and procedures can shape the development of school-based support systems (examples in this case study include the wellbeing committee, the house system, and discipline learning areas) and teachers' access to them. These support systems appeared to strengthen teachers' sense of belonging and inclusion, as well as supporting job satisfaction and teacher commitment. This is consistent with evidence that employee support systems foster employee belonging (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017b) and positively impact job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016) and teacher commitment (Graham et al., 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

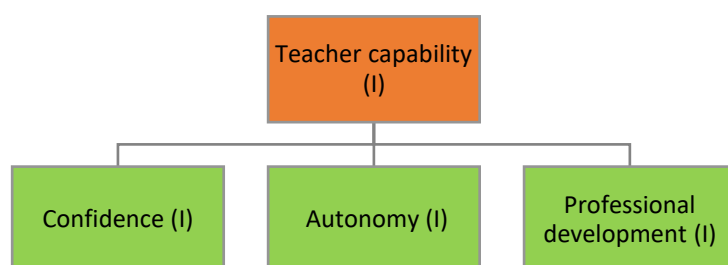
The school's staffroom was also identified as a setting that facilitates teacher inclusion and belonging, as most staff from across the school enjoyed spending time there and were comfortable socialising and interacting with leaders and colleagues from various houses and learning areas. While interpersonal interactions play a vital role in the interconnected

environment of the 21st-century workplace (McLinton et al., 2023), the present research also highlights that the staffroom, as a social and inclusive setting, can promote organisational communication and participation in H&S through school-level practices such as all-staff meetings and wellbeing committee activities. Overall, the findings show that the school's PSC context provided opportunities for both formal and informal interactions in the staffroom, which appeared to contribute to job satisfaction and teacher commitment. Additionally, it extends the existing literature by demonstrating that school-level PSC shapes the extent to which the staffroom functions as a pivotal setting for promoting inclusivity and supporting these common indicators of teacher wellbeing.

6.4 Teacher Capability

The primary theme of *teacher capability* explores how a positive PSC environment may have created working conditions that supported the common indicators of teacher wellbeing. As illustrated in Figure 6.3, this primary theme comprises three subthemes: *confidence*, *autonomy*, and *professional development*. The findings indicate that a positive PSC impacted the extent to which teachers felt capable of completing their work, contributing favourably to teacher wellbeing.

Figure 6.3 *Teacher Capability Primary Theme and Subthemes*



6.4.1 Confidence

Teachers believed that the school's PSC environment made them feel safe, and therefore they had more confidence in being able to fulfil their roles successfully. These perceptions were primarily based on teachers feeling self-assured in making key decisions in their roles and seeking appropriate support from leaders and colleagues when necessary. Teachers generally explained how the school's psychologically safe environment had positive implications for their teaching practice, through experiential learning and problem-solving, which, in turn, appeared to increase teachers' self-efficacy and alleviate stress. As P2 explained:

I know that if any issues arise, I feel confident to take action. I feel comfortable that I'm able to make a mistake here and that I'm not going to get in trouble for it. That it [the mistake] will be a learning opportunity, and I will be guided to make the right decision.

The connection between PSC and teacher self-efficacy was also evident in teachers' accounts of working in unsafe environments in previous schools. Some described their previous workplaces as toxic and characterised by significant management overreach, which led to adverse perceptions of PSC. As one teacher stated:

If the [work]place is not making you feel safe, that psychologically impacts how you feel about your own abilities and then it definitely impacts how you feel as a teacher in the classroom and that leads to you not feeling good about yourself. (P8)

This quote indicates that psychologically unsafe workplaces can undermine teachers' confidence, particularly their teaching capabilities. Conversely, as the previous quote suggests, a positive PSC creates a safe environment and serves as a foundational resource that supports teacher self-efficacy.

6.4.2 *Autonomy*

Teachers also highlighted how a positive PSC environment could impact the degree of autonomy they experienced in their roles, which, in turn, had favourable implications for job satisfaction and self-efficacy. While closely related to the *feeling valued* and *meaningful work* subthemes discussed in Section 6.3, the *autonomy* subtheme primarily focuses on teachers having greater agency within a safe and healthy workplace. The findings suggest that teachers appreciated having greater flexibility in how they carried out their roles. Because the school syllabus and pastoral care programmes were well prescribed, job satisfaction increased when teachers were afforded greater autonomy, enabling them to respond more effectively to students' individual needs.

Again, some teachers compared their perceptions of PSC at their current school with those at their previous workplaces, further emphasising PSC's link to teacher autonomy. These comparisons suggest that positive PSC environments are more likely to foster teacher agency, therefore empowering teachers in their role. P17 commented:

There is agency given to teachers – I feel like it's a high-trust model here ... It was the leadership [at previous school], it was the pressure ... It was the constant micromanaging, I guess. And you couldn't be free as a teacher and have your own agency. It was the style of micromanaging – the “do it now” approach: “It's my way, and that's the only way” [*laughter*].

Teachers who reported greater job control and autonomy at the participating school appeared to experience job satisfaction and self-efficacy. As P15 explained, “I have the freedom to run things my way ... it makes me feel good ... It's a nice feeling to know that everyone else thinks that you're trustworthy and capable.”

I observed that within a positive PSC environment teacher autonomy contributed to job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy, especially when curriculum integration was practised across disciplines. While house leaders were usually present and accessible, classroom teachers often led planned activities and delivered them across various subjects in house settings (PO). It was clear from my observations and the house planning documents (OD3/OD4) that both beginning and experienced teachers were usually given significant autonomy by their house leaders to plan and initiate these teaching and learning programmes. There was a general sense of safety within house settings, which made teachers feel comfortable taking risks in front of their peers and leaders. These opportunities allowed teachers to lead in areas where they had strengths or interests, as they practised and refined their individual skills in undertaking work they enjoyed and felt capable of doing (PO).

6.4.3 Professional Development (PD)

The findings also suggest that the school's positive PSC environment facilitated opportunities for staff to request relevant and timely PD. Because of fluctuating student numbers, staff promotions, turnover, and general teacher shortages in hard-to-fill subjects, it is not uncommon for teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to be assigned a new subject, which can increase workload and stress. Participants emphasised the importance of receiving PD before taking on new pedagogical and pastoral initiatives or teaching outside their subject specialism, so they were better equipped to tackle these responsibilities with greater self-efficacy.

The findings indicate that the school's management priority facilitated teachers' participation in suitable PD programmes. For instance, P8 explained, "We can tell that the school and the senior leaders are doing their best to give us the tools that we need, the workshops that we need, the upskilling and PD that we need." Similarly, P14 explained how leaders enabled them to take valuable PD when teachers needed it most: "Last year, when I was teaching a new subject, they [leadership] put me on professional development [courses], and I

was given many opportunities to learn how to teach this new subject, which was really worthwhile.”

Several organisational documents also suggest that the school placed importance on offering effective PD, which may reflect the school’s PSC. For example, the school’s “Implementation Plan”, developed by the school board and leadership team, includes a PD objective specifically focused on the Ministry of Education’s upcoming curriculum refresh and its associated changes (OD5). Relatedly, the school’s “Policies and Procedures” document highlights the importance of staff receiving ongoing PD and maintaining an adequate annual budget for this purpose, noting that the school prioritises building staff capabilities to address potential skill gaps (OD15). The school’s charter also prioritises staff PD, through its “Human Resources Capacity Development” criterion, which emphasises that staff professional learning needs must be met and that individual teachers should enjoy professional growth (OD13). These policies may reflect the school’s management commitment and support, as well as management priority in providing accessible, high-quality PD, which appeared to support teachers’ self-efficacy and reduce stress during significant changes to teachers’ roles.

6.4.4 Discussion

Teachers reported that the school’s positive PSC environment created working conditions that strengthened their confidence in making key decisions and taking action on matters directly related to their roles, potentially reducing teachers’ stress and supporting self-efficacy. This contrasts with an earlier study which found that PSC was not significantly associated with teachers’ decision-making authority (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). The present research’s findings are aligned with literature outside educational settings which suggests that a positive PSC environment allows employees to take greater risks and therefore exercise greater decision-making authority (Afsharian et al., 2016; Hu et al., 2022), enabling teachers at the participating school to feel more confident in making decisions relating to teaching and

learning. When employees feel safe in the workplace, they can make decisions and take actions that lead to greater ownership of their work (Dollard, 2019; Dollard, Tuckey, & Dormann, 2012; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Loh et al., 2018), therefore reducing or diverting the stress they experience (Afsharian et al., 2018). Hence, in a PSC-supportive setting, teachers may experience lower stress and greater self-efficacy, as they can act more decisively in environments where a blame culture is less likely to exist.

A positive PSC environment also facilitated teacher autonomy by increasing skill discretion, which appeared to contribute to job satisfaction. It also enables employees to utilise specific skills (Dollard, Opie, et al., 2012), making teachers feel more trusted and supported by their leaders, and enabling them to exercise their expertise and benefit from greater job control. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that in such settings, PSC can influence teachers' skill discretion over time (Dollard & Bakker, 2010), as PSC is positively associated with skill discretion (Afsharian et al., 2018; Dollard et al., 2024; McLinton et al., 2019). Further, in a positive PSC environment, skill discretion can lead to higher job satisfaction by meeting employees' psychological needs (Dollard et al., 2024). Findings from the present research indicate that positive team-level PSC, enabled primarily by house leaders, supported teachers' skill discretion and, in turn, contributed to their autonomy and job satisfaction.

A positive PSC environment may support teacher autonomy, including skill discretion, allowing teachers more flexibility in how they teach and enabling a more varied and enriching role. For beginning teachers, experiencing autonomy can be particularly important, as it provides varied opportunities to develop self-efficacy over time and, as Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) posit, enables them to master different teaching situations, such as learning course content and managing different levels of student engagement. Because positive PSC workplaces foster learning opportunities and knowledge sharing (Han & Ni, 2025; Idris et al.,

2015), beginning teachers may be better supported in building key skills when school leaders allow appropriate levels of skill discretion.

The working conditions, policies, and procedures of a positive PSC environment might also allow more experienced teachers to have greater autonomy and discretion in their pedagogical practice, potentially enhancing job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy. This could be because in these settings, teachers feel safer exploring and extending their teaching and learning expertise, such as leading interdisciplinary programmes or initiating a new pastoral system. Conversely, in low PSC contexts, even more experienced employees may be insecure about changing their working methods, as there is a greater risk in utilising the limited resources available, which restricts the employee's ability to learn and apply new skills (Lawrie et al., 2018). Participants in the present research who had taught in schools they perceived as having low PSC environments felt that their self-efficacy and job satisfaction were influenced by policies and practices that had significantly constrained their autonomy and, subsequently, their skill discretion.

Finally, the school's policies, practices and procedures also appeared to facilitate teachers' access to professional development (PD), which can enhance teachers' self-efficacy and mitigate stress, as teaching a new subject or implementing a new initiative without adequate support can lead to anxiety and isolation (D. Kelly & Denson, 2017; Marangio & Heyting, 2023). The school's PD programmes were detailed across multiple documents, reflecting both the extent to which PSC principles are embedded in these organisational materials and the priority placed on teachers' psychological H&S. These findings align with existing literature, which indicates that PSC is positively linked with the provision of PD as a psychological H&S intervention (Biron et al., 2018) , with PD enhancing teacher self-efficacy and mitigating stress when teaching a new subject or implementing a new teaching programme (Haug & Mork, 2021). The present research extends prior work in educational settings by highlighting that school

policies and procedures specifically related to teachers' PD signal its availability and enhance leaders' awareness of teachers' professional needs. Furthermore, timely access to PD, facilitated by a positive PSC environment, may help teachers manage stress and strengthen their self-efficacy by ensuring they feel supported and well prepared during significant changes in their roles.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored how PSC can act as a mechanism to help address common challenges in teaching and create conditions that support teacher wellbeing. The findings indicate that a positive PSC setting fosters an environment in which teachers' psychological H&S is prioritised, allowing them to voice concerns about common job demands, such as student misbehaviour and heavy workloads, and enabling teachers and leaders to co-develop effective, targeted measures to address these demands. More specifically, as a contextual contribution to the literature, the findings show how a positive PSC may shape the design and implementation of student behaviour policies and procedures that can reduce teacher stress and support self-efficacy in challenging circumstances.

Although most participants perceived the school's overall PSC environment as positive, concerns remained about how some leaders addressed staff conflict. These findings suggest that although PSC was well-established and effective in certain areas within the school, its implementation was inconsistent in others. A widespread positive PSC therefore depends not only on the consistent application of policies and procedures but also on leaders' competence (as discussed in 5.3.3) and their willingness to proactively address potential psychosocial hazards, such as staff conflict.

While quantitative studies have shown that PSC is negatively associated with teacher stress and positively associated with job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-

efficacy (e.g., Boström et al., 2020; Viseu et al., 2025; Winwood & Kramer, 2020), the present case study shows *how* a positive PSC environment supports these indicators of teacher wellbeing in daily practice. This includes developing a supportive, trusting, and inclusive environment where school leadership encourages and values teachers' suggestions and expertise. These settings appear to mitigate job demands and facilitate access to job resources by enabling job crafting, decision-making authority, skill discretion, and PD opportunities, highlighting an additional contextual contribution to the literature through the deep, holistic nature of this investigation. Overall, access to these job resources, facilitated by a positive PSC environment, is perceived to contribute positively to teacher wellbeing.

Chapter 7: Emergent Findings and Practical Leadership Tools for a Positive Psychosocial Safety Climate School Environment –

Results and Discussion

7.1 Chapter Overview

As a paradigm well-suited for examining organisational processes and experiential inquiry, pragmatism recognises that findings often emerge unexpectedly as the researcher explores and engages with complex social settings (L. Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). An emergent finding is an unexpected yet meaningful insight inductively derived from the data that also addresses the research questions. Accordingly, this chapter presents two emergent findings from this research. The first emergent finding relates to how the school's house system shaped perceptions of team and individual-level psychosocial safety climate (PSC). The second emergent finding highlights the pivotal role that mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and worldview) plays in supporting PSC enactment within the school.

This chapter also presents two practical leadership tools derived from the findings of Chapter 5, specifically regarding leadership and PSC within educational settings. The first practical leadership tool, which evolved from findings in Section 5.2, is the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4). This model conceptually illustrates how the dual leadership approaches of the principal and house leaders operationalise *existing* key policies, practices, and procedures to facilitate the transfer of PSC across teams. The second practical leadership tool is the Leader Competence–PSC Framework (Figure 7.5), informed by the findings in Section 5.3, which provides practical recommendations to enhance school leaders' capability and PSC implementation.

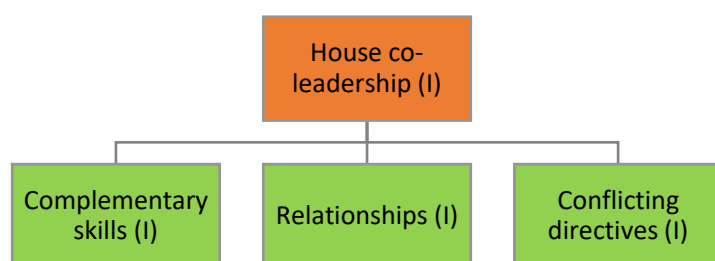
7.2 The House System

The first emergent finding is the impact of the school's comprehensive house system on perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. Section 5.2.3 sheds light on the instrumental role of house leaders (line managers) in operationalising policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of school-level PSC amongst teams within house settings. The findings from the interviews and subsequent participant observation data prompted a further examination of the school's house system in relation to PSC in the focus groups. This shaped the focus group schedule, including, for example, questions such as "How do house leaders specifically contribute to PSC?" and "How does leadership in a 'multiple schools within a school' model impact PSC?" Through inductive thematic analysis, two primary themes that characterised the school's house system and its apparent impact on team and individual-level PSC were identified: *house co-leadership* and *house workspace*.

7.2.1 House Co-leadership

Two co-leaders led each house and oversaw a team of 12 teachers from different disciplines, as well as a house assistant. This contrasted with many Aotearoa New Zealand secondary schools, where there is usually one head of department leading a smaller team in a related discipline and, within a traditional department or faculty-based school, occupying a middle leadership role with a narrower scope focused mostly on academics and staff leadership. The findings suggest that the participating school's house co-leadership structure shaped perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. While most staff appeared to appreciate the benefits of this line management structure, it also presented some challenges that had adverse implications for team and individual-level PSC. Figure 7.1 illustrates the three subthemes that constitute the *house co-leadership* primary theme: *complementary skills, relationships, and conflicting directives*.

Figure 7.1 *House Co-leadership Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Key: Orange – primary theme; green – subthemes.

(I): Inductive analysis.

Complementary Skills. Participants noted the advantages of having two house leaders with complementary yet distinct skills. Most importantly, co-leadership could involve leaders with specific skills who could mitigate and address different psychosocial hazards and, therefore, provide a broader range of support for teachers. TFGP2 noted: “I quite like having different leaders, who have different strengths and weaknesses. I find that sometimes you pick the person that you can go to for certain things, because this person is going to be really useful for that.” Relatedly, SLFGP3 underlined some of the advantages of bringing different co-leader skills into a house co-leadership arrangement:

We have strengths in different areas. For example, I’m more analytical and enjoy working with data and curriculum matters, while the other house leaders that I’ve co-led with are much better with the pastoral issues. I mean it just works.

It was evident from participant observation and focus groups that staff knew which leader to approach depending on whether the issue related to student behaviour, the curriculum, or pastoral care. In particular, beginning teachers I worked alongside appeared to value having two leaders present within the same house, as each brought distinct strengths that enabled regular interactions and immediate support. Across data sources, this arrangement reassured

teachers and gave them a sense of safety, knowing that a leader was usually available to assist them (PO).

Relationships. Teachers also considered co-leader relationships important when evaluating the impact of co-leadership on team and individual-level PSC. How well the co-leaders got along in weekly professional learning community (PLC) meetings, daily interactions, and while completing shared tasks and initiatives (e.g., academic and pastoral) shaped participants' perceptions of the relationship between the two leaders. As participants noted, the quality of the co-leader relationship could impact the working environment, and often determined whether teachers felt safe approaching house leaders for support and to resolve problems. A teacher made this valuable observation in the teacher focus group:

If they work well together and we [staff], as a house – PSC – great! But if they don't, then it's going to start trickling down into your house as well, so it starts affecting us [staff] as well. So, it's almost like your parents are fighting – it's going to get a bit tense ... We'll be walking around on eggshells, and we're like, "Oh, should we come to you with our problems?" So, we may repress them until they address their own issues. (TFGP10)

Another teacher in the same focus group added:

If they're on edge, how's it going to make us feel? You know, like we get even edgier. If it was an ongoing thing where they were projecting that energy, I suppose that negative energy – then yeah, that would trickle down [to staff]. (TFGP6)

The house system is an intimate workplace, requiring the co-leaders to work in a confined space and, ideally, to collaborate closely every day. A poor working relationship between co-leaders negatively impacted perceptions of team and individual-level PSC, as teachers were less likely

to seek support or voice concerns to their co-leaders, especially when there was visible tension between them.

