The Fearless Organization
Creating psychologically safety in the workplace for Learning Innovation and Growth

Amy Edmondson

- For knowledge work to flourish the workplace must be one where people feel able to share their knowledge – sharing concerns, questions, mistakes and half formed ideas.
- Teaming is the art of communicating and coordinating with people across boundaries of all kinds – expertise, status, distance etc. Most effective team work happens best in a psychologically safe workplace.
- In a psychologically safe workplace people are not hindered by interpersonal fear. They feel willing and able to take inherent interpersonal risks of candor.
- The fearless organization is one in which interpersonal fear is minimized so that team and organizational performance can be maximized in a knowledge intensive world.
- Psychological safety is broadly defined as a climate in which people are comfortable in expressing and being themselves. When people have psychological safety at work, they feel comfortable in sharing concerns and mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution.
- Psychological safety is not a personality difference but rather a feature of the workplace that leaders can and must help create.
- Fear may have once acted to motivate assembly line workers on the factory floor – jobs that reward individual speed and accuracy in completing repetitive tasks. For jobs where learning and collaboration is required for success, fear is not an effective motivator.
- Fear inhibits learning – impairs analytical thinking, creative insight and problem solving.
- Psychological safety describes a belief that neither the formal nor informal consequences of interpersonal risks, like asking for help or admitting a failure will be punitive.
- Working in a psychologically safe environment does not mean that people always agree with one another for the sake of being nice – nor it is about unequivocal praise or unconditional support.
- Psychological safety is about candor about make it possible for productive disagreement and free exchange of ideas.
- Psychological safety enables people on different sides of a conflict to speak candidly about what’s bothering them.
- Psychological safety sets the stage for more honest, more challenging, more collaborative and more effective work environment.

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Psychological safety is not the only factor that leads to high performance. Psychological safety takes the foot off the brakes that keep people from achieving what’s possible. It is not the fuel that powers the car.

In any organizational setting, leaders have two vital tasks – one build psychological safety to spur learning and avoid preventable failures and two – set high standards and enable people to reach them.

 Leaders must motivate people to do their very best work by inspiring them, coaching them, providing feedback, and making excellence a rewarding experience.

As a leader you have to be willing to be vulnerable and be open about your mistakes so others feel safe to report their own.

As a leader, “if you think you have all the answers, you should quit – because you are going to be wrong.”

Amy Edmondson’s research was organized into five broad categories

- Extent to which psychological safety is lacking in workplaces
- Relationships between psychological safety and learning
- Relationships between psychological safety and performance
- Relationships between psychological safety and employee engagement
- “Moderator studies” – psychological safety alters a relationship between another team attribute and outcome such as team performance

Epidemic of silence

- People often hold back even when they believe that what they have to say could be important for the organization, for the customer, or for themselves
- Those who fail to speak up often report regret or pain. Some wish they had spoken up
- In some cases, people remained silent as they did not want to be seen in a bad light. In some, it was a fear of retaliation
- Two most frequently mentioned reasons for remaining silent were fear or being viewed or labeled negatively and two fear of damaging work relationships

Work environment that supports learning
Studies find that psychological safety can exist and work and that people do speak up to offer ideas, report errors and exhibit what we call “learning behaviour.”

The challenge is one of asking people to perform the highest quality work and yet be willing to take about errors that do occur.

Two types of learning behaviour
- **Learn what** – reading literature to catch up with the latest research findings
- **Learn how** – Team based learning – sharing knowledge, offering suggestions and brainstorming better approaches

**Reduce work arounds** – work arounds are shortcuts that people take at work when they confront a problem.
- A workaround accomplishes the immediate goal but does nothing to diagnose the problem that triggered the work around in the first place
- The problem with work arounds is that though they seem to get the job done, creates new subtle problems
- Work arounds delay or prevent process improvement
- Psychological safety makes it easier for people to speak about problems and improve work processes rather than engaging in counterproductive workarounds

A psychological safe work place helped people overcome a lack of confidence – one is able to speak up more even with less confidence

**Psychological safety and Performance**
- Teams with high psychological safety showed higher performance – both on a self-rating scale and when evaluated by superiors.
- Research also shows a relationship between psychological safety and innovation – members were able to offer their ideas without fear of being rejected or embarrassed
- Google’s Project Aristotle found that psychological safety was the critical factor that explained why some teams outperformed others.

**Psychological safety and engaged employees**
- Engagement is defined as to the extent to which an employees feels passionate about the job and committed to the organization.
- Studies have shown that psychological safety is fostered by supportive relationships with co-workers. Similarly trust in top management also led to psychological safety

**Psychological safety as the extra ingredient**
- Psychological safety has been found to help teams overcome the challenges of geographic dispersion, put conflict to good use and leverage diversity.
- Psychological safety acts as moderator that makes other relationships weaker or stronger.

