sustainability

MDPI

Review

Relational Foundations of Sustainable Working Life: A Critical Integrative Review and Multilevel Framework of Trust, Social Competences, and Belonging

Jasmina Starc [1,*], Aleksandar Šobot [2] and Diana Bilić-Šobot [3]

[1] Department of Communication and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Economics and Informatics, University of Novo Mesto, Na Loko 2, 8000 Novo Mesto, Slovenia
[2] Department of Environmental Management, Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, University of Novo Mesto, Na Loko 2, 8000 Novo Mesto, Slovenia; aleksandar.sobot@uni-nm.si
[3] Department of Environmental Protection and Rural Management, Landscape Governance College, University of Novo Mesto, Ljubljanska cesta 28, 8000 Novo Mesto, Slovenia; diana-bilic-sobot@vsgrm.unm.si
* Correspondence: jasmina.starc@uni-nm.si

Abstract

Socially sustainable working life requires more than continued employment or short-term performance; it depends on relational conditions that preserve health, voice, inclusion, and capability over time. This critical integrative review examines trust, social competences, belonging, and psychological safety across individual, interactional, team, organisational, and institutional levels. A 70-source seed corpus was audited, 38 non-redundant sources were retained, two nearest-model publications were added, and a documented public update screened 30 candidates identified through PubMed/PMC, EconBiz, publisher and DOI records, and citation chaining. Ten new articles were included, yielding 50 substantive sources. The review compares RFSWL with workplace social sustainability, swAge, capability-based sustainable employability, relational coordination, inclusion, psychological safety, and multilevel trust models. Its contribution is a new integrative configuration rather than new constructs: trust enables warranted vulnerability, social competences enable reciprocal coordination and repair, and belonging enables recognised membership without assimilation. It proposes to explain why favourable relational perceptions can coexist with silence or unequal participation when they fail to become reciprocally enacted and institutionally protected team processes. Through repeated interaction, these foundations may generate team trust climate, relational coordination, inclusive climate, and psychological safety, while governance, work design, employment security, digital control, and status relations condition their effects. Six propositions specify enabling, failure, distributional, and feedback pathways for multilevel longitudinal research.

Keywords: social sustainability; sustainable working life; trust; social competences; workplace belonging; psychological safety; multilevel framework

Check for updates

Academic Editors: Kirk Chang and Susan Akinwalere

Received: 16 September 2026
Revised: 23 September 2026
Accepted: 29 September 2026
Published: 2 October 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

1. Introduction

Sustainable working life is more than continued labour-force participation or short-term organisational performance. It concerns whether work can preserve health and well-being, enable decent and meaningful participation, and distribute opportunities without reproducing avoidable inequalities. This social dimension is relevant to the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goals 3, 8, and 10, although organisational

practices should not be assumed to advance those goals merely because they are labelled sustainable [1,2]. Existing approaches variously define sustainability through workplace social-sustainability constructs, the ability and motivation to remain in work across the life course, continuity and interruption trajectories, or real opportunities to achieve work capabilities that people value [3–6]. Relational work-design scholarship further shows that work is organised through interdependence and proactive relations [7]. These perspectives establish the breadth of sustainable work but do not fully explain how everyday relational quality is converted into durable participation, learning, health, and collective adaptability.

The explanatory gap is especially consequential in digitally mediated and unequal work. Hybrid arrangements change informal contact and communication, algorithmic systems redistribute visibility, discretion, and control, and insecure employment raises the cost of vulnerability and voice [8–14]. Treating relational quality as a generic resource can therefore conceal both mechanisms and unequal distribution. Trust may facilitate cooperation but may also be demanded where accountability is weak. Social competences may support repair but may also individualise problems created by work design. Belonging may enable participation but may become assimilation when uniqueness or dissent is penalised.

The relevant studies are also separated by level of analysis. Trust may refer to an individual judgement, a dyadic relation, a team climate, or confidence in management and institutions [15–17]. Social competences are commonly measured as individual attributes, whereas relational coordination is a patterned property of interdependent work [18–20]. Felt belonging is an individual experience, inclusion is a contextual condition that combines belongingness with valued uniqueness, and psychological safety is principally an emergent team belief about interpersonal risk [21–24]. A defensible integrative framework must therefore separate constructs and specify the processes through which individual perceptions and capacities become shared or enacted team properties.

The unresolved relationship is the conversion from individual relational resources to shared or enacted team properties under unequal structural conditions. Multilevel trust models specify referents and emergence, relational coordination specifies interdependent communication, and inclusion and psychological-safety models explain recognition and interpersonal risk. RFSWL asks when these processes align, when they become decoupled, and whose participation remains costly despite favourable average perceptions. Its proposed contribution is the joint specification of conversion, misalignment, and distribution; these individual mechanisms are not claimed as new.

From an industrial–organisational psychology perspective, the central question is not simply whether positive relational variables correlate with desirable outcomes. It is how vulnerability, coordination, recognition, voice, and learning become sustainable under specific governance, work-design, technological, and status conditions. This review asks four questions: (1) What distinct relational function do trust, social competences, and belonging perform? (2) How do the nearest sustainable-work and relational models differ from the proposed Relational Foundations of Sustainable Working Life (RFSWL) framework? (3) At which analytical levels should the constructs and mechanisms be located? (4) Which evidence clusters support each proposition, and under which conditions should the propositions fail? The contribution claimed is deliberately bounded: RFSWL does not introduce new constituent constructs or claim priority over all relational approaches. It proposes a specific configuration of non-equivalent functions, cross-level emergence, structural boundary conditions, failure pathways, distributional asymmetry, and recursive feedback.

For example, RFSWL predicts that high mean trust and belonging can coexist with low psychological safety and voice when coordination is not reciprocally enacted or when dissent carries unequal penalties. Conversely, formal protection may not generate participation when everyday recognition and repair are absent. These predictions qualify favourable

single-domain expectations by specifying the conditions under which relational resources fail to convert into shared safety and durable participation.

Three tests follow: non-compensation, where strength in one foundation does not fully offset weakness in another; cross-level decoupling, where favourable individual averages do not become shared team states; and distributional divergence, where team averages conceal subgroup-specific costs. These are proposed configurational and distributional effects. If they add no explanatory value over the nearest models, the case for RFSWL is weakened.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Review Design and Analytical Purpose

The study is a critical integrative literature review. Integrative reviews are appropriate for heterogeneous conceptual, quantitative, qualitative, and review evidence when the purpose is theory development rather than pooled effect estimation [25–27]. The term critical indicates that the synthesis evaluates construct boundaries, levels of analysis, causal overreach, power, negative cases, and omissions rather than merely cataloguing associations. The review is not presented as a systematic review or meta-analysis. A protocol was not prospectively registered; instead, exact queries, the dated candidate set, screening decisions, extraction rules, source provenance, and checksums are provided in the Supplementary Materials (Sections S1–S14; Tables S1–S17).

2.2. Corpus Construction and Public Update Search

The initial 70 publications formed a legacy narrative working corpus assembled before finalisation of the six-proposition RFSWL architecture. The original databases or other discovery routes, search dates, exact strings, and hit counts cannot be reliably reconstructed because no contemporaneous search log or machine export was retained. The corpus is therefore a reconstructed starting set, not the output of a reproducible systematic search. The dated public update below documents a subsequent search; it does not retrospectively validate the original selection.

Its adequacy is functional rather than representative: the source audit, nearest-model completion, and public update are intended to cover definitions, mechanisms, levels, and boundary conditions relevant to the review questions. Neither the size of the starting corpus nor this targeted coverage establishes theoretical saturation. The resulting framework is bounded by the literature and discovery routes actually examined.