Conflicting Directives. Effective co-leadership required house leaders to communicate consistently with staff about school and house directives and regulatory requirements, so that teachers could successfully implement them in their practice. However, participants highlighted that the co-leadership arrangement could lead to teachers receiving conflicting directives from co-leaders, often arising from differing interpretations of policies, practices, and procedures. In turn, these discrepancies could influence how teachers interpreted and applied information, potentially shaping their teaching and learning practices and contributing to role ambiguity and perceptions of team-level PSC. As P11 reflected:

We give them the behaviours, we give them the answers that they want, depending on what we've picked up. This leader wants it this way, and this one wants all of this. So, we shift our behaviours according to the things that will please them. And so sometimes it's very contradictory. And even at meetings, you can feel it, especially when they're both together. You think, who am I supposed to please or which one is the very head honcho?

P7 expressed a similar frustration related to conflicting directives and approaches to house leadership:

There are a range of different management styles, and sometimes those can be a little bit in opposition to each other, or they have slightly different perspectives ... Sometimes it comes down to having a conversation with a colleague and saying, "Hey, I'm getting mixed messages. What are you doing?"

Inconsistent messaging from co-leaders impacted perceptions of organisational communication and, consequently, how teachers behaved and completed their tasks.

Conflicting directives were also likely to increase job demands, as teachers spent valuable time trying to make sense of inconsistent information. Conversely, when co-leaders delivered consistent directives to teachers, this was likely to mitigate such issues, enable effective organisational communication, and, consequently, greater role clarity.

7.2.2 Discussion

The school's house system required effective co-leadership, as house leaders were responsible for delivering academic, cultural, and pastoral student outcomes, while also maintaining strong relationships with parents/caregivers, meeting regulatory requirements, and leading a multidisciplinary team. Highly complex environments, such as the school's house system, require co-leaders with complementary skills and high levels of expertise, as Dust and Ziegert (2012) assert. Participants also underlined the advantages of co-leaders with complementary skills, particularly given the competing demands of their roles. This finding aligns with research showing that diverse leadership skills help mobilise different groups of staff towards varied objectives (e.g., multidisciplinary teams) and that these teams require broader leadership expertise (Fjellvær, 2010; Gibeau et al., 2016; Klinga et al., 2016).

Co-leadership at the line management level can improve the work environment (De Brún et al., 2019) by not only providing greater leader support and feedback (Konu & Viitanen, 2008) but also reducing role ambiguity (R. Johnson, 2015). For example, a beginning teacher who receives comprehensive curriculum support from one house leader and extensive pastoral support from the other receives greater assistance overall. In turn, such support may increase job resources and minimise job demands, mainly because management commitment and support, and organisational communication can be applied more broadly across the beginning teacher's role, potentially influencing their perceptions of team and individual-level PSC.

While the literature discusses the value of complementary skills and the need for some degree of overlap in co-leadership (Dust & Ziegert, 2016), the present research demonstrates that it is the combination of *both* complementary skills *and* sufficient skill overlap that can strengthen teachers' perceptions of organisational communication and management commitment and support. In a semi-autonomously led house setting with significant task interdependencies and teacher-line manager interactions, co-leaders required sufficient skill overlap in areas such as curriculum, pedagogy, and pastoral care, so that teachers were not dependent on a single leader for each skill. In turn, complementary skills, combined with adequate skill overlap, strengthened teachers' perceptions of organisational communication and management commitment and support, as teachers were likely to receive more comprehensive assistance from an effective co-leadership arrangement. Therefore, co-leaders contributed to positive perceptions of team and individual-level PSC by supporting each other's development in areas requiring improvement and ensuring sufficient skill overlap.

For co-leader relationships to be successful, strong collaboration and trust are essential (Gronn & Hamilton, 2004; Reid & Karambayya, 2016). Participants also emphasised the importance of having positive co-leader relationships within house settings. Co-leaders who present themselves as a united team are more capable of handling challenges effectively and efficiently (Klinga et al., 2016). In house settings where co-leaders had trusting and respectful relationships, teachers felt comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns to their co-leaders. Such environments facilitated spontaneous opportunities for organisational communication and participation, whereby teachers and leaders could identify and address psychosocial hazards collaboratively and more freely.

Conversely, teachers reported preferring not to engage with co-leaders when their relationships were strained. This research contributes to the PSC literature by demonstrating that poor co-leader relationships can undermine a potentially valuable channel for

organisational communication and participation, and negatively shape perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. Strained co-leader relationships create hostile work environments, as employees tend to cope with issues on their own by withdrawing psychologically rather than sharing their concerns with their leaders (Mawritz et al., 2014). In contrast, organisational communication in positive PSC environments thrives because both leaders and employees feel safe identifying stressful work conditions, therefore enabling the prevention or control of psychosocial hazards (Hall et al., 2010; Plimmer et al., 2022).

As noted in Chapter 5, house leaders had significant autonomy in their roles, which could lead to conflicting directives that shaped perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. For example, differing interpretations of the school's vision and charter by house leaders led to conflicting directives, even within a single house. This contributes to tension and communication issues amongst teachers in PLC settings (Vangrieken et al., 2017), which is particularly problematic in a team that works interdependently and usually shares a confined physical space. Co-leaders' conflicting directives contributed to role ambiguity and, in turn, impacted teachers' practice and behaviour as they tried to make sense of the information they receive, which, as Leka and Jain (2024) claim, can develop into psychosocial hazards.

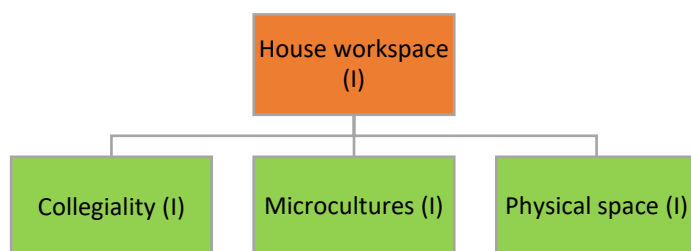
Co-leadership can lead to differences in communication, coordination, employee expectations, direction-setting, and role clarity (De Brún et al., 2019; Dust & Ziegert, 2016). Prior research indicates that PSC is positively related to role clarity (Afsharian et al., 2025; Berglund et al., 2024; M. Lee & Idris, 2017). However, the present research shows that conflicting directives from house co-leaders could undermine teachers' role clarity, which, in turn, negatively shaped perceptions of PSC at both the team and individual levels. Given the limited attention paid to co-leadership in the PSC literature, these findings highlight how co-leadership arrangements at the line management level may not only influence role clarity but also perceptions of PSC within team settings.

Each time a conflicting directive was issued, or tension arose in the co-leadership relationship, it led to misunderstandings amongst teachers and reduced perceptions of safety, prompting staff to re-evaluate team and individual-level PSC. This finding aligns with recent literature suggesting that PSC may be more fluid and dynamic than previously thought (McLinton et al., 2025), with team and individual perceptions within house settings potentially fluctuating in response to teachers' daily experiences and interactions with co-leaders and colleagues. Because the house setting was a dynamic, confined and semi-autonomous environment, co-leader relationships and inconsistent directives altered teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC, as such settings may jeopardise organisational communication and participation. Consequently, employees continually reassess psychological health and safety (H&S) in response to the daily changes they may experience, as noted by McLinton et al. (2025).

7.2.3 House Workspace

This primary theme focuses on the impact of the house workspace on perceptions of team and individual-level PSC and comprises three subthemes: *collegiality*, *microcultures*, and *physical space* (see Figure 7.2). Data from various sources revealed that working within the unique confines of a comprehensive house system could foster greater interdependence, collegiality, the development of microcultures, and a more intimate, interactive physical space than in a department or faculty-based school. These subthemes also identify key distinctions across the school's four houses, which impacted perceptions of PSC and are reflected in this powerful comment: "I do think that depending on what house a teacher is in, they can have a really different experience" (SL1). As noted in earlier chapters, the findings suggest that PSC was not uniformly experienced across the school, with variability emerging across leadership levels and teams. This highlights the importance of examining PSC as a multilayered construct rather than an independent organisational resource.

Figure 7.2 *The House Workspace Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Collegiality. A key feature of the house workspace was the collegiality that teachers experienced within their assigned house. From a PSC perspective, the house workspace provided teachers with more options for quick and effective collegial support, enabling positive perceptions of commitment and support, as well as organisational communication. Much of this collegial support came from other house staff (teachers and house assistants) who worked closely and collaboratively. Importantly, problem-solving support that occurred in the house workspace often came from teachers who did not share the same discipline, as P5 explained:

We're quite lucky in terms of structure, in that there are other people you can go to ...

So, in your house, that person may be from a different learning area, but you can still have those discussions. And so, there's always an ear you can choose to talk to.

In turn, this high degree of collegiality seemed to strengthen teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC, as it signalled that teacher psychological H&S were collectively valued and actively supported by leaders and colleagues alike within the house workspace.

As the quote above suggests, a key difference of working in a comprehensive house system is that teachers can benefit from the ongoing collegial support of teachers outside their own discipline. This differs notably from how collegiality manifests in a department or faculty-structured school. P11 shared this description of collegiality in action within the school's house setting: "Each house is a [mini-]school, and they are working together. We have all these other little things at play, like science, social science, English and maths collaborating together."

Interview data suggested a strong collegial environment within the house workspace, which was confirmed during participant observation. The collegiality of the house staff appeared greater than in the department or faculty-structured schools that I had relieved and worked at in the past. The greatest difference was that the house workspace appeared to promote collegiality that extended beyond the boundaries of learning areas or disciplines. Hence, an English lesson could be taking place right beside a social science and a mathematics lesson. In some cases, the three lessons were team-taught and planned together, requiring significant collegiality. This led teachers from different disciplines to regularly interact and feel comfortable seeking support from one another, largely due to ongoing collegiality that extended across disciplines (PO).

In addition, the analysis of the “House Collaborative Plan” and “House Contextual Planning” documents revealed the interdisciplinary nature of the house system and its impact on collegiality across learning areas, as evidenced by team-teaching activities, house projects, and course assessments (OD3, OD4). The 12 house teachers, who worked closely and interdependently, offered their colleagues broader collegial support than they would experience in a smaller department or faculty-based school. However, as I observed, collegiality within each house extended beyond pedagogy and often included matters that could impact teachers’ psychological H&S, such as classroom management or staff conflict. Given the number of close colleagues in the same building, teachers could easily access collegial support regardless of their discipline.

Microcultures. While a school-wide culture was evident to both participants and me, each house also appeared to have a distinct microculture, partly shaped by the semi-autonomous nature of the house system. The findings indicate that these house microcultures impacted teachers’ working conditions and also their perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. The following exchange from the teachers’ focus group highlights how both house co-leadership

(as examined in Section 7.2.1) and house workspace contributed to the development of a distinct microculture within each house:

TFGP7: You spend so much time just with this group of kids ... And I think in terms of staff and leadership cohesion, it's the same. I think the staff cohesion comes from that house framework system, and it also comes from our [house] leadership.

TFGP6: It's that culture creation.

TFGP8: It's so important. That culture creation within that house is what your leaders are exhibiting, as we look up to them, right?

The level of cohesion within each house seemed to depend on its microculture, which then played a critical role in shaping teachers' perceptions of team and individual-level PSC, as microcultures appeared to determine how psychologically safe teachers felt in house settings.

I also observed how different house microcultures impacted my own experience and perceptions of team cohesion, as my relief work observation was equally distributed across the school's four houses. For example, the microculture of each house usually determined how comfortable I felt approaching other house staff, particularly house leaders, when seeking operational, pedagogical, or student behavioural support. Data from participant observation revealed that houses exhibiting positive microcultures were typically characterised by strong co-leader relationships and staff collegiality, which, in turn, increased my likelihood of seeking support (PO). Conversely, in houses where I perceived the microculture to be less collegial or collaborative, my perception of management commitment and support, as well as of management priority, from house leaders and staff, also decreased. While these perceptions of house microculture and PSC were entirely my own and may have been influenced by personal bias or other circumstantial factors, a conversation I had with a teacher during a break, whose

role involved working across the school's four houses, affirmed some of my observations. The teacher commented:

I know exactly the type of day I'm going to have once I find out which house I'm working in. I know how much classroom management will be necessary and what kind of support I'm likely to get in the house I'm in on that specific day. (PO)

The findings outlined above suggest that each house had a distinct microculture shaped by two key factors related to the school's house system: (1) the house workspace and (2) house leadership. Collectively, the house workspace and leadership appeared to shape the house microculture and, in turn, perceptions of team and individual-level PSC.

Physical Space. The physical space of house settings may also influence perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. The accessibility staff had with one another, as well as their proximity to house leaders, were regularly and positively discussed and attributed to the physical space of the house setting. For instance, the design of each house allowed house leaders the flexibility to prioritise where beginning teachers taught, ensuring them continuous and accessible support (see Appendix A). As SLFGP1 explained:

The architects designed the school so that all the classrooms face into the middle, upstairs and downstairs. And I think because of that, you're never far away from somebody ... When possible, we put beginning teachers on the bottom floor because they're right in the middle of the house ... so they are accessible to you, and you're accessible to them ... and it's also looking out for them.

This arrangement was likely to make a noticeable difference for a beginning teacher, who generally faces greater challenges and requires more guidance in their first two years of teaching. During participant observation, it was evident that support was consistently available and appeared to be greater than at other non-house schools that I had worked at or visited.

Teachers from various disciplines usually worked in enclosed classrooms connected by glass walls, so they were always within sight of one another. This proximity and visibility made me feel more supported and aware of my surroundings than I would have if I had been teaching in a single-cell classroom that was physically disconnected from colleagues and leaders (PO).

Participants also underlined the importance of having a house leader stationed on each floor and within the same building where they taught. Those who had worked in traditional schools with single-cell classrooms made valuable comparisons about how different physical spaces impacted how supported and connected they felt. Several participants reported that working in a classroom at the end of a corridor or in a completely detached classroom made it difficult to seek support when it was most needed and potentially less safe. TFGP3 recalled:

When I was at this traditional school [department-structured school], a relative passed away, and I went looking for the Dean [line manager] for support. In a typical secondary school, in the old-fashioned prefabs [non-attached single classrooms], it just happened that our Dean was located in a different department and on another side of the school entirely. I'm trying to find her, and the day was so tricky ... You didn't get this level of support.

Given that teachers often work alone in confined spaces with multiple students under their care, the lack of immediate and accessible support can pose a significant psychosocial hazard. The findings suggest that the physical space within the house workspace positively impacted the degree of management commitment and support, as well as the organisational communication, that teachers experienced.

7.2.4 Discussion

The findings relating to the house workspace are largely consistent with the limited literature on schools operating with a house system, which shows that it can facilitate

collegiality amongst house staff and shape teaching and learning practices (Brennan, 2012; V. Lee & Ready, 2008; Mack, 2011; Wallace, 2009). Collegiality within the school's house system was generally encouraged by house leaders, as shown in the house planning documents and during participant observation, and took various forms that transcended disciplinary lines. These valuable collegial interactions reinforced positive perceptions of management commitment and support amongst teachers and leaders. Collegiality occurred throughout the school day as teachers worked alongside their colleagues and house leaders, during collective planning sessions, and, as discussed in Chapter 5, during weekly PLC meetings, reflecting Eisenschmidt and Vanari's (2025) claim that teaching has become an increasingly team effort. The present study builds on prior literature by showing that the house workspace not only fosters collegiality but also supports a positive PSC environment that enables the early identification and resolution of problems, thereby reducing the likelihood of psychosocial risks.

The participating school's comprehensive house system generally provided teachers with a broad array of skills and support, largely due to the team's size and interdisciplinary makeup. Therefore, when a teacher faced a potential psychosocial hazard, they felt more comfortable seeking help and support from another colleague rather than relying entirely on the presence and availability of a house leader. These findings corroborate recent evidence by Okros and Virgă (2025) that suggests support from both colleagues and line management is essential when addressing a fellow employee's problem. Although PSC is generally conceptualised as an upstream predictor of job resources, such as line management and co-worker support (Afsharian, Dollard, et al., 2023; Loh et al., 2021; Loh et al., 2025), the present research proposes that strong collegiality within a house system also has a positive impact on perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. This degree of support and PSC enactment, more generally, is less likely to thrive in a traditional secondary school organised by subject departments, primarily because of the silo effect created by departments or faculties,

geographical dispersion of staff, and the lack of task interdependence, even within the same faculty. Conversely, the house system encourages teachers to work collaboratively through an interdisciplinary approach, which is likely to foster stronger collegiality (Brennan, 2012) and, in turn, enable staff to seek support and address psychosocial hazards when they arise.

While PSC can be a snapshot of organisational culture (Dormann et al., 2019), the present research found that house microcultures contributed to perceptions of both team and individual-level PSC. Teachers discussed the impact of house microculture and house leadership on team cohesion. Literature from other sectors has found that cohesion has favourable implications for social interaction, communication, and the management of conflict and stress (Levi, 2014). Given that positive school cultures facilitate communication and problem-solving (Manning et al., 2020), positive house microcultures also create conditions in which management commitment and support, as well as organisational communication, are encouraged. For instance, a positive microculture fostered higher levels of team cohesion and encouraged teachers to bring an individual or shared psychological H&S concern to a PLC meeting, as a psychologically safe climate promotes an environment in which employees can seek help when needed (Ji et al., 2025).

However, since school culture is primarily shaped by leadership (Day, 2017), house microculture may also determine whether teachers feel safe raising an issue with their leaders and whether they have adequate resources to address it. As such, perceptions of team and individual-level PSC may be enhanced by positive house microcultures, as these settings might cultivate a sense of safety amongst staff and create multiple opportunities to interact with their leaders and colleagues to address potential psychosocial hazards. This also reinforces the critical role of house leaders in prioritising psychological H&S through the policies, practices, and procedures they are responsible for operationalising and transferring within house settings (as discussed in Section 5.2).

The findings also demonstrate that the physical space of each house contributed to perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. Data from participant observations and focus groups showed that the design of the house workspace influenced the degree of management commitment and support and organisational communication that house leaders could provide staff. This is because the physical space of the house settings ensured teachers had greater visibility and connectedness with colleagues and house leaders. These findings relate to research that has shown that the physical environment of a school (e.g., appearance of classrooms, availability of resources and psychosocial safety and comfort) impacts the daily experiences and perceptions of teachers but also the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning (De Simone et al., 2016; Grannäs et al., 2025; Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Lorass, 2025). Thus, the intimate and dedicated teaching and learning spaces often associated with house systems (George & Lounsbury, 2000) might also play a key role in fostering positive perceptions of team and individual-level PSC.

Flexible teaching and learning spaces within house systems have been shown to enable collegiality and communication, as well as a sense of community, care, and support (Benade, 2017; George & Lounsbury, 2000). Participants appreciated having their colleagues and house leaders present in the same building and within sight, particularly when they required urgent support, and also because the physical layout facilitated their multiple daily interactions (as discussed in Section 5.2). Furthermore, PLCs within a dedicated physical space allowed teachers and leaders to get to know one another better and have more informal conversations, while providing the security needed to take risks and institute change (George & Lounsbury, 2000). The *physical space* subtheme highlights how the layout of house settings play an important role in enabling house leaders to operationalise practices and procedures that can facilitate management commitment and support, as well as organisational communication, especially for beginning teachers.