**Unreachable target goals, a command and control hierarchy that motivates by fear and people afraid to lose their jobs if they fail – symptoms of lack of psychological safety**

**In today’s VUCA world, this is not a script for good business – and often invites painfully public failure – like what happened to Volkswagen and Wells Fargo.**

**Leaders who welcome only good news create fear that blocks them from hearing the truth.**

**A lack of psychological safety can create an illusion of success that turns into serious business failures.**
Early information about shortcomings can nearly always mitigate the size and impact of a future large-scale failure

Link to Articles, Sketch notes and Videos

1. Here is a link to document by Joshua Kirievsky, Heidi Helfand and Ashley Johnson on Psychological safety and High Performance --http://modernagile.org/safety/

Here are a few sketch notes based on the book

Courtesy : Corina Laabs @corinnalaabs
Psychological Safety (PS) is the key trait of high-performing teams. It describes a belief that you will not be punished for asking for help or admitting a failure – neither informally e.g. by being ridiculed nor formally e.g. by being written up.

PS shapes how often we engage in learning behaviors such as sharing information, experimenting, double-checking when in doubt, suggesting improvements, and asking questions – both with your peers and when a boss is present.

**What is Psychological Safety?**

Being able to show your whole self without fear of negative consequences

Want to build a high-performing team? Establish Psychological Safety!

Speaking up can be hard. You might be ignored or humiliated, you make yourself vulnerable. Silence pays off immediately: there is no risk of losing face. And there is seemingly no downside: since nobody knows you are holding back. But long-term you may grow resentful and detached.

Speaking up pays off in the long run: being able to bring your whole self to work, innovate, make fewer errors and improve for the organization. PS makes it more likely that someone will speak up.

It is a trait of your immediate team. An organization can make PS more likely to evolve but it cannot "have" PS. PS lives at the team level and is shaped by the behavior team leaders and team members model.

PS does not mean that everybody is always comfortable. It makes it possible to talk about hard and controversial topics, such as saying that you think someone made a mistake or admitting that you don’t know something.

Neither does PS mean that meetings take longer because more people speak. Actually, meetings can conclude sooner because there is less covert beating around the bush. Doubts and concerns are voiced openly which leads to faster decisions. In an environment with PS candor is allowed and expected.

To become a high-performing team everyone needs to learn all the time. Fear inhibits learning. Thus PS is the enabling factor for high-performance. It is not enough, but other factors such as clear goals, mutual accountability, and purpose do not help unless there is PS.

*“Psychological Safety takes off the brakes that keep people from achieving what’s possible. But it’s not the fuel that powers the car.”* – Amy Edmonson

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**WALL-SKILLS**

Based on "The Fearless Organization" by Amy Edmonson

Designed by Wall-Skills.com - Spread Knowledge with 1-Pagers

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**Courtesy:** Corinna Baldauf @findingmarbles
WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT
FROM “THE FEARLESS ORGANIZATION” BY AMY C EDMONSON

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS
NOT ABOUT BEING NICE
WORKING IN A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT DOES NOT MEAN THAT PEOPLE ALWAYS AGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER FOR THE SAKE OF BEING NICE.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS ABOUT CANDOR & PRODUCTIVE DISAGREEMENT & FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS
NOT A PERSONALITY FACTOR
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT CORRELATED WITH INTROVERSION OR EXTRAVERSION

IN A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT, PEOPLE WILL OFFER IDEAS & VOICE THEIR CONCERNS REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY TEND TO INTROVERSION OR EXTRAVERSION.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS
NOT JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR TRUST
TRUST REFERS TO INTERACTIONS BETWEEN TWO INDIVIDUALS. PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS EXPERIENCED AT A GROUP LEVEL.

TRUST IS ABOUT GIVING OTHERS THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY RELATES TO WHETHER OTHERS WILL GIVE YOU THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT WHEN, FOR INSTANCE, YOU HAVE ASKED FOR HELP OR ADMITTED A MISTAKE.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS
NOT ABOUT LOWERING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS ARE TWO SEPARATE, EQUALLY IMPORTANT, DIMENSIONS. BOTH OF WHICH AFFECT TEAM & ORGANIZATION PERFORMANCE IN A COMPLEX & INTERDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENT.

Courtesy: Adrien Liard @Adrien_Liard
Link to Videos on Psychological safety and Fearless organization

1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m00QU4UnphQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m00QU4UnphQ) - Amy C. Edmondson Talk on Psychological Safety
2. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAhD_P94AIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAhD_P94AIQ) - The Fearless Organization - Interview with Amy C. Edmondson
3. [https://www.workandlifepodcast.com/blog/ae](https://www.workandlifepodcast.com/blog/ae) - Podcast
4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8&feature=youtu.be) – TED Talk
5. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEJRyiGjU8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEJRyiGjU8) - #81 PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK - AMY C. EDMONDSON | Being Human

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