Corpus construction proceeded in three stages. First, the 70 substantive publications supporting the initial narrative phase were reconstructed and checked for bibliographic completeness. Each record was assessed against five retention functions: definition of a focal construct; specification of a relational mechanism; evidence on analytical level or cross-level emergence; a structural boundary condition, adverse pathway, or temporal feedback process; or status as a nearest comparison model. Thirty-eight original sources were retained, and 32 were excluded because they were conceptually redundant with a stronger retained synthesis, addressed peripheral outcomes or measurement without a direct mechanism, or represented a narrow context without a non-redundant theoretical contribution. Second, two nearest-model sources absent from the seed corpus were added, producing a 40-source core [4,5].

The five retention functions were formalised during retrospective reconstruction, after the seed corpus had been assembled and before final coding and proposition wording. Retention required a non-redundant contribution, not agreement with RFSWL. Competing models, adverse pathways, and contradictory findings were eligible, and the retained trust, inclusion, and work-design literature informs the failure paths. However, a dedicated

search designed to retrieve disconfirming studies is not documented; these safeguards cannot exclude confirmation bias or circularity.

Third, a documented public update was conducted on 13 July 2026. Public discovery used PubMed/PMC and EconBiz and was supplemented by publisher and DOI resolution, exact-title checking, and backward and forward citation chaining. Four concept blocks covered trust; social competences and relational coordination; belonging, inclusion, and psychological safety; and sustainable working life or sustainable employability. Thirty candidate records were captured. Twelve duplicated the 40-source core. Eighteen unique records were screened, 10 were included, and eight were excluded with a standardised reason. The final substantive corpus contains 50 publications (Table 1), supplemented by five methodological sources. The supplementary package now separates the candidate log, source audit, analytical corpus, model comparison, proposition traceability, evidence-status rules, and provenance records so that the inferential steps can be inspected independently.

Table 1. Corpus construction and documented selection flow.

Stage	Records	Procedure	Output
Starting seed corpus	70	Retrospective bibliographic and conceptual audit; original search provenance incomplete	38 retained; 32 excluded
Nearest-model completion	2	Targeted exact-title and citation-chain search	40-source core
Public update candidates	30	PubMed/PMC, EconBiz, publisher/DOI records, and citation chaining	12 duplicates; 18 unique
Unique update records	18	Title, abstract, full-text, public-access, and journal-coverage screening	10 included; 8 excluded
Final substantive corpus	50	Structured extraction and critical synthesis	RFSWL comparison and six propositions
Methodological sources	5	Review-design and search-reporting guidance	Analysed separately from substantive evidence
Additional theoretical references	2	Foundational multilevel theory added during revision	Supports transition rules; outside the audited 50-source corpus

Two foundational multilevel-theory references introduced during revision support the transition rules in Section 5.1. They are reported separately from the 50-source substantive corpus and the five review-method sources, rather than being retroactively counted as results of the public update.

2.3. Public Discovery and Scopus/Web of Science Coverage Verification

Scopus and Web of Science were treated as citation indexes rather than as hosts of open full text. Because no authenticated subscription session or database export was available, this review does not claim a direct subscription-interface search, does not attribute hit counts to either index, and does not reconstruct non-existent exports. Instead, publicly accessible candidate articles were identified first, after which journal coverage was checked separately. Scopus coverage was verified against Elsevier's official June 2026 Source Title List. Web of Science coverage was assessed through publicly available Clarivate evidence, an archived ESI journal snapshot, publisher records, and dated historical notices. These sources differ in scope and date: ESI is not the full Web of Science Core Collection, and snapshot presence does not by itself establish coverage of every publication year. Absence from ESI does not establish non-indexing. Dual-index journal coverage was a pragmatic, externally checkable boundary for the public update when article-level exports were unavailable. It is neither a measure of conceptual relevance nor a proxy for methodological quality, and it does not make public discovery reproducible. The rule can exclude relevant work solely because of outlet status, particularly new, regional, specialist, or non-indexed publications; it therefore restricts the scope of the synthesis.

The search report follows PRISMA-S principles of transparent query reporting where applicable, and the strings were self-audited against PRESS elements; neither framework is used to relabel this theory-building integrative review as systematic [28,29]. Public web interfaces are relevance-ranked and mutable, so unstable platform totals were not treated as reproducible evidence. The auditable unit is the dated candidate set: every captured record, access route, DOI, duplicate decision, index decision, and inclusion or exclusion reason is documented in Table S6.

2.4. Eligibility, Screening, and Data Extraction

Eligible substantive sources were English-language peer-reviewed theoretical articles, empirical studies, systematic or integrative reviews, and meta-analyses that addressed work or employment and contributed directly to at least one review question. Foundational publications before 2000 were retained when they supplied definitions still used in later work. For the public update, the stated eligibility rule additionally required publicly reachable full text or an author/publisher version and journal coverage in both Scopus and Web of Science at publication. Operational evidence was limited to the journal lists, snapshots, and notices recorded in Table S8; article-level and complete historical verification was not available. Sources were excluded when they were conceptually redundant, supplied only a peripheral outcome or measure, did not add a non-redundant mechanism or boundary condition, lacked confirmed public full text, or failed the update's journal-coverage rule. The dual-index and public-full-text requirements applied only to the public update, not to foundational seed sources or the additional multilevel-theory references. Method sources were kept separate from the substantive corpus.

Initial screening and coding were undertaken by the first author (J.S.) using a structured extraction framework (Table S14). For each included source, the framework specified the focal construct and definition; referent and analytical level; proposed mechanism; evidence type and context; outcomes; structural conditions; counterevidence or failure path; temporal assumptions; and contribution to a proposition. Evidence was appraised for inferential strength rather than converted into a single score. Conceptual arguments and reviews were used primarily for construct definition and model comparison; empirical studies were used for observed associations or mechanisms; and longitudinal, multilevel, or meta-analytic evidence was given greater weight when the claim concerned temporal ordering, cross-level relations, or broader regularities. Cross-sectional associations were not treated as evidence of emergence or causal order. The synthesis also distinguishes three inferential statuses: direct support when a source explicitly addresses the claim; cross-source synthesis when a conclusion follows from convergent evidence across sources; and author-proposed interpretation when the RFSWL framework specifies a transition that has not been directly tested. The subsequent coding check by all three authors is described below and in Table S15; initial screening and coding verification are reported separately.

All three authors—Jasmina Starc (J.S.), Aleksandar Šobot (A.Š.), and Diana Bilić-Šobot (D.B.-Š.)—checked the coding used in the review. J.S. prepared the initial coding, and A.Š. and D.B.-Š. checked that coding, with J.S. also participating in the verification. The coding was thus examined by all three authors before its use in the final synthesis. The extraction categories described above provided the framework for this checking. Table S15 identifies the authors' roles, and Table S16 presents the coding and source-traceability matrix for all 50 substantive publications, linking the recorded topic codes, analytical use, and proposition assignments.

Revision-stage reconciliation of Tables S4–S10 checked the 30 candidate decisions, the 70-source audit, and the membership of the 50-source corpus. It corrected the Q1 and Q2 captured-record counts to nine and three, reconciled the selection-flow entries, corrected

the Boström DOI, and linked stable corpus IDs to manuscript reference numbers. Tables S11–S16 were aligned with the final propositions and evidence-status rules. These checks verify documentary consistency, not the completeness of discovery or the reliability of source-level interpretation.