To conclude, the findings on house co-leadership and house workspace contribute to the PSC literature, particularly in relation to schools with comprehensive house systems. These findings extend studies that have investigated the role of line management in shaping and implementing policies, practices, and procedures within team settings (Fattori et al., 2022; Hernandez Grande et al., 2024; Krasniqi et al., 2019; Sjöblom et al., 2022) by explicitly examining the impact that a co-leadership arrangement has on team and individual-level PSC. Co-leadership is an underexplored area in the PSC literature, so this research advances knowledge by demonstrating that co-leadership has both positive and negative implications for perceptions of team and individual-level PSC within a comprehensive school house system.

Complementary co-leader skills and adequate skill overlap provide a wider range of expertise and support in complex, dynamic house settings than a sole-charge leader could in a department or faculty-structured school. Adequate co-leader skill overlap is particularly important for beginning teachers, as they require more frequent and comprehensive support. The effectiveness of the co-leadership partnership and its potential to have a favourable impact on perceptions of team and individual-level PSC may also depend on the quality of the relationship and the consistency with which organisational directives are shared with teachers. While the literature points to the importance of positive leader–employee relationships as a key resource (Amoadu et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2010), the present research also highlights how the dynamics of the co-leader relationship may either hinder or enable a positive PSC team setting. This finding indicates that greater emphasis should be placed on promoting high-quality, trusting co-leader relationships, as they can help teachers feel safe and reassured about approaching either leader, knowing their concerns will be heard and promptly addressed. Principals should evaluate each house leader’s skills when pairing leaders to ensure they have both complementary and adequate skill overlap and provide co-leaders with appropriate

training to understand how each leader's specific skills (e.g., curriculum, pedagogy, pastoral care) can support the psychological needs of individual teachers.

This research also demonstrates how specific contextual and organisational factors appear to influence the house workspace and subsequently shape perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. House collegiality, distinct microcultures, and flexible physical spaces can create conditions that facilitate the enactment of effective house-level interventions that promote teacher psychological H&S. These house settings may also enable the identification and prevention of psychosocial hazards, as they can provide greater opportunities for management commitment and support, organisational communication, and organisational participation to take effect.

7.3 Mātauranga Māori: Complementary and Supportive Indigenous Framework for Psychosocial Safety Climate

The second emergent finding of this research is that both mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and worldview) and PSC encompass reciprocation (“utu” in Māori; Haar, 2025) and mutually reinforcing relationships (Haar & Martin, 2022).³ In Māori culture, utu is commonly practised, and an organisation's positive PSC environment can enable the enactment of tikanga (cultural values). In turn, tikanga can reciprocate this organisational goodwill (positive PSC) through utu by embracing the principles and domains of the PSC framework. This relationship acknowledges the pivotal role of PSC as an organisational climate mechanism that supported the meaningful embedding of mātauranga Māori within the participating school's values, charter, and leadership framework (OD6, OD13, OD16), potentially leading to the successful

³ Consultation with Professor Jarrod Haar (Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Mahuta), Dean's Chair in Management and Māori Business at Massey University, ensured that I followed a culturally appropriate process in interpreting and applying relevant tikanga Māori.

enactment of relevant policies, practices, and procedures. This reciprocal relationship ensured that mātauranga Māori and individual tikanga (cultural values) support and promote PSC principles at the school. As noted by Potter et al. (2019), a positive PSC context can provide a foundation for the successful utilisation of resources, including, in this case, the appropriate interpretation and integration of mātauranga Māori into the school's policies, practices, and procedures.

7.3.1 Mātauranga Māori in Practice within a School Setting

Data from document analysis, participant observation, and focus groups revealed that mātauranga Māori can offer a complementary and supportive Indigenous framework for understanding and facilitating PSC in a school setting. Across the three focus groups, participants broadly agreed that mātauranga Māori contributed positively to the school's PSC. After showing participants the PSC visual aid (Appendix F), teacher participants made the following comments about mātauranga Māori:

TFGP6: "Management priority for teacher psychological health – yeah, a big part of mātauranga Māori. That groundedness and wellbeing are very important."

TFGP8: "But it's also that commitment to supporting our [teachers'] issues."

TFGP7: "It's ongoing."

Follow-up question: So, it's [mātauranga Māori] not just about the students?

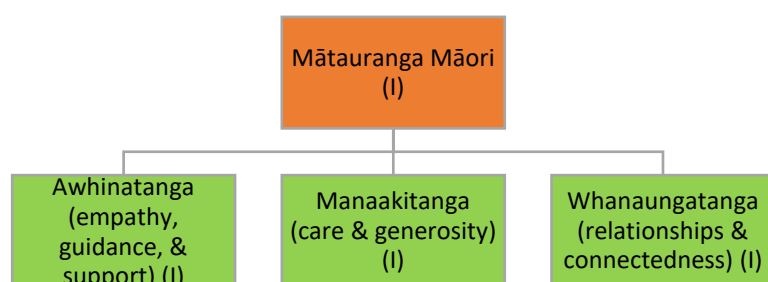
Group in unison: "No, no, no, no."

TFGP8: "In fact, we talked yesterday [in a meeting] about it having to start amongst us [school leaders and teachers] first. Because if we can't do it together [practise mātauranga Māori], how can it trickle down [to students]?"

Three inductive subthemes emerged from the inductive *mātauranga Māori* primary theme (as shown in Figure 7.3), each reflecting a tikanga that the school had adopted as a school

value, and which had a positive impact on PSC: *awhinatanga* (empathy, guidance, and support), *manaakitanga* (care and generosity), and *whanaungatanga* (relationships and connectedness). In addition, these tikanga were embedded in the school’s charter and leadership framework, which, in turn, informed policies, practices, and procedures related to teacher psychological H&S.

Figure 7.3 *Mātauranga Māori Primary Theme and Subthemes*



Awhinatanga (Empathy, Guidance, and Support). Analysis of the school charter, leadership framework, and school website identified awhinatanga as a key tikanga that shaped the school’s values, policies, practices, and procedures. Across these sources, awhinatanga is described as leaders guiding and supporting their staff, leading with empathy, and appreciating other people’s points of view (OD6, OD13, OD16). The documents reflect what participants underlined in focus groups: that awhinatanga fosters mutual respect between teachers and leaders so that teachers’ voices are heard, particularly in house settings. Regular conversations between teachers and leaders led to the sharing of ideas, collective decision-making, and the initiation of change. Therefore, the degree of respect between leaders and teachers favourably impacted how organisational communication and participation in H&S were practised, as leaders actively sought and prioritised teachers’ involvement. As TFGP4 pointed out: “It’s reciprocal. So it gives everyone an opportunity to speak, an opportunity to be heard and valued. And I think that within our house system, that is what’s reciprocal.” Awhinatanga is closely aligned with the *feeling valued* subtheme examined in Section 6.3 and may offer an additional

reason for leaders to ensure that teachers feel heard and valued in their roles. In addition, the quote highlights the importance of the school's house system's workspace for organisational communication and participation in H&S, as examined in Section 7.2.

Through the school's leadership framework, school leaders were guided by *awhinatanga* and *mātauranga Māori*, supporting their understanding of how *tikanga* could be integrated into policies, practices, and procedures related to teacher psychological H&S. The leadership framework was displayed in the school's staffroom and was also visible across the four houses as illustrative posters (OD7/PO). In addition, the "Professional Growth Cycle" model, one of the school's professional development frameworks, explicitly outlines how *awhinatanga* can support leaders in mentoring and guiding staff, as reflected in statements such as "leaders genuinely caring for others" (OD9). The model also emphasised the importance of fostering an inclusive and collaborative environment, which, as the quote below suggests, helped school leaders prioritise teachers' psychological H&S through informed, proactive decision-making:

I'm putting it [*mātauranga Māori*] at the forefront, and it is on par with the curriculum. If you look at that model that we've created about our [*tikanga*] values ... We've made that a strategic move to have it [*mātauranga Māori*] front and centre. Then that means that if we are going back to psychosocial safety and looking after staff, we use that as a reference. (SLFGP3)

Manaakitanga (Care and Generosity). Multiple participants emphasised that *manaakitanga* encourages leaders to take a genuine interest in staff welfare and to foster a caring, safe work environment. *Manaakitanga* is also about showing kindness by respecting one another. TFGP7 emphasised that school leaders must consistently demonstrate these behaviours: "It's almost like a set of expectations, really – about the way that we treat each other and interact. And it's from the top down." The *manaakitanga* subtheme is closely linked

to the *interpersonal skills* subtheme (Section 5.3), underscoring how possessing interpersonal skills enables school leaders to implement PSC principles. This subtheme is also distinct because school leaders were clearly informed that the responsibility for developing and practising relevant interpersonal skills that foster care and kindness starts with leadership.

The findings also suggest that manaakitanga can encourage leaders to exhibit greater kindness and care towards teachers. It is embedded in the school charter, so that leaders could adopt and incorporate this tikanga into daily policies, practices, and procedures that may enact and build PSC. For instance, statements relating to leader responsibilities and skills, such as “development of self-awareness” and “build[ing] capacity and self-efficacy”, are included in the “Manaakitanga” section of the school charter (OD13). Additionally, participants explained how manaakitanga can increase leaders’ awareness of teachers who were struggling with their work and facilitated appropriate interventions, reinforcing key PSC domains such as management commitment and support and management priority. One school leader explained how manaakitanga should be offered to teachers:

So, our biggest goal for this year is to embed mātauranga Māori. So, what does that look like? ... Showing care, knowing somebody’s having a rough time. We have spare leave for “Joe”, who’s a teacher under the pump – that’s manaakitanga – that’s showing kindness. (SLFGP2)

The inclusion of tikanga in the school’s charter and leadership framework not only shaped the school’s values but also provided leaders with greater clarity and confidence to implement policies, practices, and procedures that supported teachers’ psychological H&S. As the school charter is the key governing document, the embedded tikanga offered leaders a stronger mandate to actively practise manaakitanga, knowing that such actions are formally endorsed in daily practices and procedures. For instance, practising manaakitanga could involve

school leaders actively promoting and gauging teachers' psychological H&S during leadership team meetings or weekly PLC meetings, particularly when making decisions about teachers' job design and workload.

Whanaungatanga (Relationships and Connectedness). Participants emphasised that whanaungatanga was essential for strengthening relationships between school leaders and teachers. The findings indicate that these relationships and connections were important, particularly in house settings, where teachers and leaders worked closely together for extended periods. When whanaungatanga was reflected in school policies, practices, and procedures, leaders were reminded and prompted to prioritise strong relationships with staff. As one participant in the teacher focus group said: "The first thing that comes to mind is relationship building ... And it's not just them [school leaders] telling us to do that [with students] – they [leaders] actually do that with us" (TGFP8). This quote emphasises that when leaders applied whanaungatanga principles in their own practice, they were more likely to prioritise building meaningful and caring relationships with their staff rather than simply expecting teachers to practise whanaungatanga only with their students.

A similar conversation was held at the school leaders' focus group. One participant stressed that integrating whanaungatanga into their practice guided and strengthened their efforts to build meaningful relationships with teachers. Hence, whanaungatanga may have benefited school leaders who did not usually prioritise strong leader–employee relationships and connections, as it provided them with a greater purpose and direction for doing so. The leader highlighted:

One of the key tenets of mātauranga Māori is whanaungatanga – relationships ... For my own professional growth, because I'm very task-driven, looking at the Māori-

immersion model of leadership and by consciously making that effort to make relationships – it's so much easier to do so. (SLFGP3)

By implementing whanaungatanga into their practice, leaders signalled that interpersonal relationships were just as valued as professional ones. Thus, whanaungatanga may have favourable implications for teacher–leader interactions, as strong relationships with leaders may make teachers feel more comfortable raising issues that could be impacting their psychological H&S.

7.3.2 Discussion

This research provides new insight into how mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and worldview) can support and shape perceptions of PSC in a school workplace setting in three key ways. First, mātauranga Māori provides a distinct, relational, values-based framework that informs policy and practice and aids decision-making (Henry & Wolfgramm, 2018; Whaanga et al., 2017), making it complementary to the PSC framework. Secondly, it is centred on the notions of reciprocity, collectivity, mutual understanding, and leading by serving people (Haar, 2025; Wikitera, 2011), potentially facilitating the implementation of PSC. Thirdly, mātauranga Māori is embedded in the core values and leadership frameworks of many Aotearoa New Zealand schools (Royal, 2023), encouraging and enabling school leaders to integrate these values directly into their daily practices and procedures.

By embedding awhinatanga (empathy, guidance, and support), manaakitanga (care and generosity), and whanaungatanga (relationships and connectedness) in the participating school's charter and leadership framework, leaders were given a mandate to take an active and visible role in promoting these tikanga across their respective teams. Participants noted that awhinatanga and manaakitanga provided school leaders with greater agency to create a work environment that fostered teachers' voices and made them feel valued. Just as organisational

communication and participation in H&S enable employees to express their views and make suggestions, allowing them to actively participate in matters relating to employees' psychological H&S (McLinton, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2018; Zadow et al., 2017), *awhinatanga* and *manaakitanga* encouraged leaders to actively seek teachers' views and concerns during weekly PLC meetings, mentoring sessions, and daily interactions.

Integrating *tikanga* into school leadership frameworks is also instrumental in fostering leaders' awareness of teacher psychological H&S. Consistent with this, the PSC literature emphasises the importance of developing awareness of psychological H&S, as neglect in this area can undermine PSC by signalling an inadequate prioritisation of psychological wellbeing (Loh et al., 2018; Loh et al., 2021). Consequently, *awhinatanga* and *manaakitanga* may reinforce this awareness by guiding leaders to act with a moral purpose and uphold employee health-centred practices. Relatedly, high PSC environments reflect strong ethical and moral standards (Potter et al., 2019). Because *mātauranga Māori* promotes and embraces inclusive values (Mead, 2022), it may also play an important role in supporting and strengthening PSC.

Participants also highlighted that *manaakitanga* positively influenced leaders' willingness to provide appropriate support, particularly when teachers experienced heightened stress and heavy workloads. Given that leaders often have discretionary authority over how policies, practices, and procedures are implemented (Dormann et al., 2019; Idris et al., 2012), *tikanga* offers a practical cultural framework that guides the appropriate use of this discretion within and across the school's multiple teams. The PSC literature also highlights that leaders require sufficient political and organisational will to successfully implement effective interventions (Bailey et al., 2014; Tappin et al., 2023). Incorporating relevant *tikanga* into the school's leadership framework and regular practices and procedures provided an additional mechanism for developing and sustaining political and organisational will to protect and promote teachers' psychological H&S more consistently across teams.

Findings relating to *awhinatanga* and *manaakitanga* indicate their alignment with the management commitment and support domain of PSC. This domain emphasises proactive and timely responses to concerns about employees' H&S, which can help mitigate psychosocial hazards (Afsharian et al., 2019; Loh, Dollard, et al., 2024). Similarly, the values of *awhinatanga* and *manaakitanga* encouraged school leaders to regularly evaluate teachers' working conditions and empowered them to implement practices that safeguarded their wellbeing. This included regular check-ins with teachers to identify and address potential threats before they led to greater harm, in alignment with the theoretical principles of PSC.

Participants appreciated that *whanaungatanga* fostered meaningful relationships between leaders and teachers, particularly within the school's house system. This aligns with the literature in which *whanaungatanga* is a fundamental value and social process that fosters a sense of trust amongst staff (Komene et al., 2024). Importantly, its implementation enabled school leaders to build relational rather than transactional connections, as poor interpersonal relationships can contribute to psychosocial hazards that harm employee H&S (Berglund et al., 2024; S. Boyd et al., 2016; Leka & Jain, 2016). Because *mātauranga Māori* emphasises balancing social and commercial imperatives (Mika et al., 2022), it encouraged school leaders to prioritise meaningful relationships. Overall, these findings align with other studies of workplaces and employee experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand, whereby *Māori* cultural values have been shown to shape our understanding of how organisations operate and how employees, both *Māori* and non-*Māori*, experience these values (see Haar & Martin, 2022; Haar et al., 2019, 2021; Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014).

Beyond its direct alignment with PSC, *mātauranga Māori* also has other practical influences. Some leaders recognised that establishing relationships was not their strength, and *whanaungatanga*, as a source of social capital and resilience (Le Grice et al., 2017), could support these leaders in developing their relationship-building capabilities, with favourable

implications for PSC enactment. Leadership that promotes whanaungatanga not only facilitates staff involvement in organisational procedures and decision-making but also fosters positive employer–employee relationships (F. Harris et al., 2016; Pene et al., 2025). For this reason, some school leaders appreciated how whanaungatanga helped them develop and prioritise meaningful relationships with staff, while also supporting a positive PSC environment.

Whanaungatanga shapes personal bonds and relationships and provides a context in which people feel and know they belong (Haar & Martin, 2022). Such settings may lead to positive outcomes for leader capability in developing and sustaining relationships with teachers, particularly within a direct-report setting. These findings support the literature suggesting that, more generally, the principles of mātauranga Māori offer a more holistic approach to human development and support compared to the reductionist approach adopted by many traditional Western organisations (Haar et al., 2019; Hook et al., 2007). As such, genuine relationships with staff are likely to facilitate organisational participation, as whanaungatanga promotes collaboration, shared decision-making, and building connections (Ministry of Education, 2022a).

These emergent findings offer a unique perspective on how specific elements of Māori culture may shape PSC. Although multiple PSC studies have been conducted across various cultural and national contexts (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2018; Athanasios, 2024; Gan & Kee, 2024; Juutinen et al., 2023; Mansour & Tremblay, 2019; Yulita, Idris, Abdullah, 2022), PSC remains an organisational climate construct primarily developed for Western settings, and which, to the best of my knowledge, overlooks Indigenous perspectives. This omission is significant, as organisational climates are embedded within national contexts and cultures that shape safety strategies and human behaviour, and because the social or relational aspects of jobs are more prominent in certain cultures (Erez, 2010; Yorio et al., 2019).

Recognising that cultural contexts shape how individuals experience their work (Oldham & Hackman, 2010), the present research demonstrates how mātauranga Māori influences PSC within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Prior research suggests national culture forms part of the broader organisational context and may act as a precursor to PSC (McLinton, Loh, et al., 2018), and that Western management frameworks may not fully capture local or minority experiences and perspectives (R. Heffernan et al., 2023; Mika & O’Sullivan, 2014). This research shows how mātauranga Māori and relevant tikanga embedded in the school’s values and leadership framework can support and promote PSC principles, offering a culturally grounded and holistic approach aligned with PSC theory. While there is growing evidence of the influence of mātauranga Māori on employee and leader mental health and wellbeing in organisations throughout Aotearoa New Zealand (Haar et al., 2019; Mika & O’Sullivan, 2014; Roche et al., 2015; Spiller et al., 2020), its presence within a school workplace and its impact on PSC remains underexplored. This research addresses this gap, and its findings align with the wider literature, which suggests that mātauranga Māori offers a people-first approach to human development and support (Hook et al., 2007; Pene et al., 2025). This investigation extends this literature by showing, for the first time, how mātauranga Māori can actively shape teachers’ perceptions of PSC within a school workplace.

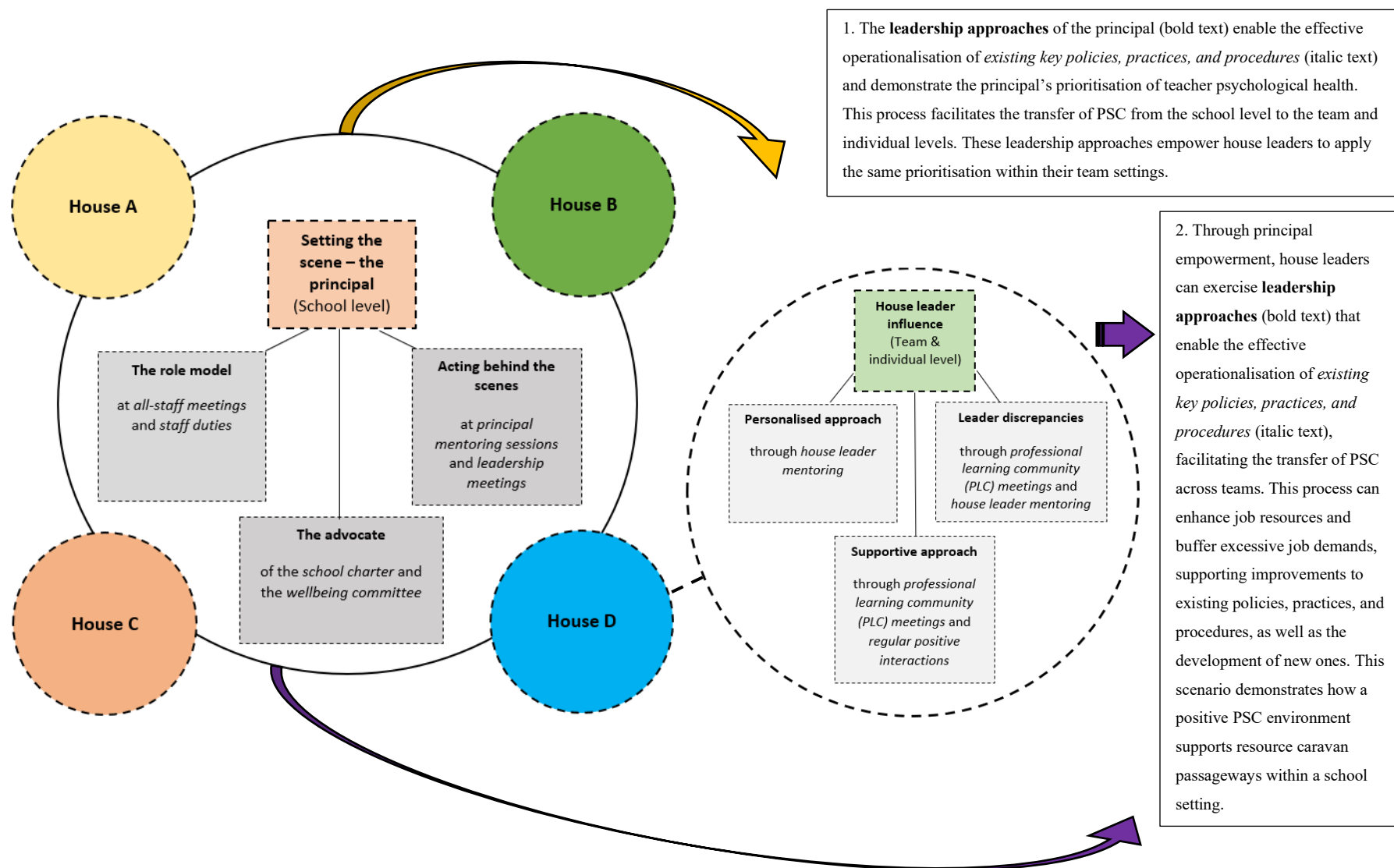
Findings from this research also demonstrate that mātauranga Māori makes a valuable contribution to leadership development in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. Prior studies outside of educational settings show that integrating Indigenous Māori knowledge into organisational frameworks can inform policy, processes, decision-making, and monitoring procedures (Haar et al., 2019; Hudson et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2020). Similarly, within the participating school, mātauranga Māori strengthened leadership capability via (1) fostering relational skills such as empathy, appreciation for staff, and genuine connection, and (2) by guiding the development of Indigenous-led policies and practices that prioritise psychological H&S. As a complementary,

relational values-focused framework, mātauranga Māori could enable meaningful strategies for building PSC. For instance, house leaders could begin and end meetings with a karakia (Māori blessing) to promote collective unity or adapt PLC meetings and teacher mentoring sessions to support teachers' psychological and emotional needs.

7.4 Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model

The first novel practical leadership tool developed by this research is the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4). Findings related to the operationalisation and transfer of PSC across school teams prompted a re-evaluation of the results presented in Section 5.2 and informed the development of this model, which captures the dual role of leadership (principal and line managers) in shaping perceptions of school, team, and individual-level PSC. The larger circle on the left of the figure represents the principal's sphere of influence through the *setting the scene* primary theme, emphasising the principal's foundational role in championing school-level PSC. As the primary role model and advocate for PSC, the principal actively supports teachers' psychological H&S through both visible and behind-the-scenes leadership approaches, enabling the operationalisation of existing key policies, practices, and procedures (in italics) that facilitate the transfer of school-level PSC across the school's four houses (teams).

Figure 7.4 Multilevel Model of Policies, Practices, and Procedures



The yellow arrow exemplifies what multiple participants described as a “trickle-down effect”, highlighting the principal’s prioritisation of teacher psychological H&S and the empowering of house leaders (line managers) to promote a positive PSC environment within their teams. The four multicoloured circles on the perimeter of the larger circle represent the school’s four houses. This shows how individual houses (structural units) and affiliated teams (functional work groups) are intrinsically connected to the school’s policies, practices, and procedures (e.g., the school charter), despite being semi-autonomously led. The four smaller circles are represented by the circle on the right-hand side of the model, which reflects the house leaders’ sphere of influence within house settings. It highlights that house leaders’ personalised and supportive approaches to leadership, as well as leader discrepancies, may either facilitate or hinder the operationalisation and transfer of PSC at the team and individual levels. The dotted-line perimeter of the house system reflects its semi-autonomous nature and indicates that house leaders have significant autonomy within their respective houses. This semi-autonomous structure explains why PSC strength and its operationalisation appeared to vary across houses, as it allows house leaders considerable discretion in how school-wide policies and procedures, such as mentoring and PLC meetings, are interpreted and implemented within team settings.

The two purple arrows illustrate how the operationalisation of policies, practices, and procedures through a positive PSC setting at both the school and house levels can support a resource caravan passageway scenario, in which job resources, as noted by Hobfoll (2014), reinforce one another and build collective strength. The conservation of resources (COR) theory posits that resources do not exist in isolation; rather, they travel in interconnected networks, benefiting both individuals and organisations (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The literature shows that PSC may create a workplace environment that facilitates access to resource caravan passageways, linking employees to resources that enable them to receive support, cope with stressors, and gain resources (McLinton et al., 2023). In the current research, this process is

reflected in the extent to which operationalised policies or procedures may support and advance the development of a new or existing resource at either the school or house level. For example, when the principal or house leaders prioritised teacher psychological H&S through mentoring and PLC meetings, this often led to the creation of additional resources, such as an updated student behaviour framework or an initiative to encourage greater student engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings examined in Section 5.2, together with the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4), provide novel, contextual insights into how PSC is operationalised and transferred across different levels within a school setting. In contrast to quantitative literature in educational settings, which has predominantly focused on organisational and individual-level PSC (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Garrick et al., 2014; Visu et al., 2025; Winwood & Kramer, 2020; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris & Abdullah, 2022), the present research sheds light on how the principal champions PSC and empowers house leaders to operationalise it through specific leadership approaches and existing key policies, practices, and procedures within house settings.

Understanding how PSC is transferred from the school level to the team level is important, both theoretically and practically, as it provides insight into the dual roles of principals and line managers in putting school-specific policies, practices, and procedures into action. When the principal actively endorses PSC and operationalises key policies, practices, and procedures, and house leaders subsequently do the same, this enables the transfer of PSC across multiple teams within the school, which benefits individual teachers. These findings align with research in other sectors, which emphasises that line management is an essential mechanism for effectively promoting PSC at the team and individual levels (Fattori et al., 2022; Loh et al., 2021). Within the educational context, this research makes a distinct contribution by showing that team and individual-level PSC may be strengthened when school line managers deliberately operationalise existing key policies, practices, and procedures through routine

leadership approaches that prioritise teacher psychological H&S. Accordingly, leaders can create optimal conditions for job resources to be available and buffer the adverse impacts of job demands.

This research clearly demonstrates PSC as a critical upstream organisational resource and an antecedent to the broader psychosocial work environment experienced by employees, consistent with earlier literature (Afsharian et al., 2018; Idris et al., 2014). Understanding how existing contextually specific policies, practices, and procedures contribute to job resources and mitigate the negative impacts of job demands provides greater guidance for PSC operationalisation, enabling its transfer across teams and individual teachers. These findings also provide valuable insights into school leaders' capabilities regarding teacher psychological H&S by identifying how the development of specific leadership approaches clarifies and improves consistency across different line managers in facilitating and transferring PSC across multiple teams.

7.5 Leader Competence–PSC Framework

The second novel practical leadership tool developed by this research is the Leader Competence–PSC Framework (see Figure 7.5). Findings presented in Section 5.3 on exercising leadership competence to enable PSC implementation informed the development of this tool. The framework illustrates how the three broad leadership competencies (exemplary leadership, navigating complexity, and the multiskilled leader) examined in Section 5.3 can facilitate the emergence of features and phenomena (associated subthemes) that can enable PSC implementation in an educational context. The arrows indicate impact, while the numbers located in the upper quadrants correspond to the numbers in the lower quadrants, located directly below. The features and phenomena of each competency are then linked with the four domains of the PSC framework.

Figure 7.5 Leader Competence–PSC Framework

Exemplary leadership	Navigating complexity	The Multiskilled leader
Key features, leadership practices and phenomena that shape perceptions of leader competence   		
1. Establishing a trusting environment in the house and/or in professional learning communities (PLCs) 2. ‘Walking the talk’ by demonstrating credibility through effective teaching and learning practices 3. Being easily accessible (‘open-door’) during teaching hours and visible in teaching spaces	1. Handling complex pastoral issues while understanding the broader social and economic external pressures through regular consultation with H&S and union representatives 2. Addressing increasing (student) misbehaviour that impacts teaching and learning in teacher-leader mentoring sessions 3. Responding to growing pedagogical pressures by developing an understanding of challenges related to student learning, with a particular focus on regular engagement with beginning teachers.	1. Possessing interpersonal skills, such as communication and empathy, enables school leaders to support teachers in daily teaching and learning activities and student pastoral care 2. Solving problems proactively (e.g., H&S, beginning teacher challenges, staff conflict) by addressing concerns raised in meetings, PLCs, teacher surveys, and focus groups 3. Sharing teaching and learning expertise (e.g., classroom management, pastoral, assessment and curriculum) with teachers in professional development programmes and teacher-leader mentoring sessions
Supporting specific PSC domains   		
1. Staff feel safe to express concerns and suggestions, which may strengthen perceptions of leader support, and enable opportunities for: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Participation in H&S activities and policy</i> • <i>Organisational communication</i> 2. Understanding the regular challenges that teachers experience (e.g., the impact that lengthy administrative tasks have on teacher workload) enables leaders to develop policies, practices and procedures that address job demands, which can facilitate: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Organisational communication</i> 3. Promotes leader visibility and open communication, which may positively impact perceptions of: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Participation in H&S activities and policy</i> • <i>Organisational communication</i>	1. Providing beginning teachers and staff who have a higher ratio of students requiring greater pastoral care (e.g. mental health challenges) with additional leader support, which may facilitate: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Management priority</i> 2. Establishing clear and targeted policies and procedures (e.g. behavioural frameworks) to assist teachers in managing classroom behaviour can foster positive perceptions of: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Management priority</i> 3. Co-developing learning strategies for individual students with higher learning needs may positively impact perceptions of: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Management priority</i> • <i>Participation in H&S activities and policy</i>	1. Teachers are more likely to receive regular and efficient organisational communication, especially in PLC and all-staff meetings, which may support: • <i>Management priority</i> • <i>Participation in H&S activities and policy</i> 2. Anticipating issues, listening to concerns and providing early leader support before the teacher experiences a psychological impact may facilitate: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Management priority</i> • <i>Participation in H&S activities and policy</i> • <i>Organisational communication</i> 3. Leaders can provide open dialogue, timely pedagogical support through effective and targeted policies, practices and procedures that can mitigate psychosocial hazards and create opportunities for: • <i>Management commitment and support</i> • <i>Participation in H&S activities and policy</i> • <i>Organisational communication</i>

The Leader Competence–PSC Framework is presented as a practical leadership tool for schools seeking to evaluate and improve PSC. For example, schools could utilise the framework for training, guiding principals and other leaders on which areas of competence require specific focus and are likely to have positive implications for PSC. Although schools usually have existing leadership frameworks, they often lack a clear focus on teachers’ psychological H&S, unless mātauranga Māori is embedded within them. This framework could also provide school leaders with relevant guidance on how leadership competence can enable the implementation of PSC, which specifically protects teachers’ psychological H&S.

The Leader Competence–PSC Framework can be employed as a planning and development tool. It highlights the interchange between specific school leader competencies and PSC domains, enabling schools to identify gaps in leadership capability and inform the design of professional learning programmes. For example, training could focus on strategies and interventions for managing pastoral and behavioural issues, as well as on practices that enhance exemplary leadership behaviours, such as building trust and accessibility. Additionally, it could support mentoring and coaching by providing clear examples of skills and strategies that leaders can apply in everyday school settings. Embedding this framework in induction programmes and ongoing appraisal systems could also help schools create a culture in which teacher psychological H&S is systematically addressed and prioritised. The integration of the framework into possible future research is discussed in Section 8.5.

The Leader Competence–PSC Framework and the earlier findings in Section 5.3 provide rich contextual insights into specific leadership competencies that can enable PSC implementation in an educational setting. This approach differs from most existing research in two key ways. First, it offers a deep and context-focused interpretation of leadership in relation to PSC. Second, while the literature has shed light on how leadership styles influence PSC (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Mirza et al., 2023; Winwood & Kramer,

2020), the present research demonstrates that PSC implementation is impactful when leaders possess the specific competencies that can lead to practical action and subsequently meaningful PSC outcomes.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored two emergent findings and presented two practical school leadership tools developed through this research. The first emergent finding is related to the house system and highlights that the house co-leadership structure and the house workspace can shape both positive and negative perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. This study identifies the importance of co-leaders possessing complementary skills, investing in quality relationships, and ensuring consistent directives as co-leadership factors that appear to positively impact perceptions of PSC. Additionally, a collegial environment, a positive microculture, and effective use of physical spaces provide practical opportunities for staff and leaders to design and exercise policies, practices, and procedures that promote a positive PSC environment at the team and individual levels.

The second emergent finding identifies mātauranga Māori as a complementary and supportive Indigenous framework for PSC. When mātauranga Māori was fully embraced and appropriately implemented, leaders had the mandate and agency to integrate awhinatanga, manaakitanga, and whanaungatanga into policies, practices, and procedures that enhanced teacher voice, participation in H&S activities, and leaders' awareness of teachers' psychological H&S. A culturally responsive approach provides a values and relationship-based framework that incorporates an Indigenous Māori perspective, helping leaders promote PSC within a bicultural national setting. Furthermore, mātauranga Māori can enhance leadership capabilities by fostering meaningful relationships and cultivating a safe, supportive work environment for teachers.

The findings of this research suggest that mātauranga Māori contributes to shaping PSC. However, the data indicate that the impact of mātauranga Māori on PSC is not unidirectional, and may rely on an initially positive PSC context. In other words, mātauranga Māori may have positive implications for PSC, but its impact appears greatest within a positive PSC environment. This indicates a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing relationship in which PSC both shapes and is shaped by mātauranga Māori.

The first practical leadership tool developed in this research visually maps how PSC is transferred across school teams, through the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4). This model demonstrates how principals and house leaders employ specific leadership approaches that facilitate the effective operationalisation of existing key policies, practices, and procedures to transfer PSC across and within school teams. Unlike previous studies in educational settings that have focused primarily on school and individual-level PSC and the principal's influence, the present investigation suggests that the principal and line managers play a dual role in strengthening job resources and buffering job demands within a school setting.

The second practical leadership tool developed in this research is the Leader Competence–PSC Framework (see Figure 7.5), which demonstrates how specific leadership competencies can enable PSC implementation. The framework provides actionable suggestions and practical steps to improve school leaders' competence and enact PSC in their daily leadership practice. Finally, the Leader Competence–PSC Framework is designed to complement and strengthen existing school leadership frameworks and leader capability.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Chapter Overview

This final chapter begins by outlining the gaps in the literature addressed by this research, followed by a summary of the primary findings of the case study. It then presents the contributions of the research and discusses its practical implications for school leaders and relevant government agencies. Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of the case study's limitations and its recommendations for future research.

8.2 Research Gaps and Primary Findings

This research identified three gaps in the literature that call for an investigation in the context of this case study of a secondary school in Aotearoa New Zealand. The first gap concerned how principals and line management operationalise *existing* key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of psychosocial safety climate (PSC) across school teams. The second research gap related to the role of leadership competence in enabling school leaders to implement PSC. Finally, the third gap was concerned with how PSC impacts a broader range of common teacher wellbeing indicators, namely teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy. Therefore, this thesis aimed to gain a better understanding of how school leadership contributes to PSC and, in turn, how PSC impacts teacher wellbeing. These gaps in the literature led to the development of two research questions, which were addressed by the case study conducted for this research.

8.2.1 Research Question 1 – How does school leadership impact PSC?

This question was addressed through two objectives. The first objective explored how leadership (the principal and line managers) operationalised existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitated the transfer of PSC across school teams. The findings indicate

that the principal played a pivotal role in shaping school-level PSC by acting behind the scenes, role modelling, and actively advocating for teachers' psychological health and safety (H&S) through regular engagement with house leaders and staff. As line managers, house leaders were empowered by the principal to adopt supportive and personalised leadership approaches through mentoring, daily house interactions, and in professional learning communities, which encouraged teachers to engage in organisational participation and organisational communication with their leaders and colleagues. Effectively operationalising these policies, practices, and procedures supported the development of job resources and helped buffer job demands. Importantly, this process highlights the influential role of school line managers in protecting teachers' psychological H&S and facilitating the transfer of school-level PSC to team and individual levels.

The second objective of this research question concerned how leadership competence enabled school leaders to implement PSC by investigating how specific leadership skills, knowledge, and behaviours supported its implementation. This research identifies leadership competence as a central mechanism linking leadership capabilities to organisational systems that support teacher psychological H&S and promote core PSC principles. The findings suggest that exemplary leadership (trust, credibility, accessibility), navigating complexity (student pastoral issues, misbehaviour, pedagogical pressures), and the multiskilled leader (interpersonal, problem-solving, teaching and learning) are essential competencies for the effective implementation of PSC.

8.2.2 Research Question 2 – How does PSC help address common challenges in teaching and enable conditions that support teacher wellbeing?