A revision-stage document consistency check compared all six focal propositions with the construct levels in Tables 2 and 3, the paths described around Figure 1, and the outcomes and falsification criteria in Table 4. It separated constituent evidence, cross-source inference, and untested RFSWL claims, and removed secondary outcomes from focal tests. This editorial check, supported by the assistance disclosed in Section 2.6, did not repeat study screening or independently recode the underlying sources.

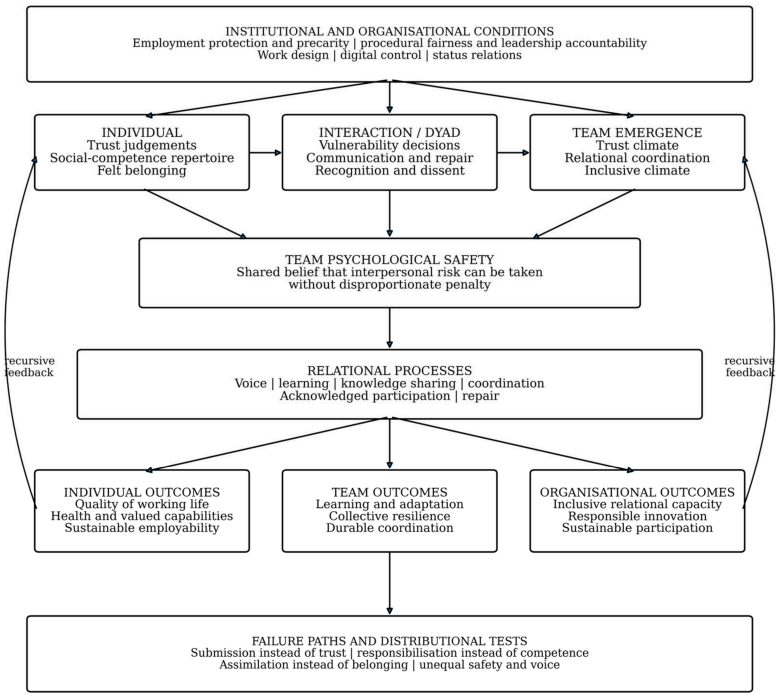


Figure 1. Proposed multilevel RFSWL framework. Solid arrows denote proposed translation and enabling paths; curved arrows denote recursive feedback. Arrow styles indicate path type, not evidence strength. The central joint ordering through psychological safety is author-proposed; the figure does not establish an exclusive or validated causal sequence.

2.5. Critical Synthesis and Model Comparison

Synthesis proceeded in four passes. First, definitions and levels were compared within each of the focal literature. Second, evidence was organised around the relational functions of accepting vulnerability, coordinating and repairing interaction, and experiencing recognised membership. Third, the nearest model families were compared against a common set of dimensions: theoretical object, primary level, mechanism, temporal logic, structural conditions, and contrasting explanatory expectation. Fourth, abductive pattern matching linked recurrent evidence clusters to six propositions. A proposition was retained only when its inferential bridge, analytical level, boundary condition, alternative explanation, and a plausible falsification test could be stated. Direct source claims were not treated as equivalent to cross-source synthesis, and the cross-level transition rules in RFSWL are explicitly identified as author-proposed rather than empirically established. This procedure makes the framework traceable while preserving the interpretive purpose of an integrative review.

The six final propositions cover distinct targets: trust-climate formation, competence-to-coordination conversion, belonging-to-voice conversion, joint psychological-safety for-

mation, distributional asymmetry, and repair feedback. They were not selected from a preregistered or quantitatively scored list. A stable count and wording history of earlier candidates was not retained, so the number merged, rejected, or reformulated cannot be reported reliably. The stated retention criteria justify the final set; Table S12 provides final-proposition traceability, not a complete developmental history.

2.6. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Luna; OpenAI, San Francisco, CA, USA) was used to support structural redrafting, language editing, search-string formatting, table preparation, and production of the conceptual figure. Revision-stage assistance also covered comparison of reviewer comments with the manuscript, bibliographic checking, and document consistency checks. This assistance was not independent study screening or coding. It was not treated as a scholarly source and did not generate empirical data. The first author independently checked bibliographic records, summaries, inclusion decisions, claims, and the AI-assisted conceptual figure, and all authors assume responsibility for the final manuscript.

3. Results of the Critical Integrative Review

3.1. Trust: Vulnerability, Referents, and Governance

Trust is a willingness to accept vulnerability on the basis of positive expectations about another party [30,31]. Cognition-based and affect-based foundations explain why competence and reliability are not interchangeable with relational care [32]. The multilevel literature further shows that the referent must be specified: trust in a colleague, team, supervisor, top management, and institution are related but not equivalent [15,16]. Contemporary reviews therefore treat trust as dynamic and relational rather than as a stable individual disposition [33]. The conceptual and review evidence is consistent on referent specificity, but it does not establish one universal trust process across levels.

The update reinforces referent and level separation. A multilevel–multireferent model distinguishes sources of organisational trust, while newer multilevel evidence identifies horizontal team trust as a pathway connecting team resources with engagement and organisational outcomes [17,34]. These findings are informative but are not interchangeable: they address different referents, levels, and outcome relationships. They therefore support a multilevel trust architecture more directly than they support a single causal sequence from individual trust to sustainable working life. RFSWL uses this evidence to justify separation of referents and levels, while treating team-level emergence as a proposition requiring direct testing.

The critical implication is that trust cannot be inferred from low monitoring or employee compliance. Trust and distrust may coexist, and breaches can remain referent-specific [35]. Under precarious employment, opaque algorithmic control, or weak procedural accountability, accepting vulnerability may reflect constrained dependence rather than sustainable cooperation [9,10]. Cross-societal evidence reports statistical mediation through trust in top management and moderation by societal culture and governance quality [36]; these associations do not by themselves establish causal ordering. The evidence therefore supports governance and work design as plausible boundary conditions, but it does not establish that these conditions operate identically across occupations, employment regimes, or organisational levels. RFSWL consequently treats governance and work design as antecedent conditions of trust climate, not as downstream consequences of interpersonal goodwill.

3.2. Social Competences: From Individual Repertoire to Enacted Coordination

Social competences include perceptive, expressive, regulatory, empathic, and conflict-management capacities that may support interaction [20]. Workplace intervention evidence indicates that emotional competences can be developed, although effects vary across interventions and outcomes [37]. This evidence is useful for establishing malleability, but it does not by itself demonstrate a durable conversion from individual competence to team-level sustainability. Relational coordination captures a different analytical object through shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect, and communication that is timely, accurate, frequent, and oriented towards problem solving [18,19]. High-quality relationships and psychological safety can then support workplace learning behaviour [38]. The two evidence streams therefore converge on the importance of enacted interaction but should not be collapsed into one construct or causal sequence.

This distinction prevents a common individualisation error. Communication training cannot compensate for retaliatory voice systems, impossible workloads, or structurally unequal participation. Competence may be used strategically by high-status actors while lower-status employees carry a disproportionate burden of emotional regulation and repair. RFSWL therefore locates social competence at two linked but non-equivalent levels: an individual interaction repertoire and an observed team pattern of coordination and repair. The proposed mechanism is reciprocal enactment under opportunity and accountability, not possession of a decontextualised soft skill. This is an integrative inference from the competence and relational-coordination literature, not a relationship directly established by a single study.