The findings indicate that a positive PSC environment enabled teachers to voice concerns about job demands, such as student misbehaviour and excessive workloads, which in turn helped mitigate psychosocial hazards, reduce teacher stress, and enhance job satisfaction

and self-efficacy. A positive PSC setting also appeared to foster supportive working conditions that promoted job crafting and skill discretion, enabled decision-making authority, and provided greater access to professional development, which may, in turn, enhance job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy while reducing teacher stress. Additionally, this research emphasises the need for consistent, proactive implementation of PSC and strong problem-solving skills to address staff conflict effectively across all houses (teams) within a school setting.

8.3 Contributions

This thesis makes five significant contributions to the literature spanning the theoretical, operational, contextual, practical, and cultural dimensions.

8.3.1 Theoretical Contribution: Leadership Competence as a Complementary Lens for Understanding PSC Implementation in Schools

The first theoretical contribution is the conceptualisation of leadership competence as a complementary lens for understanding how leadership can implement PSC within an educational setting. The relationship between leadership competence and PSC highlights school leaders' specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours that data identified as critical for implementing PSC. This research advances understanding and clarifies how actionable school leader competencies, such as handling pastoral issues, addressing misbehaviour, and managing pedagogical pressures, can enhance teachers' job resources, reduce job demands, and potentially improve perceptions of PSC. The Leader Competence–PSC Framework (see Figure 7.5) illustrates how these competencies are applied in leaders' everyday tasks and responsibilities and are linked to individual PSC domains. While a number of quantitative studies have demonstrated that leadership is a critical factor in shaping PSC (e.g., Athanasios, 2024; Laloo et al., 2025; Loh et al., 2021; Mirza et al., 2023; Winwood & Kramer, 2020), most

of this work has focused on the influence of different leadership styles. In contrast, the present research is part of a limited body of literature that offers an alternative and qualitatively informed perspective on how leadership shapes PSC beyond leadership styles.

8.3.2 Operational Contribution: The Dual Role of Principal and Line Managers in Operationalising and Transferring PSC across School Teams

The second contribution of this research is its demonstration of how specific leadership approaches enable principals and line managers to operationalise existing key policies, practices, and procedures that facilitate the transfer of PSC across school teams. This process is illustrated in the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (see Figure 7.4) and underscores the critical and dual role of principals and line managers in promoting teacher psychological health and wellbeing by co-constructing policies and practices with staff who proactively mitigate psychosocial hazards and strengthen perceptions of PSC at the school, team, and individual levels. Because line manager discretion contributes to PSC variability amongst teams (Afsharian et al., 2018; Krasniqi et al., 2019), the model and its accompanying discussion can guide leader job design by embedding school-specific policies and procedures that foster a positive, more consistent PSC environment across multiple teams within a school. This contribution is distinct from related studies within educational settings (Afsharian et al., 2025; Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Dollard & Zadow, 2018; Yulita et al., 2017; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), which have primarily investigated how PSC-informed interventions and diary entries affect PSC at the school and individual levels. Conversely, the present research explored how the operationalisation of existing key policies, practices, and procedures through principal and line management leadership approaches may enable the transfer of PSC across school teams, generating valuable insights into team and individual-level PSC in a school setting.

8.3.3 Contextual Contribution: Extension of PSC Literature within an Educational Setting

This research extends the literature within school settings by demonstrating how a positive PSC environment may address teaching-specific challenges and create conditions that support teacher wellbeing. Its qualitative approach advances understanding of how PSC functions as an upstream organisational resource that shapes key teacher wellbeing indicators, including teacher stress, job satisfaction, teacher commitment, and teacher self-efficacy. In doing so, it provides a more nuanced account of PSC by showing how it operates through organisational policies, practices, and job design that influence teachers' experiences and behaviours. For example, while the literature indicates that PSC is negatively associated with student behavioural issues (Afsharian et al., 2025; Viseu et al., 2025), the present research extends this knowledge by demonstrating that embedding PSC principles into student behavioural policies and procedures signals that teachers' psychological H&S is a priority. Thus, PSC-informed student behavioural policies appear to reduce teacher stress and build self-efficacy in managing complex behavioural situations, even in the immediate absence of leaders and colleagues. In an educational context, this is critical, especially for beginning teachers, as student behavioural issues remain a persistent stressor and because teachers are often isolated from other adults.

This research is amongst the first qualitative investigations to link PSC with job satisfaction and self-efficacy in an educational workplace, by showing how a positive PSC environment shapes supportive teaching and learning conditions that positively influence teacher wellbeing. Despite the constraints of a prescribed secondary school curriculum, PSC-related policies and procedures can facilitate teachers' access to critical job resources, such as job crafting, skill discretion, decision-making authority and professional development. These working conditions enable teachers to feel safe taking informed risks and making decisions by

implementing differentiated and innovative practices in course planning and assessment design, as they are more likely to receive leadership and collegial support.

8.3.4 Practical Contribution: The House System and Team and Individual-level PSC

This contribution is practical in nature and emerged from the findings. The research found that the school's comprehensive house system was a critical contextual factor that impacted PSC and offered novel insights into how school organisational and house leadership structures shaped teachers' experiences and perceptions of team and individual-level PSC. Two central insights emerged from the house system's relationship with PSC: (1) co-leadership and (2) the house workspace. By analysing these contextual working conditions, this research deepens the understanding of PSC development as a social process that evolves from relationships, interactions, and practices within the unique confines of a house setting. These findings also suggest that co-leaders should receive appropriate training to maximise their collective capacity to support teachers' psychological needs, and be paired with a leader who has complementary skills and adequate skill overlap to contribute positively to team and individual-level PSC.

8.3.5 Cultural Contribution: Integration of an Indigenous Māori Perspective

This research extends PSC theory beyond Western epistemologies by demonstrating its affinity with mātauranga Māori, a relational, value-based framework that complements and supports PSC principles in an Aotearoa New Zealand school setting. Through the integration of tikanga into the participating school's charter and leadership framework, mātauranga Māori provided an Indigenous Māori perspective on teacher psychological health and wellbeing. Therefore, mātauranga Māori establishes a powerful and ethical mandate for leaders to make meaningful, collaborative improvements to support teachers and address psychosocial hazards commonly associated with the role. This contribution advances the PSC literature by

demonstrating that an Indigenous perspective offers novel insights and cultural value into PSC development in an Aotearoa New Zealand school context, and reinforces the importance of culturally responsive approaches to teachers' psychological health and wellbeing. As a complementary and supportive framework, mātauranga Māori may strengthen PSC by embedding Māori values that can foster relational trust, collective responsibility, and holistic wellbeing within a school workplace. The findings suggest a potentially reciprocal, mutually reinforcing relationship between mātauranga Māori and PSC, contributing to Loh et al.'s (2021) call for greater exploration of the potential drivers of PSC.

8.4 Practical Implications

8.4.1 School Leaders

The role of school leaders are complex and varied, which contributes to their high workloads (Arnold et al., 2023), making it challenging for leaders to prioritise teachers' psychological H&S. The Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model (Figure 7.4) can assist principals in understanding and evaluating how specific policies, practices, and procedures they delegate to line management for operationalisation may contribute to the successful transfer of PSC across school teams. The proposed model also offers meaningful, practical guidance for designing school leader roles and strengthening leadership capabilities to promote a positive PSC workplace. The model is easily adaptable to different organisational structures and provides leaders with a clear, actionable foundation for co-constructing targeted and timely PSC-enhancing measures that benefit teams and individual teachers.

The Leader Competence–PSC Framework (Figure 7.5) can inform principals and other school leaders about specific competencies that can enable PSC implementation. As a guiding tool for planning and leadership development, the framework offers contextual insights into how leadership competencies may be used in everyday practice to strengthen the four domains

of the PSC construct. Effectively applying both the Multilevel Policies, Practices, and Procedures Model and Leader Competence–PSC Framework could promote the development of additional job resources to buffer job demands, such as ongoing student misbehaviour, job intensification, and high workloads.

More generally, this research extends the earlier PSC literature on schools (e.g., Afsharian et al., 2025; Athanasios, 2024; Winwood & Kramer, 2020; Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah, 2022), showing that PSC can serve as a benchmark and a practical tool for evaluating and enabling psychosocial safety and positive teacher wellbeing outcomes. For instance, the PSC framework could be an effective recruitment and retention strategy, particularly in hard-to-staff schools, as it sends a strong signal to prospective and currently employed teachers that psychological H&S is a priority. Furthermore, the leadership competencies examined in this research could support the selection and recruitment process for leadership roles by helping hiring panels identify candidates who demonstrate proficiency in these competencies and are more likely to implement PSC.

8.4.2 Government Agencies and Policymakers

Teacher wellbeing resources on the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Teaching Council websites remain relatively limited and primarily focus on individual-level approaches, whereas White (2020) argued that they should be combined with organisational-level approaches for longer-term benefits. The present research offers more contextual insights at the school, team, and individual levels that may help to address issues at their source and contribute positively to teachers' psychological health and wellbeing. Promoting the PSC framework on the MoE and Teaching Council websites may encourage schools to adopt it. More broadly, this research provides recent empirical evidence to guide resourcing and funding decisions, such as securing additional leadership training and support staff. Additionally, it highlights key

contemporary pressures that schools and staff face, which could inform collective bargaining and policy development on teachers' working conditions.

8.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with all research, this investigation has some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. While case studies provide rich detail (Yin, 2009), this is offset by their limited generalisability. Ultimately, this case study's findings and conclusions reflect the psychosocial work conditions experienced at the participating school. While generalisation was not the intention of this research, the focus on a single school may limit the transferability of findings to other settings. Conducting a comparative study across schools with varied organisational structures and different policies, practices, and procedures would deepen understanding of the leadership mechanisms that support or hinder PSC and, in turn, the impact of PSC on teacher wellbeing. Nevertheless, this research provides analytical generalisability (Yin et al., 2018) in relation to relevant PSC and teacher wellbeing theory. Additionally, by providing a rich contextual description, this research enables readers to assess the applicability of the findings to comparable educational contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The potential transferability of this research's findings is supported by the literature, which highlights that teachers across diverse educational systems experience similar challenges and pressures (Hofmann et al., 2022; Hulme et al., 2025; McLean et al., 2024), indicating that the conclusions may be applicable in contexts with comparable conditions.

This research did not examine other potentially important factors, such as other teacher wellbeing indicators, school size, location, socioeconomic level, and school type, in relation to leadership, PSC and teacher wellbeing. Finally, this research took place in a school that, based on conversations with participants and through my own observations, generally appeared to have a positive PSC environment. Future research in schools with lower PSC levels would

provide important complementary insights, offering a fuller picture of how PSC can be strengthened across diverse educational settings.

As another recommendation for future research, it would be interesting to conduct rigorous longitudinal investigations using the Leader Competence–PSC Framework (Figure 7.5) to examine how shifts in leadership capability influence PSC over time. For example, quantitative research could assess the relationship between the levels of the identified competencies that school leaders possess and the PSC of their work group. Additionally, qualitative research could extend the analytical generalisability of the present findings by being conducted across a wide range of educational contexts. More generally, applying the framework in contexts beyond education could yield valuable insights.

Understanding how mātauranga Māori supports and facilitates PSC is critical because it reveals how specific components of an Indigenous culture shape organisational safety climates, including PSC. These findings emphasise the need to recognise the unique intricacies and rich nuances of Indigenous values and their potential to contribute positively to PSC, particularly in local settings where they are implemented. There is also potential for further research and valuable insights within Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g., comparing Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori) employees' perceptions; see Haar & Brougham, 2016), as well as in other nations with notable Indigenous populations (e.g., Australia, Canada, and the United States). Future research could also examine how the relationship between mātauranga Māori and PSC varies across organisational contexts, including within the school system (e.g., primary vs secondary schools) and in other non-educational settings. In addition, longitudinal research designs may provide deeper insight into how the integration of mātauranga Māori influences PSC over time and whether these effects are sustained.

This investigation was conducted in a school setting organised around a comprehensive house system with a co-leadership arrangement. A similar investigation involving schools organised under different leadership and organisational structures could, for instance, provide additional insight into the impact of line management on PSC at the team and individual levels within subject departments. Schools organised by departments usually have taller organisational structures and different physical layouts. Most heads of department in Aotearoa New Zealand report to a deputy principal, so this additional reporting line could impact the principal's ability to transfer PSC to a team of deputy principals and, in turn, their respective heads of department.

Since principals influence how they allocate tasks and responsibilities to other school leaders who report to them (Goldring et al., 2021), investigating how school-level PSC explicitly contributes to the job design of other school leaders (e.g., line managers) might provide further insight into PSC transfer and team and individual-level PSC. Such research could also shed light on how school leaders can be better equipped and supported by top leadership (i.e. principals) through targeted resources and a more manageable workload, ultimately enhancing their ability to support teachers' psychological health and wellbeing. In this way, school leaders' job design can be intentionally aligned with a positive PSC environment rather than being treated as an afterthought.

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Appendices

Appendix A: House Floor Plan

Figure A1

Ground floor

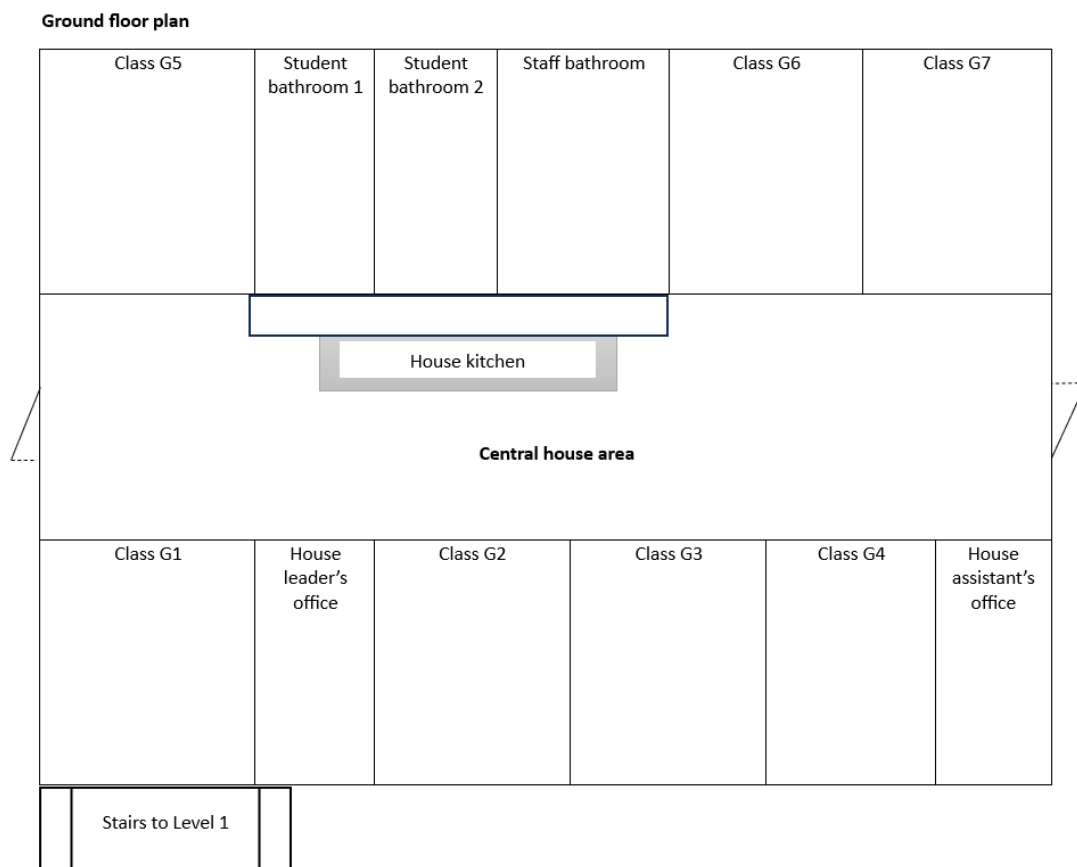
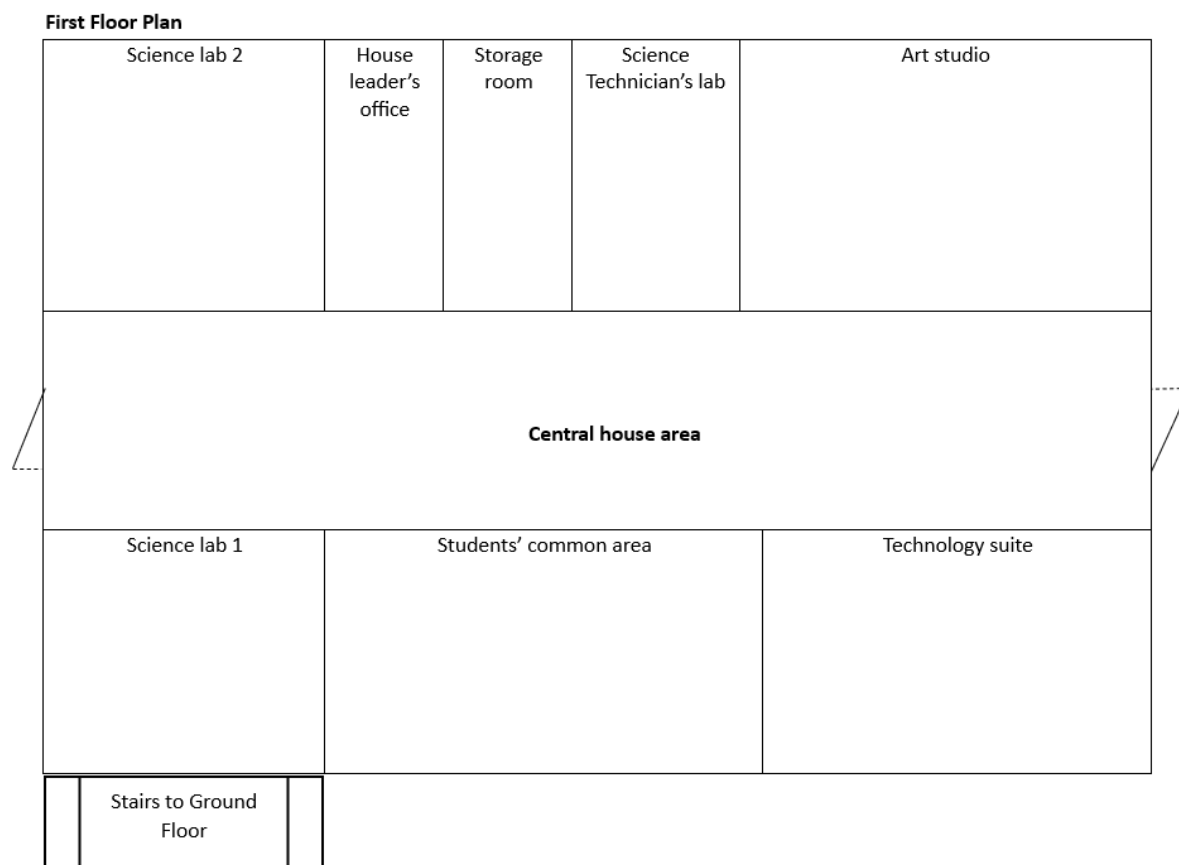


Figure A2

First floor



Appendix B: Summary of Key PSC Studies Conducted Within Primary and/or Secondary Settings

Source	Setting and methodology	Key findings
Afsharian et al. (2025)	A five-year survey study involving 105 permanent staff in a workplace intervention consisting of a continuous intervention loop. Based on survey results, participants implemented a school network-led intervention, which was evaluated through a post-intervention survey.	This investigation underscores PSC as an essential theoretical and practical framework for promoting psychological health through management's commitment to stress prevention. Findings suggest that improving PSC may reduce emotional exhaustion, sustain engagement, and mitigate risks in high-stress workplaces such as education, supporting the need for regular feedback-driven interventions. In practice, PSC may cultivate transparent communication, employee involvement, and job resources, while regular PSC assessments, stress-reduction initiatives, and monitoring of mental health are important for continuous improvement. The authors suggest that managers empower staff to co-design interventions, such as collegial networks, safe spaces, and the prioritisation of psychological health, which may further strengthen organisational resilience and foster a supportive culture.
Athanasios (2024)	Quantitative cross-sectional study involving 742 teachers from 60 Greek secondary schools.	Highlights the interplay between leadership (servant and teacher leadership) and PSC. Servant leadership provides a supportive environment for teacher leadership to thrive. Implementing servant leadership programmes and initiatives may enhance PSC in schools and could be highly beneficial.

Bourgoin Boucher et al. (2024)	Longitudinal quantitative Canadian study during the COVID-19 pandemic involving 70 education professionals and 69 healthcare professionals. A comparative study of education and healthcare professionals. The role of participants or the teaching level was not specified.	PSC is significantly higher among education professionals than healthcare professionals. PSC is related to job demands and resources, which are linked to emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Recognition is a factor that impacts the PSC-work engagement relationship. Practical implications include promoting recognition as a powerful tool for stimulating teacher engagement. The authors emphasise the importance of management practices that support workers' psychological demands and social support. This includes managers and employees meeting to review job descriptions and ensure they accurately reflect the role and are well-balanced. Initiating communities of practice to enable employees to grow their competencies and to mitigate the effects of psychological demands on their wellbeing.
Boström et al. (2020)	A Swedish cross-sectional quantitative study involving 478 primary school teachers was conducted across 20 schools.	Teachers reported relatively good health despite experiencing high stress, high work pace, emotional demands, and low influence, within a low PSC setting. Teachers also reported substantial opportunities for professional development and high work engagement despite low PSC. Findings suggest an association between low PSC and the high-stress environment teachers experience.
Casely- Hayford et al. (2025)	A longitudinal Swedish study examining the relationship between psychosocial safety climate and psychosocial work factors and teacher turnover at 12 and 24-month intervals. The study involved 440 teachers (T1) and 406 teachers (T2) across 14 primary schools.	Findings indicate that differences in teacher turnover between schools were primarily explained by municipal factors and labour market dynamics, rather than by variations in schools' PSC or psychosocial work conditions.

Dollard and Bakker (2010)	Australian longitudinal quantitative study involving 288 (Time 1) participants and 209 (Time 2) participants employed across 19 different primary, secondary, and special schools.	This study found that PSC occurs prior to working conditions. PSC has a top-down impact on lower-level work entities, which can predict changes in skill discretion, work pressure, and emotional demands over time. School PSC impacts individual demands and psychological health. PSC also predicts job demands, psychological health problems (psychological distress and emotional exhaustion) and employee engagement. However, PSC did not moderate the effect of job resources on psychological health, nor was it positively associated with decision authority. The practical implications of this study are to build PSC through senior management involvement and commitment, and through the enactment of relevant policies, practices, and procedures.
Dollard and Karasek (2010)	This Australian longitudinal study involved stress-prevention interventions designed to build PSC in 18 primary and secondary schools. Intervention groups participated in workshops to identify psychosocial risks and to develop and implement action plans targeting work- and organisational-related risks.	High levels of PSC were required for individuals to notice the benefits of their decision influence in reducing emotional exhaustion and psychological distress over time. Conversely, when PSC was low, the positive effects of high control were nullified. The intervention group experienced a significant reduction in psychological distress over 12 months. However, the moderation of job demands by PSC was not supported.
Dollard and Zadow (2018)	Australian mixed-methods study, including organisational stress intervention workshops, pre-workshop interviews (participants across health and education workers), post-workshop interviews (1 participant from the education workforce), and focus groups with workshop facilitators. A post-workshop, two-wave survey included 301 (time 1) and 214 (time 2) participants from educational workplaces in the control and	The control group reported one PSC difference: that concerns were listened to within the organisation. Results from the capacity-building workshop indicated that the intervention groups had no impact on psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, physical health, engagement, job satisfaction, or intention to resign. Practical implications for schools include emphasising the key elements of best practice, promoting top management involvement and commitment, and ensuring that a participatory approach involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process facilitates

	intervention groups, respectively. Education workers included leaders and teachers from primary, secondary and special schools.	initiative ownership. Further, the study utilises a variety of quantitative and qualitative tools to identify stress factors and evaluate local contexts, for the development of workshop action plans and prevention strategies.
Garrick et al. (2014)	An Australian quantitative study that collected diary data at three points (915 data points) from 61 teachers and principals working in 15 primary and secondary schools.	Teachers working in higher PSC settings reported fewer negative impacts of job demands, lower fatigue, and increased restorative outcomes of daily recovery. Conversely, teachers working in lower PSC settings reported increased adverse effects of job demands and fatigue and reduced benefits of recovery. The study emphasises the importance of management in promoting strong PSC as a facilitator of meaningful change.
Nasharudin and Rui (2024)	A Malaysian cross-sectional study that examined the effect of PSC on work–family conflict (WFC) and psychological health among working couples in which at least one partner was a secondary school teacher.	Strong management concern about teachers’ health can help reduce cognitive and physical demands and WFC. When PSC reduces the impact of work demands on WFC, individuals are better able to fulfil their roles, which, in turn, can reduce spouses’ depressive symptoms. However, the study also found that high PSC did not buffer the effect of high emotional demand on WFC amongst female participants. Additionally, PSC reduces tension between work and family responsibilities and is directly associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms in spouses. The study recommends that management identify PSC elements that may reduce specific job demands in the workplace.
Viseu et al. (2025)	A Portuguese study involving 1481 school teachers, consisting of six self-report questionnaires. Teachers throughout Portugal participated in this research.	PSC was positively associated with PsyCap (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience). PSC was also positively associated with work engagement. PsyCap partially mediated the relationship between PSC and job

		satisfaction. PSC promoted desirable indicators of teacher wellbeing, such as job satisfaction, and mitigated the detrimental effects of stress.
Wiklund (2023) (Qualitative)	A Swedish qualitative master's thesis explored how six principals promote a good psychosocial safety climate in their respective urban schools	The principals involved actively prioritised measures to create a favourable psychosocial safety climate. This was achieved by prioritising, communicating, engaging, and involving employees in everyday dialogue. The study highlighted the value of effective communication as a key factor in addressing psychosocial work-environment risks.
Winwood and Kramer (2020)	A South African study that included 664 primary and secondary school teachers examined how the principal, as a Caring School Leader (CSL), builds and maintains high PSC values.	This study found a very high correlation between CSL and PSC across all assessed constructs (e.g., bullying, morale, fatigue, affective commitment, and absenteeism). Increasing PSC awareness, particularly among school principals, may be a way forward for mitigating the suboptimal state of teachers' psychological health. A focus on selecting and training principals on the crucial significance of presenting themselves as a 'Caring Leader' is recommended.
Yulita et al. (2017)	A Malaysian cross-sectional study involving 109 secondary school teachers and principals who completed 545 diary entries across 23 schools. Espoused PSC and enacted managerial support (principal's future actions related to PSC) were measured at the school level.	There is a significant positive link between espoused PSC (saying) and enacted managerial support (doing). The espoused PSC is significantly positively associated with work engagement, which is mediated by enacted managerial support. There was no significant link between espoused PSC and daily perceptions of emotional exhaustion, nor was there one between enacted managerial support and emotional exhaustion. However, high enacted managerial support moderates the relationship between espoused PSC and daily emotional exhaustion (negative and significant). There was

		no significant interaction between enacted managerial support and espoused PSC on work engagement. When managers endorse the organisation's commitment through enacted managerial support, employees' perceptions of safety, support, and work increase, while emotional exhaustion decreases. The authors recommend that leaders recognise that employee psychological health should be reinforced through repeated actions, such as providing regular emotional and supervisory support.
Yulita, Idris, & Abdullah (2022)	A Malaysian cross-sectional multilevel quantitative study of 178 teachers who completed 534 diaries over two weeks, examining psychological detachment and relaxation for off-job recovery and to reduce emotional exhaustion.	Job demands are significantly and positively related to daily emotional exhaustion. PSC significantly moderates the interaction of psychological detachment and job demands. Results also show that PSC significantly moderates the interaction of relaxation and job demands in predicting emotional exhaustion. PSC is essential in strengthening the moderating role of recovery on the work stressor-strain process. Strong PSC conditions should provide effective policies, procedures, and practices across PSC's four domains that support teacher detachment and relaxation on non-workdays. Implications for practice include ensuring that teachers have adequate recovery time from work and that they can detach and relax.

Appendix C: Key Studies Examining PSC's Relationship with Wellbeing Indicators (Stress, Job Satisfaction, Commitment, Self-efficacy)

Author(s) (Quantitative unless stated)	Sector(s)/role(s) and location(s) of study (bold text indicates educational setting)	Wellbeing indicator(s) relevant to the present research that were examined	Relationship between PSC and the examined indicators of wellbeing
Boström et al. (2020)	Primary school teachers (Sweden)	Teacher stress	High stress is associated with low PSC settings
Farr-Wharton et al. (2023)	Emergency services personnel (Australia)	Stress	High PSC is associated with lower stress, whereas low PSC is associated with higher stress.
Havermans et al. (2017)	Healthcare employees (Netherlands)	Stress	Low PSC is significantly associated with higher stress.
Juutinen et al. (2023)	Higher education employees (Finland)	Stress	PSC is negatively related to stress
Winwood and Kramer (2020)	Primary and secondary teachers (South Africa)	Teacher stress	PSC is negatively related to teacher stress
Zinsser and Zinsser (2016) (Qualitative)	Early childhood teachers (United States)	Stress	High PSC is associated with a less stressful work environment, whereas low PSC is associated with higher stress

Author(s) (Quantitative unless stated)	Sector(s)/role(s) and location(s) of study (bold text indicates educational setting)	Wellbeing indicator(s) relevant to the present research that were examined	Relationship between PSC and the examined indicators of wellbeing
Abdi et al. (2023)	Nursing (Iran)	Job satisfaction	PSC has a significant indirect effect on job satisfaction
Dollard et al. (2024)	Varied occupations (Australia)	Job satisfaction	PSC is positively associated with job satisfaction
Dollard and Zadow (2018) (Mixed-methods)	Primary, secondary, and special school teachers and other human services (Australia)	Teacher job satisfaction	PSC-focused interventions have no significant effect on job satisfaction
Fattori et al. (2022)	Healthcare (Italy)	Job satisfaction	PSC is positively related to job satisfaction
Gan and Kee (2024)	University academics (Malaysia)	Job satisfaction	PSC is positively and significantly associated with job satisfaction
Geisler et al. (2019)	Social work (Sweden)	Job satisfaction Commitment	PSC is positively related to job satisfaction PSC is not significantly related to commitment.
Lintanga and Rathakrishnan (2024)	Local government employees (Malaysia)	Job satisfaction	Organisational participation is positively associated with job satisfaction, whereas organisational communication is negatively associated with job satisfaction; management priority and management commitment are not significantly related to job satisfaction.

Author(s) (Quantitative unless stated)	Sector(s)/role(s) and location(s) of study (bold text indicates educational setting)	Wellbeing indicator(s) relevant to the present research that were examined	Relationship between PSC and the examined indicators of wellbeing
Plimmer et al. (2022)	Various roles in the public sector (Aotearoa New Zealand)	Job satisfaction	PSC is indirectly associated with job satisfaction via workplace bullying
Xie et al. (2024)	Construction work (China)	Job satisfaction	PSC has a positive and significant association with job satisfaction
Gan and Kee (2021)	University academics (Malaysia)	Commitment	PSC has a significant indirect effect on commitment.
Hu et al. (2022)	Healthcare professionals (China)	Commitment	PSC has a significant indirect effect on commitment
Winwood and Kramer (2020)	Primary and secondary teachers (South Africa)	Teacher Commitment	PSC has a positive association with commitment.
Brunetto et al. (2021)	Healthcare professionals (Australia)	Psychological capital (PsyCap): self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience)	PSC has a significant and positive relationship with PsyCap
Dollard, Winwood, & Tuckey (2019)	Police officers (Australia)	Professional efficacy	PSC has a positive association with professional efficacy

Author(s) (Quantitative unless stated)	Sector(s)/role(s) and location(s) of study (bold text indicates educational setting)	Wellbeing indicator(s) relevant to the present research that were examined	Relationship between PSC and the examined indicators of wellbeing
Maqsood et al. (2023)	Lecturers, industrial and IT employees (Pakistan)	Self-efficacy	PSC has a positive and significant relationship with self-efficacy
Viseu et al. (2025)	School teachers (Portugal)	PsyCap (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience)	PSC has a positive association with psychological capital (PsyCap), which was associated with lower stress and higher job satisfaction.

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



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Applying the PSC framework to teacher wellbeing – a case study analysis

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

This research is undertaken by Stefano Cataloni, who is a PhD candidate at Massey University's School of Management. He is a fully registered former school teacher who is interested in the impact that organisational climate within schools has on teacher wellbeing. In addition to his PhD studies, Stefano is also a senior tutor within the School of Management, teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses in leadership and international business.

Purpose of Research

Teacher wellbeing scholars continue to stress the implications that rising non-teaching tasks and responsibilities have on the wellbeing of school teachers in Aotearoa. Interpretations of teacher wellbeing vary, but Bricheno et al. (2009) define it as teachers' feelings, emotions and perceptions of their own working lives. Extant literature identifies teacher job satisfaction, self-efficacy, job commitment, and stress as commonly cited factors relating to teacher wellbeing. These factors have implications on the physical and psychological health of teachers, staff retention, as well as the academic achievement and social development of their learners.

This project aims to investigate teacher wellbeing through a psychosocial safety climate (PSC) lens. PSC is an organisational climate construct that measures the working conditions which impact on the psychological wellbeing of employees within an organisation, a team or unit. Characterising the PSC framework are its four domains: (1) management commitment and support, (2) management priority, (3) organisational participation, and (4) organisational communication (Dollard et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2010). The degree in which an organisation and its leadership prioritise these four domains in their practice, procedures and policy, is likely to reflect the PSC and the job resources that employees are likely to experience and access in their role (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Given leadership's influential role in this construct, this project will firstly examine the extent to which school leader roles and their leadership competencies have implications on a school's PSC. This will be followed by an investigation as to what degree PSC is related to teacher wellbeing within an Aotearoa school setting. The data collected from this project will form the basis for a PhD thesis and for potential papers, presentations and other work related to leadership competencies, PSC and teacher wellbeing.

Project Description

[REDACTED] has been selected as a case study to carry out this project. This research will incorporate the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) framework as a means to provide novel insights into teacher wellbeing. Data related to school leader roles and leadership competencies, along with the school's PSC and teacher wellbeing will be collected and interpreted for analysis. Three types of data will be collected from three different types of participants. Participants who choose to be included in this research will complete a priming tool, closely followed by an individual interview, and be part of a focus group session set at a later date. Eligible participants include teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders, which will ensure that there is a range of perspectives from within the school.

The priming tool and interview (Stage one) will include and discuss:

- o Leader commitment and support
- o Leader priority
- o Organisational participation
- o Organisational communication
- o Leader roles and competencies in relation to PSC
- o Teacher wellbeing at [REDACTED]

Te Kūnenga

School of Management

<http://www.massey.ac.nz/school-management>

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The subsequent focus group session (Stage two) will discuss:

- PSC at [REDACTED] and in previous roles
- Teacher wellbeing at PSC and in previous roles
- PSC in relation to teacher wellbeing

Invitation

You have been invited to participate in this research project because of your role (i.e. a teacher or leader) at [REDACTED]. Your experiences, knowledge and perspectives of leader roles, leadership competencies, PSC and teacher wellbeing gained in your current and previous roles in schools, would benefit this project significantly. Participating in this study will include completing a priming tool, followed closely by an interview, and taking part in a subsequent focus group session. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact the researcher: s.cataloni@massey.ac.nz or Ph. [REDACTED].

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Participation in this study is voluntary and is at the discretion of the individual participant. To be included in this study, participants must either be a teacher or leader, currently employed at [REDACTED]. After taking part in the priming tool and interview, each participant will be involved in a focus group, consisting of 3 to 5 participants, which matches their role within the school (e.g. teachers participate in the teacher focus group session). Ideally, the varied roles (teachers and senior leaders) of participants will provide this research with different perspectives relating to the study's themes and phenomena. Each participant will receive a koha at the end of the data collection process. In addition, light refreshments will be provided at the focus group sessions.

Participants will be asked to discuss matters relating to their physical and mental wellbeing, which may cause discomfort to some respondents. Strategies to address these circumstances and concerns are outlined procedures section below.

Project Procedures

Participants who are interested in taking part in the study will be asked to provide their contact details to the researcher or to make contact with the researcher. Each participant will complete consent forms (i.e. consents for priming tool/interview and for the focus group session) before formally participating in the study. Ideally, each participant will be involved in stages one and two of the following data collection process:

STAGE ONE – Completion of priming tool exercise, followed closely by an individual interview (approximate duration – 55 mins.)

The priming tool assists participants' understanding of the study's primary themes as well as providing the researcher with quantitative data relating to the participant demographics and their perceptions of leadership competencies, PSC and teacher wellbeing at [REDACTED]. The purpose of the individual interviews will be to generate qualitative data on leader roles and their leadership competencies in relation to the school's PSC. The two sets of data will also be used to verify the accuracy of data.

STAGE TWO – Focus group sessions (approximate duration – 55 mins.)

Stage two involves 3 to 5 participants being allocated to focus groups according to their role (i.e. teacher and senior leader). The aim of these sessions is to collect data that may show a potential link between the school's PSC and teacher wellbeing.

Participants will have the option to edit their responses following the completion of their individual interview and focus group session.

The researcher does not have any conflict of financial interest by undertaking this project.

Participants who experience psychological distress as a result of participating in this project, may decide to withdraw or be advised to withdraw at any stage of the data collection process. Moreover, these participants will be advised by the researcher to access free professional counselling services: Ph. 1737, or contact the Depression Helpline - 0800 111 757.