3.3. Belonging and Inclusion: Membership Without Assimilation

Belonging is a fundamental need for durable, positive social connection [39], but workplace belonging must be separated from inclusion. Integrative work clarifies that felt membership is an individual experience whose meaning depends on context [40]. Inclusion models add a crucial normative condition: people should experience both belongingness and recognition of uniqueness [23,24,41,42]. Instrumental diversity rhetoric can undermine belonging among underrepresented members even when organisations publicly endorse diversity [43]. Belonging that requires silence, identity suppression, or conformity is therefore not evidence of sustainable inclusion.

Recent reviews and qualitative studies sharpen the process and inequality dimensions. Inclusive-leadership research extends beyond the original belongingness–uniqueness pairing and spans multiple levels and mechanisms [44]. A process review organises workplace inclusion through an input–mediator–output–input cycle and places power, context, and feedback within the research agenda [45]. Qualitative evidence shows that belonging is produced through collegiality, recognition, task allocation, role in the primary work process, and participation in decisions [46]. A resource model further demonstrates that inclusion depends on resource distribution and fair employment practices, particularly for under-resourced workers [47]. These findings support a relational account only when organisational structures are included.

3.4. Psychological Safety and Psychosocial Safety Climate: A Level Distinction

Psychological safety is a shared team belief that interpersonal risk can be taken without disproportionate penalty [22]. Reviews and meta-analysis connect it with learning, voice, and performance while identifying contextual and multilevel antecedents [48,49]. Leader inclusiveness and professional status shape who experiences safety within the same team [50], and employee voice depends on whether speaking is both safe and consequential [51].

A recent review identifies persistent conceptual confusion between psychological safety and psychosocial safety climate [21]. The former concerns a team's shared interpersonal-risk belief; the latter concerns organisation-level policies, practices, and procedures for protecting psychological health and safety. Multilevel research likewise distinguishes individual and team psychological-safety pathways, although cross-sectional designs cannot establish emergence or causal order [52]. RFSWL therefore proposes team psychological safety as a proximal emergent integrating state produced through repeated interaction under organisational conditions. Existing evidence supports constituent relationships; it does not establish this complete joint ordering. It is not an individual feeling interchangeable with trust, belonging, or general psychosocial climate.

3.5. Sustainable Working Life as a Converted and Distributed Outcome

Social sustainability remains less theoretically consolidated than its economic and environmental counterparts [2]. The sustainable-work literature supplies complementary but non-equivalent evaluative lenses. The swAge model addresses the ability and motivation to remain in work across the life course and links individual, organisational, and societal determinants [4]. The capability approach asks whether people have real opportunities to achieve valued work outcomes, including meaningful relationships and participation [6]. Workplace social-sustainability research maps relevant constructs across job, person, organisation, and society levels [3]. Cohort research operationalises sustainable working life through continuity and interruption trajectories while recognising the absence of a single settled definition [5]. These perspectives therefore differ in what they treat as the relevant outcome: continued participation, valued capability, psychosocial conditions, or employment trajectories. RFSWL treats sustainable working life as a distributed outcome domain rather than as a single measurable endpoint.

The update clarifies conversion and distribution. A focus-group study identifies organisational, work, and personal conversion factors perceived to enable or constrain valued work capabilities [53]. Associations between psychosocial work conditions and extended working life vary by occupation and gender; favourable averages can therefore conceal unequal pathways [54]. The reviewed evidence supports examining who receives relational resources and who bears the costs of voice, connection, and continued participation, rather than relying only on mean climate or engagement scores. RFSWL consequently treats quality of working life and sustainable employability as individual outcome domains, learning and collective resilience as team outcomes, and inclusive relational capacity as an organisational outcome. This allocation is a framework-level synthesis and should not be read as a settled taxonomy established by the literature.

Social sustainability requires three additional evaluative conditions: temporal persistence, preservation or expansion of valued work capabilities, and fair distribution of benefits and burdens. Reciprocal coordination and repair may sustain participation through disruption; protected voice and recognition may preserve health and valued agency; and distributional analysis tests whether these gains extend to less secure or lower-status workers. Short-term cooperation is insufficient when it depletes health, suppresses dissent, or shifts repair burdens onto disadvantaged groups. These proposed pathways connect SDG 3 to health-preserving work, SDG 8 to decent and durable participation, and SDG 10 to unequal access and consequences [1]. The goals define normative domains, not direct measures or proof of SDG impact.

4. Comparison with the Nearest Models

Table 2 (see also Table S11) compares RFSWL with the model families that most directly overlap with its subject matter. The purpose is not to diminish those models, but

to identify what they explain, what remains outside their central architecture, and where RFSWL adds a bounded integrative proposition. The established-contribution column summarises claims documented in the cited literature. The final column states author-proposed contrasts in mechanism or prediction. These are hypotheses to test against the cited models, not claims that those models deny the possibility of the stated outcomes or cannot be extended to explain them.

Table 2. Nearest-model comparison and the bounded contribution of RFSWL.

Model Family	Primary Object/Level	Established Contribution	Contrasting RFSWL Mechanism or Prediction
Workplace social sustainability [3]	Job, person, organisation, and society	Maps psychological workplace constructs to social-sustainability goals.	Favourable workplace indicators may coexist with unequal durable participation when relational resources fail to convert into protected voice and capability.
swAge [4]	Individual ability and motivation within organisational and societal conditions	Explains life-course and multilevel determinants of sustainable participation.	Comparable ability and motivation to remain in work may yield different participation trajectories when reciprocal coordination or protected dissent differs.
Capability-based sustainable employability [6,53]	Individual valued capabilities and conversion factors	Explains whether people are able and enabled to realise valued work.	With comparable resources, relational conversion may differ by trust, enacted coordination, and recognised uniqueness; the proposed contribution specifies this pathway.
Relational coordination [18,19]	Interdependent work relations and communication patterns	Specifies shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect, and problem-solving communication.	Strong task coordination may coexist with silence or exclusion when dissent and uniqueness are penalised. Coordination alone need not indicate social sustainability.
Belongingness–uniqueness and inclusive leadership [24,41,44]	Individual inclusion and leader/team processes	Shows that inclusion requires membership and valued uniqueness.	Belonging and valued uniqueness may not sustain voice when vulnerability is unprotected or reciprocal coordination is absent; the joint configuration is the proposed test.
Inclusion process and resource models [45,47]	Inclusion, context, power, resources, and feedback	Adds process, feedback, fair employment practices, and unequal resource endowments.	Resource access and inclusive practices may coexist with fragile participation when trust or repair fails; joint conversion should add value beyond inclusion alone.
Psychological safety and psychosocial safety climate [21,22]	Team interpersonal-risk belief versus organisation-level protection climate	Clarifies the proximal voice/learning mechanism and the level distinction.	Trust climate, enacted coordination, and inclusive climate should jointly predict later team safety beyond additive effects; safety need not be the exclusive mediator.
Multilevel and multireferent trust [15,17,34]	Trust across referents and levels	Explains referent specificity, emergence, and cross-level consequences.	High mean trust may coexist with low safety or unequal voice when coordination is not reciprocal or recognition requires conformity.
RFSWL (proposed here)	Individual, interactional, team, organisational, and institutional levels	Differentiates three functions; specifies team emergence, psychological-safety integration, boundary conditions, failure paths, distribution, and feedback.	Incremental value requires joint, cross-level, or distributional effects beyond additive and nearest-model alternatives; these claims remain unvalidated.

The diagnostic contrasts are therefore trust with silence, coordination with exclusion, and inclusion with fragile participation. RFSWL predicts these configurations when relational resources are misaligned or their conversion costs differ across groups. Its dis-

tinctiveness depends on whether the joint and conditional predictions improve explanation beyond the nearest models. The comparison does not establish conceptual priority or empirical superiority.