Data Management

Data collected from participants will be used for the completion of this study's PhD thesis in analysing and exploring potential links between the school's psychosocial safety climate (PSC) and teacher wellbeing. This data may also be used for potential future publications and at presentations relating to leadership competencies, PSC and teacher wellbeing. All raw data taken from the priming tool, individual interview and focus group sessions will be transcribed and stored in a password-secured file on the University's OneDrive system, which only the researcher has access to. Any hard copy data will be shredded once it has been placed in the password-secured digital file. All recordings will take place on the researcher's laptop using encrypted software. Names, details and quotes relating to the participant will be redacted and paraphrased to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the individual's identity. All electronic data (recordings included) will be disposed five years post-thesis publication. Participants of this project will be able to access a summary of findings once it is deposited in the Massey University library. A digital link will also be provided to participants on request.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period and up to two weeks following the date of your interview;
- request that any data collected from the priming tool and interview is deleted up to two weeks following the date of your interview session, should you decide to withdraw from the study
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview and focus group.
- review your individual interview transcript up to two weeks following the date of your interview, upon request.

Project Contacts

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Please feel free to contact the researcher or his supervisors if you have any questions about the project.

Committee Approval Statement

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 86015, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz. "

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Appendix E: Document Analysis

Document/s analysed	Accessible to: Public/staff Code	Summary of content/findings
Annual financial reports (2019 – 2023)	Public OD1	Five annual financial documents were sighted. Produced annually, each financial report outlines the school's revenue and expenses. Only the 2019 and 2023 reports showed that: • Staff development expenditure decreased by 68% from 2019 to 2020 (potentially due to disruptions caused by COVID-19) • Staff development expenditure increased by 87% from 2020 to 2023 (again, potentially due to the COVID-19 low base figure)
Education Review Office report of participating school (2016)	Public OD2	This report is completed every three to five years by the Education Review Office, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is no mention of teacher wellbeing, the 2016 report does note: • School-wide coaching and mentoring programmes by school leaders for staff • School's initiatives to build leaders' capacity • Teachers are provided with a range of opportunities to experience and develop their own leadership practice • Distributed leadership is evident, and leadership roles and responsibilities are complementary and collaborative • Effective governance and shared leadership are demonstrated throughout the school
House collaborative plan 2023 (multiple)	Public and staff OD3	The house collaborative plan illustrates how teachers from different courses and subject areas collaborate. While this document does not focus on leadership, PSC, or teacher wellbeing, it demonstrates how teachers collaborate within their house system.
House contextual planning document 2023 (multiple terms)	Staff OD4	This collaborative document is for house staff planning. It lists the topics and themes each house focuses on throughout the school term. Like the 'house collaboration plan', it demonstrates how different courses and subjects contextualise teaching and learning throughout a school term.
Implementation plan 2024	Public	Document developed by the Board of Trustees and the school's leadership team, which focuses on teaching and learning, and quality leadership. The document outlines:

Document/s analysed	Accessible to: Public/staff Code	Summary of content/findings
	OD5	• The importance of maintaining robust systems and processes • The importance of providing an environment in which staff of high quality are attracted to the school, can grow and feel valued • Teachers being able to develop their knowledge and skills through the school's coaching and mentoring programme • That professional development opportunities are a priority
Leadership framework 2023	Staff OD6	This document provides a comprehensive overview of the school's leadership functions and includes: • Leading others (high performing teams, developing staff, engagement and collaboration) • Incorporating Māori tikanga (values) such as genuinely caring for others, high trust, self-awareness, staff wellbeing and growth • Demonstrating <i>manaakitanga</i> (lead with moral purpose) • Demonstrating <i>awhinatanga</i> (guide and support) • Development of mentoring skills • Links to other Ministry of Education leadership-focused websites
Mātauranga Māori posters	Staff OD7	Large posters located in each house system and the school staffroom, which illustrate: • Key tikanga (school values) • How tikanga can be integrated into teaching and learning • How specific tikanga can be incorporated into leadership practices • How tikanga can be used for staff growth and development
Mentoring session schedule 2023	Staff OD8	The mentoring session schedule identifies areas for the mentor and mentee to focus on and documents the session. It is used in conjunction with the 'Professional growth focus' document. It also includes 'action steps' and 'reflective practice' sections.

Document/s analysed	Accessible to: Public/staff Code	Summary of content/findings
Professional growth cycle model 2023	Staff OD9	This model illustrates staff's growth cycle as part of their role in the school by incorporating: • Awhinatanga by nurturing self, others and relationships to strengthen community and to create a caring environment • Ako to both teach and learn • Maintain professional relationships that are reciprocal and collaborative with all members of the school community • Leadership to support teachers and foster an inclusive environment • Teachers can discuss and receive feedback on their practice
Professional growth cycle reflection tool 2023	Staff OD10	Teachers complete this reflective tool as part of their teacher registration attestation. While it predominantly focuses on teachers providing evidence relating to their pedagogical practice, it also includes: • Collaborative and supportive teaching practices • Mentoring with their respective line manager (house leader/s)
Professional growth focus area 2023	Staff OD11	Teachers complete this document as part of their yearly professional inquiry, which, like the professional growth reflection tool, focuses primarily on teachers' pedagogical and student pastoral practices. It also includes: • Discussing teachers' needs with their mentor • Understanding how the inquiry relates to teachers' professional growth • Opportunity to voice concerns and seek appropriate support • Identifying strategies to improve teacher practice
School Board minutes (28 meetings sighted – only relevant minutes included)	Public OD12	The school board meets 9 times a year to discuss strategic, financial, pedagogical and operational matters. A total of 28 documents were sighted. Agenda items relating to PSC and teacher wellbeing were uncommon, but included: • The board is supportive of the wellbeing funding and the refreshment leave policy

Document/s analysed	Accessible to: Public/staff Code	Summary of content/findings
		• Behaviour management policy and procedure reviewed • Principal's acknowledgement of the heavy strain that COVID-19 had placed on teachers • Health and safety motions were moved at each meeting, but with no details of what each motion entailed • An item relating to the correct procedure for handling employment matters • Due to a shortage of substitute teachers, students may be rostered home
School charter (2019–2024)	Public OD13	Human resources and staff wellbeing and health and safety sections outline how the school is a “good employer” and outline the likely outcomes below: • Positive school culture focusing on staff morale, retention, and attracting high-quality staff • Building staff capacity and ensuring the professional learning needs and growth of staff are met, and that opportunities for positions of responsibility are made available • Leadership development for effective and safe coaching and mentoring of staff • A variety of communication systems in place so that staff are well informed and consulted • Emotional wellbeing of staff is promoted through wellbeing programmes • Processes and procedures in place that promote resilience and support • A staff wellbeing budget for programmes, which includes strategies to increase retention of staff
School newsletters	Public OD14	The school publishes a school newsletter each term, which contains: • Staff achievements by the principal • Staff changes by the principal • Staff acknowledgements by the principal (e.g., during the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns)
School's policies and procedures 2023	Public OD15	This comprehensive document explains staff wellbeing, H&S, and employment policy. It includes: • Links to and acknowledgement of the Health and Safety at Work Act and H&S responsibilities for schools • A dedicated section to the health of workers as part of its ‘primary duty of care’ and how it relates to the Health and Safety at Work Act

Document/s analysed	Accessible to: Public/staff Code	Summary of content/findings
		• Links to and/or outline for staff induction, harassment and bullying, leave, professional development, flexible working arrangements, managing stress in the workplace and working alone • The stress in the workplace link which emphasises that the school and staff have a joint responsibility for stress management and provides advice on how each party can address employee stress • Links to WorkSafe New Zealand sites such as ‘supporting mentally healthy work’ https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/laws-and-regulations/operational-policy-framework/worksafe-positions/supporting-mentally-healthy-work/ and the Mental Health Foundation https://mentalhealth.org.nz/workplaces • The school’s behaviour management guidelines • Responsibilities of the school as a good employer (Education and Training Act 2020), supporting a fair and proper treatment of staff members, and building relationships based on good faith
School website 2023	Public OD16	The school website is generally accessible to the general community and includes the following pages: • Acknowledgement of local iwi (Māori tribe) • Relevant tikanga (school values) • Organisational structure of school leadership • The school’s house system • Teachers’ professional development programmes • Provides links to ERO report and School Charter (see above)
Staff wellbeing stand	Staff OD17	Located in the school’s staffroom, this stand is visible to all staff and displays: • Past and upcoming key wellbeing and social activities and events • Mindfulness suggestions and strategies for staff • Recognition of staff achievements • Staff suggestion and feedback boxes for what the school is ‘doing well’ and ‘how it can improve’

Document/s analysed	Accessible to: Public/staff Code	Summary of content/findings
Wellbeing activity calendar 2023	Staff OD18	The monthly wellbeing calendar is a shared and live document for staff to suggest/view: • Upcoming events and activities (e.g., physical and social) that staff can participate in • Events and activities that are held both onsite and offsite • Weekly wellbeing themes and events • Staff ideas and suggestions for events and activities that promote wellbeing and inclusion
Wellbeing survey 2022	Staff OD19	Each year, staff can participate in the wellbeing survey, which is organised by the wellbeing committee and seeks staff's perspectives relating to: • Overall wellbeing • Workload • Current role • Leadership and mentoring • Teaching and learning • Areas for improvement

Appendix F: PSC Familiarisation Task Visual Aid



Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview Participant Consent Form



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Project Title: Applying the PSC framework to shed light on teacher wellbeing

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW - INDIVIDUAL

I have read, and I understand (or have had read to me in my first language) the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period and up to two weeks following the date of my interview. Withdrawal within this timeframe will ensure that your data taken from the interview is deleted. I understand that I can review my individual interview transcript up to two weeks following the date of the interview, upon request.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
3. I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix H: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Applying the PSC framework to teacher wellbeing

Date: _____ Time & Place: _____

Interviewer: Stefano Cataloni Interviewee: _____

Pre-interview Information & Procedures

- Introduction of interviewer and outline of interview format
- Study's purpose and application
- Consent form and approval (signature, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, recording)
- Treatment of data (data management/storage, security and disposal)
- Interviewee questions or concerns

Key interview Questions

PART 1: Leader competence & leader roles

Q1. Content:

Why do you think is it important for teachers to have competent leaders?

Probe:

Q2. Content:

How competent do you think your school leaders are at this school?

Probe:

/10

Q3. Content:

How might a leader's role make a difference to PSC?

Probe:

PART 2: And now on to the PSC

Q4. Content: Do you think leadership prioritises teacher psychological health (mental wellbeing) and is proactive in addressing such issues as much as other ?

Probe:

Q5. Content: Do you think leaders do a good job in communicating psychological health and safety issues (mental, emotional and social health) to employees?

Probes:

Q6. Content: Do you think teachers are given opportunities to play a significant role in shaping the policies and practices of psychological safety and health matters?

Probes:

/10

PART 3: Teacher well-being

Q7. Content: Do you feel connected and valued at this school?

Probe:

Q8. Content: How satisfied are you in your role?

Probe:

Q9. Content: Do you feel as though you make a positive impact on student learning outcomes?

Probe:

/10

PART 4: Concluding Questions – Thank you. Now, I'd just like to pull everything we've discussed so far by looking at how all these ideas and themes might be connected...

Q10. Concluding Question: Do you have any views on how competent leaders may contribute to making your school a psychologically healthy and safe workplace?

Probe:

Q11. Concluding Question:

I'm also interested in your views as to whether you think there's a link between a psychologically healthy and safe workplace and your wellbeing as a teacher?

Probe:

Concluding question: Is there anything else you would like to tell me regarding today's topic?

Appendix I: Example of Participant Observation Field Notes

Relief Day 3

I relieved in two different houses (A&B) today – mostly in the social sciences, with a period in science. This was another neat and tidy house, much like it had been during the previous three periods I'd worked there. I was quickly assisted by the house leader in setting up the school's device on the classroom projector. Her office door was open for most of the time I was there, so she was easily accessible, as she was located diagonally across (within viewing sight) from the classroom I was relieving in. The house leader appeared very helpful and was mindful that I had relieved in her house only once before. As a reliever, and I can also imagine as a beginner teacher, I find additional support welcoming, and it made me feel at ease. Her office is centrally located within the house and within 30 metres of any other classroom on the ground floor. There are plenty of teachers present in the public areas, and some students also work in these shared spaces as these areas become busier as period one nears. This means teachers are constantly working alongside other staff, even when working within their single-celled classroom (with doors and a combination of glass and regular walls that separate the individual classrooms). The semi-open plan design of the central house area and the use of glass as class dividers mean that I can see almost everyone on the ground floor, especially when working in the common spaces (surrounded by six classrooms). Upstairs, however, didn't seem as busy when I worked there last time, and for this reason, beginner teachers are usually placed on the ground floor, so there is immediate additional support, which makes staff feel less isolated from other staff. However, during lunch the other day, a staff member said they prefer working upstairs, as there seemed to be less noise overall – perhaps better suited to a more experienced staff member who doesn't mind working more independently. Perhaps, some staff prefer not requiring a constant leadership presence, while others do.

The day's schedule is clearly displayed in the central house for students to view. The school's values (tikanga Māori) are proudly visible in classrooms and central house spaces. What do these mean in teachers' day-to-day practice, or, more pertinently, do they also apply to teachers' psychological health and safety? The two house leaders are seated in the central house area and appear to be in a meeting. House leaders seem to work very closely together, which is appropriate given their level of responsibility for the house they lead. Their presence is reassuring for many teachers should they require immediate support, especially at the beginning of the day. Multiple teachers mentioned in the interviews that they appreciated their leaders' presence, and as a reliever I did too. I'm not sure whether I'd enjoy it as much if I worked here permanently, as a more experienced teacher, however. For me, it could be tantamount to significant managerial oversight, or at least I might perceive it that way, while also encroaching on my own professional autonomy. Maybe this is what the other teacher meant by preferring to work upstairs, because there's a lot happening on the ground floor.

Directly across the central house area from my classroom is the house assistant's office, where the house assistant is currently supporting a group of students. Their presence also appears to reassure staff, as before and between lessons they are actively involved in keeping the house tidy and guiding students into class. Teachers appear to appreciate this support, as house assistants get to know the students who need additional learning or behavioural support well. House assistants generally develop a very good rapport with these students, and the day with them might start by issuing one of the school's Chromebooks for the day or signing them in for arriving to school late. The house assistant I spoke to said they are regularly in touch with students' families regarding pastoral and schooling matters, and therefore these relationships also alleviate teachers' workloads by taking some of the administrative work off teachers. They are also often on hand to deal with behavioural issues in classes, which again may take some of the stress from teachers, as the student involved is removed from the class.

Period 1 Social Sciences (House B) – This was a very large class of 32 students, which made things a little more complex and challenging. This was especially the case when trying to offer one-to-one

help to students, which, as a social science teacher, I was able to do. However, having a large class size made it that little bit harder to offer individual support while simultaneously monitoring student behaviour. Fortunately for me, this class was generally well-behaved and on task for the most part. They were seated in groups of between 4 and 9 students. The groups with the larger number of students were usually more easily distracted and more likely to require my close presence.

The principal entered the classroom around halfway through the period to briefly check in with students. While I didn't speak to the principal on this occasion, interview data described the effort the principal makes to connect with staff in these impromptu class visits. The principal's presence made a difference to some students' behaviour, including those who were a bit distracted. This reminded me of my time as a teacher, when a school leader's presence in the classroom always had an immediate impact on student behaviour. Once they'd leave the room, the noise levels would increase and engagement would sometimes drop. This makes me wonder whether leaders who have been in their role for a long time encounter serious behavioural issues when they teach, since students are aware of their status in the school and therefore behave accordingly.

Some students completed all the required work, while the rest completed minimal work on most of the set tasks. Their behaviour certainly caught my attention throughout the lesson, and it required quite a lot of effort on my part to keep them engaged and on task. But the reality was that, as a reliever, I had limited clout. If I had been a beginning I could imagine it may have caused me stress if that's how they behaved each lesson. In retrospect, I could have been firmer and possibly spoken to the house leader about their lack of work, but at the time I thought what they produced might have been a standard level of work for this group of students.

Period 2 (House B) – The teacher set the work, and students were working on an inequality topic. It was a good, focused cohort. It was a much smaller class – with 25 students – and only 23 were present. This made a significant difference compared to the previous lesson, where I had to circulate around the classroom to monitor throughout the period. They were generally on-task and the fewer students in the class made it much easier to monitor behaviour and mitigate potential off-tasking.

15 minutes into the lesson, the house leader came to check in and see how things were going. After giving it some thought, I do wonder whether this visit by the house leader was because I was a reliever or because I was conducting participant observation. Initially, I was curious as to whether that house leader would have visited my class had I been a regular reliever or a permanent member of that house, which I was neither. However, I had interviewed five people from this house, all of whom spoke positively about their house leaders' supportive leadership. Therefore, the house leader's behaviour may have been genuine and well-intentioned, given that I was a relatively new reliever at the school.

Interval – staff meeting in staffroom – There was a big turnout today, with most seats taken. Most staff sat in their usual spots amongst their closest colleagues, reminiscent of most school staffrooms I've been to. However, there was a very good mix of staff and leadership scattered throughout the staffroom. You spot a leader or two seated amongst a group of eight teachers, for example. Hierarchy doesn't seem to extend into the staffroom. This was mentioned in some interviews, as was the general friendliness and welcoming nature of the staffroom climate. I too noticed this. And while I didn't get to sit with everyone, the overall feel was a pleasant, welcoming environment in which I could probably have sat with every group of staff and generally felt included.

There is an announcement in the staffroom about the newly created Mātauranga Māori poster, introduced by the Wellbeing Committee, for staff. It explains, through images and text, how Mātauranga Māori and the Māori worldview can be incorporated into teacher practice within individual houses in teaching and learning, especially for the benefit of the school's Māori students, but not only. The poster also notes that staff can benefit from integrating Mātauranga Māori into their

teaching practice. However, I also wonder how Mātauranga Māori could relate to teachers' psychological health and safety.

The wellbeing lead continued talking to staff to appreciate the different levels of contribution individuals have made to the wellbeing committee, such as organising events and supporting colleagues in various ways, including teaching and learning. The wellbeing committee team also briefly spoke about the upcoming activities they deliver, such as the Thursday bootcamp and lunchtime walks around the school campus. The wellbeing committee was hosting a dinner event at a local restaurant that evening. These events often attract 70% of staff, so they are quite well subscribed.

The H&S representative also reminded staff about reporting faulty equipment to leadership. This is now the second H&S announcement I've listened to, yet there was no mention of psychological health and safety. This observation aligns with what some participants highlighted in the interviews, suggesting it may be an area that requires additional attention from the H&S representative. Of course, organisational communication doesn't and shouldn't be limited to full-staff meetings, but the interview data indicate that this is the weakest domain of PSC and could benefit from more consistent and stronger messaging from the SLT. I do wonder whether school leaders are aware of what organisational communication may or should look like, and how it can be delivered, since most interview participants required a more detailed explanation than for the other three domains.

Period 3 (House B) – Generally, the class was well-behaved, though active supervision was required throughout the lesson. Students were never cheeky or disrespectful towards me, but they did require ongoing reminders to stay on task. On this occasion, the class was given the option to work inside the classroom or in the central house (shared) area, where students from two other classes were also sharing the space. This option appeared to be at the classroom teacher's discretion, but it required additional monitoring. Working in shared spaces such as the central house area is significantly different from working in a single-celled classroom. It meant providing students with the lesson's instructions, and, once this was done, as the teacher, moving between the actual classroom and the central house area continuously throughout the lesson. This was because not all students wanted to work in the central house area. In fact, less than half the class would work in the central house area, and it normally meant sharing it with students from other classes.