A decisive test must compare nested additive models, prespecified configurational terms, and subgroup or cross-level effects using the same outcomes and observations. If single-domain or additive models account equally well for those outcomes and the proposed joint or distributional effects add no meaningful value, RFSWL's incremental contribution is weakened.

5. The Multilevel RFSWL Framework

5.1. Levels and Transition Rules

RFSWL distinguishes five analytical levels (Table 3). Institutional and organisational conditions structure the resources, rights, and risks under which interaction occurs. At the individual level, employees form trust judgements, possess social-competence repertoires, and experience felt belonging. At the dyadic or interactional level, vulnerability decisions, communication, recognition, conflict, and repair are enacted. Repeated interaction may generate team properties: trust climate, relational coordination, inclusive climate, and psychological safety. Sustainable outcomes then appear at individual, team, and organisational levels and feed back into later relational expectations.

Table 3. Construct location and cross-level transition rules.

Level	RFSWL Constructs	Transition Rule	Minimum Empirical Requirement
Individual	Trust judgement; social-competence repertoire; felt belonging	Person-specific perceptions and capacities; not automatically shared.	Measure referent-specific perceptions and individual differences.
Interaction/dyad	Vulnerability decision; communication; conflict; recognition; repair	Observable reciprocal episodes translate capacities into relations.	Use interaction coding, event data, networks, or repeated dyadic reports.
Team	Trust climate; enacted relational coordination; inclusive climate; psychological safety	Shared climates require a common team referent and within-team agreement; enacted coordination compiles complementary behaviours across interdependent roles.	Justify referent shift and aggregation; report agreement, between-team variation, and dispersion; observe reciprocal coordination separately.
Organisation	Procedural fairness; work design; leadership accountability; voice system; psychosocial safety climate; digital architecture	Creates opportunities and sanctions that condition whether relational processes can be enacted safely.	Model as cross-level antecedents or moderators rather than employee traits.
Institution	Employment protection; labour-market insecurity; occupational status; structural inequality	Sets the cost of vulnerability, exit, and dissent and distributes access to relational resources.	Use comparative, contract-status, occupation, and policy designs.

Three transition rules follow from established multilevel theory [55,56]. Composition describes convergence around a shared team referent: agreement about trustworthiness or inclusive treatment can support team-climate constructs. Person-specific trust and felt belonging cannot simply be averaged into trust climate or inclusive climate; belonging also requires separate assessment of valued uniqueness [15,16,23,24]. Compilation instead combines differentiated role contributions: a competent communicator cannot substitute for partners' responses, so enacted coordination is a pattern across interdependent ties rather than a mean competence score [18,19]. Contextual constraint is top-down: governance and work design alter the opportunities and costs of enactment, and enter as antecedents or moderators, not aggregated personal traits [9–11]. These are theoretically grounded

emergence specifications, not universal rules fixed by construct labels; their application in RFSWL requires empirical testing.

5.2. Recursive Model and Failure Paths

Figure 1 presents the proposed multilevel architecture. Trust judgements, social-competence repertoires, and felt belonging are analytically distinct individual foundations. Through interaction, they are translated into vulnerability decisions, communication and repair, recognition, and dissent. Repeated and sufficiently convergent interaction may produce team trust climate, enacted relational coordination, and inclusive climate. Team psychological safety is proposed as a proximal emergent integrating state through which voice, learning, knowledge sharing, coordination, acknowledged participation, and repair may become more likely. Organisational and institutional conditions shape every conversion step rather than entering only as distant background variables.

The integrating placement concerns the shared appraisal that interpersonal risk is tolerable at the point of speaking, asking for help, admitting error, or challenging a decision. Trust concerns expected treatment by a referent; coordination concerns enacted interdependence; inclusion concerns recognised membership and uniqueness. Psychological safety is thus a plausible action-proximal state connecting their alignment to interpersonal risk-taking [22,48–52]. This rationale is a cross-source inference, not evidence that the three antecedents jointly produce safety.

The placement is non-exclusive. Trust, coordination, and inclusion may have direct effects, operate in parallel, or be reinforced by successful voice and repair. P4 tests their configurational contribution to subsequent safety; a separate mediation test is needed to establish whether safety carries effects to later processes. Parallel, selective-mediation, reciprocal, and reverse-order accounts must therefore be compared, rather than ruled out by the diagram.

Evidence status is differentiated as follows. Direct constituent evidence supports the distinction among constructs and reported associations involving trust, coordination, inclusion, safety, voice, and learning [15–24,48–52]. Cross-source synthesis supplies the argument for linking these studies. The complete configurational ordering, conversion rules, failure-path combination, and feedback system are RFSWL hypotheses; no study in the reviewed synthesis establishes the whole sequence.

Figure-to-proposition correspondence is explicit: P1 links governance to individual-to-team trust formation; P2 links individual competence and interaction opportunities to compiled team coordination; P3 concerns belonging, inclusive climate, and voice; P4 links the joint team configuration to psychological safety; P5 tests status-conditioned safety-to-voice differences; and P6 concerns repair-to-later-trust feedback, represented schematically by the outer loops. Arrows entering team safety from lower levels summarise emergence, not aggregation-free causal shortcuts. The lower failure-path box is a diagnostic lens on the whole system, not an outcome caused only by team performance. Table 4 states the focal tests; the figure also displays secondary pathways.

The model is recursive rather than linear. Successful coordination and fair outcomes can replenish trust and belonging; constructive repair can make future disagreement safer. Conversely, surveillance, arbitrary decisions, unresolved breaches, or status exclusion can reverse the cycle. Three failure paths are central. Trust can become submission when vulnerability is demanded without accountability. Competence can become responsibilisation when individuals are trained to absorb structural dysfunction. Belonging can become assimilation when acceptance depends on suppressing difference or dissent. These are author-proposed boundary mechanisms derived from the combined literature; the reviewed studies do not test the complete three-path configuration as one system.

5.3. Evidence-Traceable Propositions

The six propositions in Table 4 convert the synthesis into testable claims. Each proposition has one focal relationship, with analytical level, boundary conditions, and secondary implications separated from its test. Source clusters support constituent claims rather than verifying the complete proposition. The source clusters provide direct conceptual or empirical support for parts of each proposition, whereas the inferential bridges and cross-level transitions are integrative or author-proposed. Detailed evidence-to-proposition traceability is provided in Table S12, and the evidence-strength and inferential-status rules are provided in Table S13.

Interpretive status: the source clusters in Table 4 represent direct support for constituent claims; the inferential bridges represent cross-source synthesis; and the proposed cross-level transitions are authorial hypotheses that have not been directly tested as a complete system.

Table 4. Evidence-traceable RFSWL propositions, analytical levels, and indicative falsification logic.

Proposition	Focal Relationship and Constituent Evidence	Level, Boundaries, and Secondary Implications	Result That Would Weaken the Focal Claim
P1. Governance-conditioned trust	Given comparable initial team-referent trust judgements, fair and accountable governance predicts greater subsequent convergence towards a favourable team trust climate [9,10,15–17,30,31,34,36].	Individual → team; governance is a contextual condition. Specify the shared referent and initial mean and dispersion; compliance is not trust.	With valid team measures, governance predicts neither trust-climate change nor convergence over time.
P2. Competence enactment	The relationship between members' social competences and later team relational coordination is stronger where work design provides reciprocal cross-role interaction opportunities [18–20,37,38].	Individual → interaction → team. Assess complementary role contributions and observed coordination; sustainable outcomes are downstream tests.	Competence predicts coordination equally across interaction opportunities, or the predicted competence-by-opportunity relationship is absent.
P3. Belonging with uniqueness	Felt belonging predicts later employee voice more strongly where the team's inclusive climate recognises uniqueness and legitimate dissent [24,39–42,44–47].	Individual relationship moderated by team climate. Adjust for prior voice; durable participation is a secondary implication.	Belonging predicts voice equally where uniqueness and dissent are protected and where they are penalised.
P4. Joint psychological-safety formation	The joint configuration of trust climate, enacted relational coordination, and inclusive climate predicts later team psychological safety beyond their separate additive effects [21,22,48–52].	Team-level test with prior safety controlled. Prespecify the joint term; voice, learning, knowledge sharing, and repair are downstream outcomes. Compare direct, parallel, selective-mediation, reciprocal, and reverse-order alternatives separately.	The prespecified joint term adds no meaningful explanatory value beyond additive effects, or strength in one foundation fully compensates for failure in another.
P5. Contextual asymmetry	For otherwise comparable employees, team psychological safety predicts later individual voice less strongly under insecure employment or low organisational status [9,10,12,14,43,46,47,50,54].	Cross-level moderation. Prespecify contract or status groups and prior voice; other inequalities are extension tests.	Adequately powered, measurement-invariant comparisons support equivalent safety-to-voice relationships across the specified groups.
P6. Recursive durability	Following comparable relational breaches, accountable repair predicts recovery in later referent-specific trust relative to unresolved breaches, beyond prior trust [5,33,35,45,53,57,58].	Repeated individual or dyadic observations; team inference requires justified emergence. Belonging and durable capability are secondary outcomes.	Event-based longitudinal evidence shows no later trust recovery attributable to repair beyond prior trust and breach severity.

P4 concerns the formation of psychological safety, not the separate claim that safety mediates all downstream effects. Tests should prespecify the functional form of the joint configuration, temporal lag, measurement invariance, and a minimum effect of theoretical interest. A non-significant result alone is not decisive falsification when power, reliability, or aggregation is inadequate. Conversely, positive main effects alone do not establish the proposed configurational contribution.

6. Discussion

6.1. Contribution to Social Sustainability and Industrial–Organisational Psychology

The review addresses four risks that frequently weaken conceptual syntheses. First, configurational distinctiveness is specified through contrasting predictions and can be assessed against the nearest models. Second, the review method is documented through a retrospective seed-corpus audit with incomplete original search provenance, an executed public update, a non-empty candidate log, transparent index verification, and documented screening decisions. Third, constructs are assigned to levels with composition, compilation, and contextual-constraint rules. Fourth, every proposition is tied to an evidence cluster, inferential bridge, boundary condition, alternative interpretation, and indicative falsification test, while the inferential status of the bridge is kept separate from direct source support. The resulting contribution is therefore a middle-range explanation of relational conversion rather than a descriptive list of positive workplace variables.

For social sustainability, RFSWL clarifies why relational quality is not only a resource for performance but a condition of whether work preserves voice, dignity, health, capability, and participation over time. Its distributional test is especially important: a workplace cannot be judged socially sustainable solely from favourable mean engagement or climate scores if low-status, precarious, remote, or minoritised members carry systematically greater costs of speaking, connecting, or remaining employed. In this respect, the framework connects industrial–organisational psychology with the normative concerns of decent work, health and well-being, and reduced inequality without treating the Sustainable Development Goals as direct outcome measures [1].

Evaluation should accordingly examine whether relational benefits persist through change, whether health and valued work capabilities are preserved, and whether voice opportunities and repair costs are fairly distributed. Repeated outcome measures and subgroup comparisons are needed for these three judgements. Higher short-term performance or favourable mean relationship scores alone cannot establish social sustainability.

The framework also sharpens distinctions within I-O psychology. Trust concerns whether vulnerability is warranted in relation to a specified referent. Social competence concerns capacity and opportunity for reciprocal coordination and repair. Belonging concerns recognised membership without erasure of difference. Psychological safety concerns a shared team belief about interpersonal risk. These constructs may reinforce one another, but they should not be collapsed into a single climate or attitudinal mediator. Their alignment is an empirical question conditioned by governance and work design.

6.2. Research Agenda

The empirical priority is a multilevel longitudinal design. Employees should be nested within teams and organisations; trust referents should be separated; social competence should combine individual assessment with observed or network-based coordination; belonging should be measured together with uniqueness and inclusion climate; and psychological safety should be aggregated only after within-team agreement is established. At least three waves, intensive longitudinal measurement, or event-centred designs are needed to test feedback and breach–repair dynamics. Hybrid and algorithmically managed settings

provide strong tests because they vary visibility, monitoring, informal contact, and discretion. Distributional analyses should compare status, occupation, contract, work-location, and identity groups rather than rely only on average effects.

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies could test specific conversion steps rather than the entire framework at once. For example, voice-protection changes could be examined as moderators of the relationship between trust judgements and speaking behaviour; structured cross-role coordination could test whether social-competence repertoires become collective repair capacity; and inclusion interventions could be evaluated for whether they increase both belonging and legitimate dissent. Null findings would be theoretically informative where they identify missing boundary conditions or show that an assumed relational mechanism is redundant.

6.3. Implications for Sustainable Workplace Practice

The framework argues against isolated soft-skills interventions. Relational training may help, but it cannot offset arbitrary procedures, retaliation, unsafe workloads, insecure contracts, or opaque digital control. Sustainable relational capacity requires accountable governance, protected employee voice, opportunities for reciprocal coordination, inclusive norms that allow disagreement, and work design that preserves discretion and contact. These implications follow from the reviewed boundary conditions and are not evidence that the proposed interventions themselves have been tested as an RFSWL package. Evaluation should track not only engagement or productivity but also who feels safe, who belongs without assimilation, whose repair work is recognised, and whether relational resources persist over time.

Managers and organisational psychologists should therefore diagnose relational systems at multiple levels. Individual coaching may be appropriate when a capability gap is genuinely individual; team interventions are needed when interaction patterns are the problem; organisational redesign is required when sanctions, workload, or digital architecture suppress voice; and institutional measures matter when employment insecurity or occupational status determine who can risk disagreement. The practical value of RFSWL lies in preventing a structural problem from being misclassified as an employee deficit.

7. Limitations

The review is theory-building and auditable, not exhaustive. It begins from a reconstructed 70-source seed corpus rather than a retained machine export of the initial search and is restricted to English-language literature. The public update used publicly accessible discovery and full-text routes; it was not a direct authenticated Scopus or Web of Science record search. Index verification is journal-level and date-sensitive; a current Scopus list and a 2024 ESI snapshot do not conclusively establish all historical eligibility decisions or article-level indexing. An ESI absence is not proof of exclusion from the full Web of Science Core Collection. These checks cannot guarantee study quality. Requiring public full text may favour open-access literature. Initial screening and coding were performed by J.S., and coding was checked by all three authors. Author-team verification and the documented exclusion audit improve scrutiny but do not establish quantified inter-rater reliability or eliminate shared interpretive assumptions. The evidence base is heterogeneous, and the six propositions have not been tested together or established as a causal system. The model therefore contains author-proposed cross-level transitions that should be treated as hypotheses for future testing rather than as established mechanisms. Exact-name searching cannot establish absolute conceptual priority. RFSWL should therefore be treated as a bounded, contestable framework whose value depends on independent replication and empirical scrutiny.

These coverage restrictions may shape the theory itself. English-language selection, public availability, and dual-index eligibility for the update can privilege canonical organisational-psychology accounts and underrepresent the regional, critical, labour-process, worker-led, and grey literature. The theoretical contribution is therefore conditional on the comparison set examined; neither comprehensive coverage nor saturation is established.

The missing original search log limits reconstruction of the seed corpus, and the retrospectively formalised retention functions leave confirmation risk. The development history of candidate propositions is also incomplete. Although all three authors checked the coding, their shared theoretical perspective may still influence interpretation. Independent replication using a prospectively specified search and coding protocol would provide a further test of the synthesis.

8. Conclusions

The reviewed literature supports treating relational conditions as an important component of sustainable working life, but it does not establish that the proposed RFSWL sequence is a validated causal system. Trust concerns the conditions under which vulnerability becomes reasonable; social competences concern the capacity and opportunity to coordinate and repair; and belonging concerns recognised membership without erasure of difference. Their joint effects are proposed to emerge through interaction as team trust climate, relational coordination, inclusive climate, and psychological safety, while remaining conditional on governance, work design, employment security, digital control, and status relations. RFSWL adds a multilevel, recursive, distribution-sensitive, and failure-aware configuration to existing sustainable-work models. Its contribution is a testable explanation of relational conversion, not a claim that its constituent constructs are new. Its added value depends on evidence for non-compensation, cross-level decoupling, or distributional divergence beyond competing models, evaluated against temporal persistence, capability preservation, and distributive fairness.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su181910101/s1.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, J.S.; Methodology, J.S., A.Š. and D.B.-Š.; Validation, J.S., A.Š. and D.B.-Š.; Formal analysis, J.S.; Investigation, J.S., A.Š. and D.B.-Š.; Data curation, J.S.; Writing—original draft preparation, J.S.; Writing—review and editing, J.S., A.Š. and D.B.-Š.; Visualisation, J.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable. This study is a literature review and did not involve human participants, human data, animals, or biological materials.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The available review records are provided in the article and the Supplementary Materials (Sections S1–S14). The Supplementary Materials contain the dated public search strategy, candidate log, selection flow, starting-corpus audit, final analytical corpus, proposition traceability, evidence-status rules, extraction rules, and recorded source provenance. No direct authenticated Scopus or Web of Science export is claimed or represented as having been executed. Section S13 provides the coding-field specification, the three-author verification procedure (Table S15), and the coding and source-traceability matrix covering all 50 substantive publications (Table S16).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

Abbreviation	Definition
I-O psychology	Industrial–organisational psychology
OA	Open access
RFSWL	Relational Foundations of Sustainable Working Life
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

References

1. United Nations. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; A/RES/70/1; United Nations: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
2. Boström, M. A missing pillar? Challenges in theorizing and practicing social sustainability: Introduction to the special issue. *Sustain. Sci. Pract. Policy* **2012**, *8*, 3–14. [CrossRef]
3. Kobal Grum, D.; Babnik, K. The psychological concept of social sustainability in the workplace from the perspective of sustainable goals: A systematic review. *Front. Psychol.* **2022**, *13*, 942204. [CrossRef]
4. Nilsson, K. A sustainable working life for all ages—The swAge-model. *Appl. Ergon.* **2020**, *86*, 103082. [CrossRef]
5. Ropponen, A.; Wang, M.; Narusyte, J.; Silventoinen, K.; Böckerman, P.; Svedberg, P. Sustainable working life in a Swedish twin cohort—A definition paper with sample overview. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 5817. [CrossRef]
6. van der Klink, J.J.L.; Bültmann, U.; Burdorf, A.; Schaufeli, W.B.; Zijlstra, F.R.H.; Abma, F.I.; Brouwer, S.; van der Wilt, G.J. Sustainable employability: Definition, conceptualization, and implications: A perspective based on the capability approach. *Scand. J. Work Environ. Health* **2016**, *42*, 71–79. [CrossRef]
7. Grant, A.M.; Parker, S.K. Redesigning work design theories: The rise of relational and proactive perspectives. *Acad. Manag. Ann.* **2009**, *3*, 317–375. [CrossRef]
8. Joyce, S.; Umney, C.; Whittaker, X.; Stuart, M. New social relations of digital technology and the future of work: Beyond technological determinism. *New Technol. Work Employ.* **2023**, *38*, 145–161. [CrossRef]
9. Kalleberg, A.L. Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* **2009**, *74*, 1–22. [CrossRef]
10. Kellogg, K.C.; Valentine, M.A.; Christin, A. Algorithms at work: The new contested terrain of control. *Acad. Manag. Ann.* **2020**, *14*, 366–410. [CrossRef]
11. Parker, S.K.; Grote, G. Automation, algorithms, and beyond: Why work design matters more than ever in a digital world. *Appl. Psychol.* **2022**, *71*, 1171–1204. [CrossRef]
12. Van Zoonen, W.; Sivunen, A.E. The impact of remote work and mediated communication frequency on isolation and psychological distress. *Eur. J. Work Organ. Psychol.* **2022**, *31*, 610–621. [CrossRef]
13. Wang, B.; Liu, Y.; Qian, J.; Parker, S.K. Achieving effective remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic: A work design perspective. *Appl. Psychol.* **2021**, *70*, 16–59. [CrossRef]
14. Yang, L.; Holtz, D.; Jaffe, S.; Suri, S.; Sinha, S.; Weston, J.; Joyce, C.; Shah, N.P.; Sherman, K.; Hecht, B.; et al. The effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers. *Nat. Hum. Behav.* **2022**, *6*, 43–54. [CrossRef]
15. Costa, A.C.; Fulmer, C.A.; Anderson, N.R. Trust in work teams: An integrative review, multilevel model, and future directions. *J. Organ. Behav.* **2018**, *39*, 169–184. [CrossRef]
16. Fulmer, C.A.; Gelfand, M.J. At what level and in whom we trust: Trust across multiple organizational levels. *J. Manag.* **2012**, *38*, 1167–1230. [CrossRef]
17. Salanova, M.; Acosta-Antognoni, H.; Llorens, S.; Le Blanc, P. We trust you! A multilevel-multireferent model based on organizational trust to explain performance. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 4241. [CrossRef]
18. Bolton, R.; Logan, C.; Gittell, J.H. Revisiting relational coordination: A systematic review. *J. Appl. Behav. Sci.* **2021**, *57*, 290–322. [CrossRef]
19. Gittell, J.H. Coordinating mechanisms in care provider groups: Relational coordination as a mediator and input uncertainty as a moderator of performance effects. *Manag. Sci.* **2002**, *48*, 1408–1426. [CrossRef]
20. Riggio, R.E. Assessment of basic social skills. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* **1986**, *51*, 649–660. [CrossRef]
21. Dong, R.K.; Li, X.; Hernan, B.R. Psychological safety and psychosocial safety climate in workplace: A bibliometric analysis and systematic review towards a research agenda. *J. Saf. Res.* **2024**, *91*, 1–19. [CrossRef]
22. Edmondson, A. Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Adm. Sci. Q.* **1999**, *44*, 350–383. [CrossRef]
23. Jansen, W.S.; Otten, S.; van der Zee, K.I.; Jans, L. Inclusion: Conceptualization and measurement. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* **2014**, *44*, 370–385. [CrossRef]

24. Shore, L.M.; Randel, A.E.; Chung, B.G.; Dean, M.A.; Ehrhart, K.H.; Singh, G. Inclusion and diversity in work groups: A review and model for future research. *J. Manag.* **2011**, *37*, 1262–1289. [CrossRef]
25. Snyder, H. Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *J. Bus. Res.* **2019**, *104*, 333–339. [CrossRef]
26. Torraco, R.J. Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. *Hum. Resour. Dev. Rev.* **2005**, *4*, 356–367. [CrossRef]
27. Whittemore, R.; Knafl, K. The integrative review: Updated methodology. *J. Adv. Nurs.* **2005**, *52*, 546–553. [CrossRef]
28. McGowan, J.; Sampson, M.; Salzwedel, D.M.; Cogo, E.; Foerster, V.; Lefebvre, C. PRESS peer review of electronic search strategies: 2015 guideline statement. *J. Clin. Epidemiol.* **2016**, *75*, 40–46. [CrossRef]
29. Rethlefsen, M.L.; Kirtley, S.; Waffenschmidt, S.; Ayala, A.P.; Moher, D.; Page, M.J.; Koffel, J.B.; PRISMA-S Group. PRISMA-S: An extension to the PRISMA Statement for reporting literature searches in systematic reviews. *Syst. Rev.* **2021**, *10*, 39. [CrossRef]
30. Mayer, R.C.; Davis, J.H.; Schoorman, F.D. An integrative model of organizational trust. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **1995**, *20*, 709–734. [CrossRef]
31. Rousseau, D.M.; Sitkin, S.B.; Burt, R.S.; Camerer, C. Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **1998**, *23*, 393–404. [CrossRef]
32. McAllister, D.J. Affect- and cognition-based trust as foundations for interpersonal cooperation in organizations. *Acad. Manag. J.* **1995**, *38*, 24–59. [CrossRef]
33. Dirks, K.T.; de Jong, B. Trust within the workplace: A review of two waves of research and a glimpse of the third. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* **2022**, *9*, 247–276. [CrossRef]
34. Olvera, J.; Acosta-Antognoni, H.; Llorens, S.; Salanova, M. Sources of trust in the healthcare context: A multilevel relationship with work engagement and organisational outcomes. *Front. Psychol.* **2024**, *15*, 1438872. [CrossRef]
35. Lewicki, R.J.; McAllister, D.J.; Bies, R.J. Trust and distrust: New relationships and realities. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **1998**, *23*, 438–458. [CrossRef]
36. Dheer, R.J.S.; Terpstra-Tong, J.; Treviño, L.; Ralston, D.A.; Bozionelos, N.; Tjemkes, B.; Sigala Paparella, L.; Crowley-Henry, M.; Burns, C.; Froese, F.; et al. Impact of organizational culture on employee psychological safety perception: The pivotal role of trust in top management across 18 societies. *Int. Bus. Rev.* **2026**, *35*, 102523. [CrossRef]
37. Mehler, M.; Balint, E.; Gralla, M.; Pößnecker, T.; Gast, M.; Hölzer, M.; Kösters, M.; Gündel, H. Training emotional competencies at the workplace: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychol.* **2024**, *12*, 718. [CrossRef]
38. Carmeli, A.; Brueller, D.; Dutton, J.E. Learning behaviours in the workplace: The role of high-quality interpersonal relationships and psychological safety. *Syst. Res. Behav. Sci.* **2009**, *26*, 81–98. [CrossRef]
39. Baumeister, R.F.; Leary, M.R. The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychol. Bull.* **1995**, *117*, 497–529. [CrossRef]
40. Allen, K.-A.; Kern, M.L.; Rozek, C.S.; McInerney, D.M.; Slavich, G.M. Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Aust. J. Psychol.* **2021**, *73*, 87–102. [CrossRef]
41. Randel, A.E.; Galvin, B.M.; Shore, L.M.; Ehrhart, K.H.; Chung, B.G.; Dean, M.A.; Kedharnath, U. Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Hum. Resour. Manag. Rev.* **2018**, *28*, 190–203. [CrossRef]
42. Shore, L.M.; Cleveland, J.N.; Sanchez, D. Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Hum. Resour. Manag. Rev.* **2018**, *28*, 176–189. [CrossRef]
43. Georgeac, O.A.M.; Rattan, A. The business case for diversity backfires: Detrimental effects of organizations' instrumental diversity rhetoric for underrepresented group members' sense of belonging. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* **2023**, *124*, 69–108. [CrossRef]
44. Veli Korkmaz, A.; van Engen, M.L.; Knappert, L.; Schalk, R. About and beyond leading uniqueness and belongingness: A systematic review of inclusive leadership research. *Hum. Resour. Manag. Rev.* **2022**, *32*, 100894. [CrossRef]
45. Randel, A.E. Inclusion in the workplace: A review and research agenda. *Group Organ. Manag.* **2025**, *50*, 119–162. [CrossRef]
46. Thissen, L.; Biermann-Teuscher, D.; Horstman, K.; Meershoek, A. (Un)belonging at work: An overlooked ingredient of workplace health. *Health Promot. Int.* **2023**, *38*, daad061. [CrossRef]
47. Fujimoto, Y.; Ferdous, A.; Wali, F. Integrative resource model of workplace inclusion for reduced inequality: Conservation of resources perspective. *J. Bus. Ethics* **2023**, *187*, 301–323. [CrossRef]
48. Edmondson, A.C.; Bransby, D.P. Psychological safety comes of age: Observed themes in an established literature. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* **2023**, *10*, 55–78. [CrossRef]
49. Frazier, M.L.; Fainshmidt, S.; Klinger, R.L.; Pezeshkan, A.; Vracheva, V. Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension. *Pers. Psychol.* **2017**, *70*, 113–165. [CrossRef]
50. Nembhard, I.M.; Edmondson, A.C. Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts in health care teams. *J. Organ. Behav.* **2006**, *27*, 941–966. [CrossRef]
51. Morrison, E.W. Employee voice and silence: Taking stock a decade later. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* **2023**, *10*, 79–107. [CrossRef]

52. Li, T.; Tang, N. Inclusive leadership and innovative performance: A multi-level mediation model of psychological safety. *Front. Psychol.* **2022**, *13*, 934831. [CrossRef]
53. Meerman, J.; van Casteren, P.A.J.; Brouwers, E.P.M.; van Dam, A.; van der Klink, J.J.L. A capability perspective on sustainable employability: A Dutch focus group study on organizational, work and personal conversion factors. *PLoS ONE* **2022**, *17*, e0274000. [CrossRef]
54. Gyllensten, K.; Torén, K.; Hagberg, M.; Söderberg, M. A sustainable working life in the car manufacturing industry: The role of psychosocial factors, gender and occupation. *PLoS ONE* **2020**, *15*, e0233009. [CrossRef]
55. Chan, D. Functional relations among constructs in the same content domain at different levels of analysis: A typology of composition models. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **1998**, *83*, 234–246. [CrossRef]
56. Kozlowski, S.W.J.; Klein, K.J. A multilevel approach to theory and research in organizations: Contextual, temporal, and emergent processes. In *Multilevel Theory, Research, and Methods in Organizations: Foundations, Extensions, and New Directions*; Klein, K.J., Kozlowski, S.W.J., Eds.; Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, USA, 2000; pp. 3–90.
57. Kira, M.; van Eijnatten, F.M.; Balkin, D.B. Crafting sustainable work: Development of personal resources. *J. Organ. Change Manag.* **2010**, *23*, 616–632. [CrossRef]
58. Hartmann, S.; Weiss, M.; Newman, A.; Hoegl, M. Resilience in the workplace: A multilevel review and synthesis. *Appl. Psychol.* **2020**, *69*, 913–959. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.