What I found interesting in these shared spaces was that the noise levels and behaviour were generally similar to those in the classrooms, even when the teacher was not always present. Having spoken to some teachers while completing the participant observations, they seemed to think that the presence of other students, teachers, and potentially leaders (if present) moderated student behaviour and noise. Teachers also believed that the design, particularly the mostly glass-walled, single-celled classrooms, made monitoring behaviour and student engagement much easier because everything is so visible – around three-quarters of most classrooms' walls are glass.

Additionally, even though other teachers were teaching their own classes, they were always more than happy to ensure students in other classes stayed on task while working on their devices in the central house area. The presence of adults increased even further when one of the house leaders was in the central house area. This collegial and management support not only pleased me as a reliever but also other teachers, with the beginner teacher mentioning this in the semi-structured interviews. Classroom management seems to be a growing concern for many staff; again, this was mentioned during lunch break chats and by some participants in interviews. Therefore, having this additional support appeared to be welcomed by staff. Further, teachers seemed to be able to interact with colleagues more this way, because of the open-plan nature of the house design and because they could share this space, which may reduce those feelings of being isolated in an older school, where one classroom might be on its own at the end of the old Mathematics block, for example.

Period 4 Science (House A) This time, the setting and working environment were quite different. I was upstairs in a science lab, which changed the dynamics compared with being on the ground floor. Clearly, science is not my area of expertise, so my role was predominantly to ensure that students remained on-task and understood the work set by their science teacher. However, this situation and the additional time (not having to actively teach) meant that I was able to explore the wider surroundings of working on the first floor, albeit in a different house. Students generally work in their single-celled science classrooms, as there are fewer shared seating areas on level 1. This means that most teaching and learning occur in single-cell classrooms on level 1.

We encountered a few hiccups in getting the lesson underway and explaining the instructions. It took me a while to get the students on task, I think partly because I couldn't understand the content and because it required me to check students' understanding, which I couldn't really do without a science background. This did make me feel a little apprehensive and prompted me to reflect on what participants said during interviews about teaching outside your subject discipline (when you have no choice), which can affect your confidence. I certainly felt this too, despite it being only for the single period. I felt unable to follow the instructions, and even with the textbook to help, I still struggled to explain the concepts to students.

Furthermore, I was the only person teaching on that floor during that period. The other two science labs were empty, with no teacher present. The second house leader was in his office intermittently, which was reassuring, but I would have felt more comfortable and supported if another science teacher had been in another lab, so I could have approached them to understand what the absent teacher was asking of the students. I think I would have felt safe seeking support from another science teacher, since the level of staff collaboration and collegiality appears relatively good regardless of which house you work in at this school. Moreover, the environment is generally collegial and supportive within house settings, as many participants spoke at length about.

However, on this occasion, being on the first floor, as I had been on three other occasions, I felt much more isolated than when I was on the ground floor earlier in the day. I could have been located at the end of a traditional block-type school, as a new reliever, hoping nothing would happen because immediate support may not have been available. I can see why most beginning teachers in this school are placed on the ground floor, as things seem much quieter up there. However, this isn't always possible for science or technology teachers, as these specialist areas are all on the first floor, which seems much quieter than the ground floor. I do wonder how a beginning science teacher would feel being up here alone, especially if the house leader wasn't always present on the first floor. In other words, teaching on the first floor was a completely different environment from what I had experienced earlier in the day.

Lunch duty (student supervision) in House C for 25 minutes. Like other relievers and permanent teachers, I have been allocated duty for the first half of the lunch break. The teacher I shared this duty with explained that they are given three duties a week, while beginner teachers are assigned two duties a week, as they have a lighter load while provisionally registered. It was mentioned twice in interviews that there seems to be an overallocation of staff during interval and lunch breaks, and that it's greater than what they were assigned in other high schools. However, one participant understood that having this many staff on duty can also minimise and prevent incidents, as adult presence can act as an effective deterrent. I also quite like having the support and presence of another staff member, and I'm assuming other relievers and possibly beginning teachers may feel the same.

The duty began with the house leader asking me to wear the hi-vis vest, obviously for visibility. It was a rainy day, so most of the 250 students in the house had lunch under cover for about 25 minutes before leaving the house premises to get some fresh air. Together, we supervised behaviour and ensured students placed their rubbish in the right place. Because there were more students than last time, we also had the house leader's assistance. Her presence meant we were able to get the house

back into good, tidy condition before period five. On other occasions, when the leader wasn't present, it often meant having to remind students numerous times to tidy up the house before they vacated it.

Each house is well equipped with kitchenettes on the ground and first floors, allowing students to heat up their lunches. Students congregate for lunch in their homeroom or at one of the many central house tables, often leaving behind rubbish and spilled food. Each house has vacuum cleaners and cloths to clean the premises before leaving. A small team of students is assigned to this 10-minute task each day. Some students needed more guidance than others on how to wipe the tables or vacuum the classrooms. While students completed the cleaning, it resulted in staff having an additional task and responsibility if their duty was inside a house.

Once the tables were cleaned and the floors had been vacuumed and then checked by the two duty teachers on the ground house level, it was time for me to be relieved by two other teachers who completed the second half of the lunch break duty. As I was heading to the staffroom for lunch, a student from Period 3 approached me to apologise for being rude. I didn't notice any rudeness in her tone while in class, but it was nice of her to mention it anyway.

In the staffroom, I sat with a group of six teachers, all of whom seemed to have worked at the school for over 10 years. They were familiar with the school's systems and processes and said they'd witnessed many changes over this period. The topic of classroom management and student behaviour was raised once again. The general view was that teachers were spending more and more time on classroom management, at the expense of valuable learning time.

Period 5 – Social sciences - Back to house A for period 5. It was the same class I taught science to, but back on the first floor. It's quite difficult to monitor students' work when they are all on their devices, and many aren't facing the teacher. All students worked using a device, so it often involved me asking students not to sit too close to the walls, which prevented me from being able to see their screens. It ensured I could walk behind their tables to see they were on task and doing their work. I did need to go around the class to check student work quite regularly, especially since it was an afternoon class when student engagement often falls at this time. It soon became clear that a good number of students hadn't made a start on the required work, well into the lesson. I asked students to work individually and asked one student to move seats to increase engagement and mitigate distractions. This strategy seemed to work, at least for the first half of the lesson.

The house leader was constantly doing the house rounds in the public and central areas, but I did wonder about the teacher on the first floor. Had the sole teacher up there been forgotten? If both house leaders are down here, how would they know what's happening upstairs if an incident did take place?

Having relieved in House A for three other periods and in House B for five periods, I found the distinctions between the two houses becoming clearer. Interview participants said that working in different houses can feel like working in different schools at times. I also noticed differences, which I generally put down to the climate and subcultures of each house. Similarly, the house leader is likely to have a significant impact on house culture and climate, which interview participants also discussed. To date, I noticed that some house leaders made an effort to greet me and check how things were going in my lessons, while others appeared less interested or simply preferred not to engage with me. Again, these different experiences with leaders and teachers would affect my perceptions of house PSC and how supported I felt. However, it is important to note that my presence as a researcher may have influenced both behaviours: leaders who provided support and those who didn't, although these findings were also supported by interview data.

Appendix J: Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Date: _____ Date, Time & Place: _____

Interviewer: Stefano Cataloni Participants (Staff group): _____

Introduction, Process, Content

- Researcher's introduction
- Review of the study's purpose, outline of the session
- Recording and storing of data

Emphasis on Ground Rules

- Right of viewpoint and opinion
- Right to speak uninterrupted
- Allowing others to speak
- Moderator to guide the flow of the discussion if necessary
- Identities of individual participants to remain confidential
- Consent form and approval

Questioning Sequence

- A. **Ice-Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant)** Please share your first name, role, department/year level you work in and length of service at [REDACTED].

B. **Content Questions**

Content #1: How do house leaders specifically contribute to PSC?

Probes: Do you have a particular story to share about that point?

Content #2: Do house leaders at need to possess different leadership competencies than their HOD or DP counterparts in other schools?

Probes: Please, tell me more about this event.

Content #3: How does leadership in a 'multiple schools within a school' model impact positively/negatively on house PSC?

Probes: Do you have any specific examples you could give?

Content #4: What impact could mātauranga Māori have on how a leader carries out their role?

Probes: Can you provide more detail on that point?

Content #5 How might mātauranga Māori impact PSC and teacher wellbeing at?

C. Closing Question/Debrief

What else would you like to tell me?

Thank you

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate hearing your insights on this topic. |

Appendix K: Focus Group Consent Form



MASSEY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Project title: Applying the PSC framework to shed light on teacher wellbeing – a case study analysis

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period and up to two weeks following the date of my focus group session. However, due to the nature of how focus group data is collected and analysed, the data collected from you in this session cannot be deleted.

1. I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.
2. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other group participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the focus group. There are risks in taking part in focus group research, and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.

3. I agree to participate in the focus group under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Te Kūnenga
ki Pūrehuroa

School of Management
<http://www.massey.ac.nz/school-management>
Massey University, Private Bag 102904, Auckland 0745 T +64 9 414 0800
Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442 T +64 6 356 9099

Appendix L: Example of Member Checking

	A	B
1	Question	Answer from School Leader
2	Are all subject/classroom teachers also learning advisors?	Yes
3	Do all subject/classroom teachers teach at least one Project - PRTs included?	Not all teachers- some SLT and teachers may have their timetable too crammed to do project learning
4	Do all mentors need to meet with their mentees at least twice a term, despite seniority of mentee?	Yes - newer teachers meet fortnightly and so the twice a term is for experienced teachers
5	Are mentors supposed to meet with BT1 mentees once a fortnight	Once a week
6	Are mentors supposed to meet with BT2 mentees once a month?	Once a fortnight
7	In the SLT focus group transcript which you were part of says house leaders still move every two years. Is this correct? Or was the focus group member referring to the previous system?	Previous system - no such requirement under current principal
8	How often are student reports published?	Reports are live - always accessible but formally sent out twice a year
9	What proportion of leaders (roughly) have mentoring microcredentials?	100% at the end of the year - 2 currently completing theirs
10	What's the approximate number of staff (excluding house leaders) based in each house?	11-12
11	How many Learning Area (subject) meetings are set each term?	2
12	Does each house have their own context or can a single context be shared by multiple house?	House develop own context but we share successful context with each other and different houses can choose to adopt successful context
13	Does the school have a breakfast/lunch programme for kids in need? If so, do you know which organisation supplies the food?	Breakfast - Fonterra Kickstart Breakfast
14	Was the new extracurricular setup, along with the decision to reduce the number of assessments per year and PLC staff meetings per term come about because of feedback derived from the staff wellbeing survey? Are there any other initiatives or policies/practices or procedures that may have come about from staff voice - though the staff survey or alternative communicative channels?	Yes in response to wellbeing survey. Other suggestions/policies implemented: Notices only on Fridays at Morning Tea. Changes to extracurricular End of year exam - replaced by Common Assessment Activity - feedback from students and staff. Personal time on two Tuesdays. Reporting to parents - focus on values and academics.

Appendix M: Example of Code Tables with Annotations

The varied role of the leader	The principal	Leadership in 'four schools within a school'	Leading by example	Relying on competent leadership	Staff perspectives on leadership competence	What competence looks like	Additional Factors that impact on PSC and Teacher Wellbeing	Leader's influence in shaping a favourable PSC
Supportive and caring leadership of leaders (47)	Principal's influence (48)	House leaders combining skills (10)	Trust and transparency (29)	When facing challenges (38)	Clear expectations and direction (71)	Compared to other schools (7)	External factors (38)	Caring leadership
Leading a house (40)	Previous principal at and/or other school (18)	Leadership differences between house (39)	Accessible and approachable (34)	Complexity of school environment (27)	Communication & interpersonal skills (64)	Collective leadership competence (29)	Mātauranga Māori initiatives (22)	Supportive and safe environment
Mentoring (35)	Knowing staff (18)	Leadership differences within house (23)	Credibility (20)	Classroom factors (18)	Leader competence - acting on suggestions and decisively resolving issues (16)	Varying levels of competence (8)	Covid challenges - (5)	Risk-taking
BT support (16)	Making 'tough calls' (16)	House competition (5)	Establishing respect (13)	Motivating teachers (5)	Examples of competent leadership (2)	Balancing various demands (11)	Busy leader merged with balancing various demands	Staff treatment
Relationships and interactions with staff (19)	Taking a holistic approach (19) (Transformational leadership?)	Organisational structure	Passionate and dedicated (8) -	Student outcomes (2)	Leader situational awareness (11)		House assistant support for leaders	
House assistant support for leaders (9)	Principal as a mentor (3) - merged with connecting with staff	Adapting to a new leadership practice merged with changing house		Overreliance (1)	Leader competence - Teaching and learning (13)			
Leader curriculum support (3)				To be led effectively (22)	Leader competence - Systems &			
Leader competence (3)				Parental challenges merged with				
Leader strengths (1)		Multiple leaders						



New
103 items

Stefano Cataloni
...

Significant change in leadership at [redacted] resulting in increased focus on teacher wellbeing. Previous principal described as paternalistic and as an authoritarian/task focused leader. Leadership approach couldn't be more different.

04 August 2023, 12:46 pm

Stefano Cataloni
...

A lot of staff mention that he's genuinely interested in staff wellbeing.

04 August 2023, 12:48 pm

@mention or reply

Stefano Cataloni
...

All participants except 2 and principal himself said he connects well with staff

@mention or reply

Stefano Cataloni
...

[redacted]

@mention or reply

Leadership priority for teacher psychological health	Leadership support and Commitment in Addressing potential psychological health issues	Strengthening psychological health communication	Participation in health and safety activities and policy
Staff views on importance of psychological health (74) Shift in student-staff priority (43) Trianga influence (8) Complementary of PSC framework Students are the clear priority (10) Looking after staff (15) Changes since Covid (2)	Effectively implementing change (78) merged with Managing workload (40) Policy & procedures/practices to address potential issues (62) Examples of quick supportive action (64) Inability or challenges in rectifying issues relating to psychosocial health (53) Addressing staff conflict and performance issues merged into inability or challenges in rectifying issues relating to psychological health (7) Worklife balance (16) Addressing poor performance (1) – merged with staff conflict Gender (9) – merged with inability in rectifying issues relating to psychological health "We're adults!"	Bidirectional communication (55) Barriers/dissatisfaction around psychological health communication (57) What leaders say (41) Openly discussing psychological health issues (21) Staff voice Digital communication House leader psychological health communication <u>communication</u> with leaders	Wellbeing committee (33) renamed from "Wellbeing activities and members" H&S staff participation (25) Wellbeing improvements (20) Working groups (14) Google survey merged with wellbeing committee



One claim by a senior leader is that school may not even follow its own policies and procedures.

08 August 2023, 8:07 am

@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni



school day rather than in the evenings as previously. Teachers have more control over their extracurricular commitments as well

@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni



Mentoring could be a good opportunity and safe setting, but does depend on relationship between mentor and mentee

1 more reply



Stefano Cataloni

Less of this seems to be discussed in learning areas though. This can depend on who's leading the learning area and/or the subject/s

@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni



Factors preventing effective communication

@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni



Regular announcements and information about psychological health are made in school-wide briefings, by the wellbeing committee

Difficulties and strain of role	Work enjoyment	Dedication	Ability in role	The House model	Factors impacting on working conditions	Merged codes
Workload(49)	Leaders appreciating staff (44)	Leaders making staff feel safe at work (23)**	Belonging ((54)) Impact on students (30)	House "effect" (20) PSC & TW	Working from home	Learning advisory Holistic reports merged with workload concerns
Job intensification (13)	Work enjoyment and (45)	Dedication to teaching (14)	Socialising with staff (31)	House physical state (11) PSC & TW	Post-covid normal merged with shift in student-teacher priority	Duty Administration tasks – merged with workload concerns
Student behaviour issues (19)**	School climate (34)	Pressures on staff (14)	Feeling confident in role (23) renamed from self-efficacy	Changing house(15)	Weekly meetings	ICT in teaching merged with managing workload.
Problems with colleagues (14)	Staff collaboration (22)	Learning areas (16)	Ability and competence to teach effectively (10) – merged with 'feeling confident in role'	House support (19) PSC & TW	Being on site	Satisfaction and Subjects taught merged with work enjoyment
Leadership demands (11)	Student outcomes & teacher achievement (16)	Collegial environment (15)	Staff PD (11)		House belonging and connected merged with house collegiality	Staff recognition and appreciation merged with feeling valued and appreciated
Leaders trust me (10)	Promotional opportunities (9)	Supervisory support** PSC & TW	Teacher motivation			
Parental challenges (8)	Teacher – student relationships (13)	House assistant support for teachers (14)	Teaching & learning			
Teacher strikes (5)	Rewarding work (18) merged with work enjoyment	External pressures and changes (14)				
Leader support – merged into "supervisory support"	Collegial support (5) merged with					
Psychosocial factors???						



Stefano Cataloni



As the literature suggests, still a significant stressor - especially if supervisory support is not given.

@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni



Generally dealt to, although some staff believe that procedures should be adhered to and applied to more effectively.



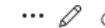
Stefano Cataloni



@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni

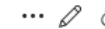


These are mostly examples and anecdotes from previous schools that teachers have been employed in, which highlight how leadership

@mention or reply



Stefano Cataloni



especially in their planning and in the classroom gives them the autonomy and control that professionals often

Marina

Appendix N: Example of Coding and Theme Development

Development of codes using NVivo

Theme development: orange – primary theme, green – subtheme)

(I): Inductive analysis

Leading the school

- Document analysis – Principal's involvement in the wellbeing committee
- Document analysis – Principal's acknowledgement in school notices
- Focus Group - Making tough calls
- Focus Groups - Previous principal
- Focus Groups - Principal's Influence
- Interviews- A holistic approach
- Interviews - Connecting with staff
- Interviews - Previous principal
- Interviews - Principal
- Interviews - Principal's influence
- Interviews - Making tough calls
- Participant observation – Principal's influence
- Participant observation – Visibility

'Setting the scene' -the principal (I)

The role model (I)

The advocate (I)

Acting behind the scenes (I)

Multidimensional role of the house leader

- Document analysis – Mentoring framework
- Document analysis – House collaboration
- Document analysis – School leadership framework
- Focus group - Supportive and caring leadership
- Focus Groups – Beginner teacher support
- Focus groups - Leading a house
- Focus Groups - Mentoring
- Focus groups - Relationships and interactions with staff
- Interviews – Beginner teacher support
- Interviews - House leadership
- Interviews - Mentoring
- Interviews - Supportive and caring leadership
- Participant observation - Supportive and caring leadership
- Participant observation - Relationship and interactions with staff
- Participant observation – Constant presence

House leader influence (I)

Personalised approach (I)

Supportive approach (I)

Leader discrepancies (I)

Appendix O: Ethics Approval



13/02/2023

Dear: Mr Stefano Cataloni

Re: Ethics Application - NOR 22/79 - Applying the PSC framework to teacher wellbeing – a case study analysis

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Ohu Matatika 2 at their meeting held on **Thursday, 8 December 2022**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
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E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz