





# Introduction to psychological safety

A prerequisite for team learning and high performance



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**SUNRISE**  **MOVEMENT**



**SHOWING UP FOR  
RACIAL JUSTICE**





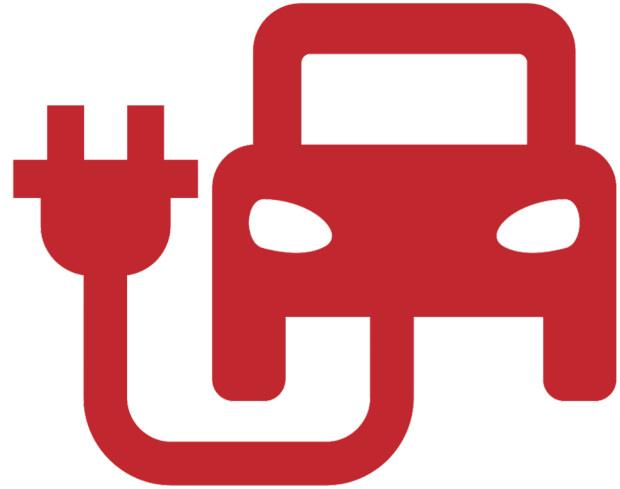
**We're a Nerdy Movement Study Group**

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# The problem



## Building and wielding power is complex, not complicated



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**In complex environments, the challenge is often “can we learn fast enough to win?”**

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**One solution: Increase  
psychological safety to  
unlock team learning and  
performance**



How do you build psychological safety?



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Get ready:

**How do you build  
psychological  
safety?**

**How do you build psychological safety?**



# Psychological safety is:

The **shared belief**, held by its members, that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.

A sense of confidence that the team **will not embarrass, reject or punish someone** for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

A team climate characterized by **interpersonal trust and mutual respect** in which people are comfortable being themselves

Adapted from Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams  
by Amy Edmondson (1999)

# Psychological safety is not:

**Freedom from discomfort** or the right to willfully or recklessly cause others discomfort or harm.

**Safety from discomfort** – quite the opposite: it means there's safety in discomfort.

**Zero consequences** for interpersonal harm

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**Psychological safety is a prerequisite for team learning, especially in complex, uncertain and interdependent environments.**

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**On your own:  
Start the Psychological Safety  
Leadership Self-Assessment.**

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**Some failures  
should be  
celebrated**



# Spectrum of reasons for failure

Deviance  
Inattention  
Lack of ability  
Process inadequacy  
Task challenge  
Process complexity  
Uncertainty  
Hypothesis testing  
Exploratory testing

**Preventable failure**

**Complex failure**

**Intelligent failure**

**Blameworthy\***

**Praiseworthy**

\*but be thoughtful about where the blame lies.

Adapted from Amy Edmondson  
Strategies for Learning from Failure (2011)

# Types of failure

Preventable failure

Complex failure

Intelligent failure

<b>Definition</b>	Deviations from known processes that produce unwanted outcomes
<b>Common causes</b>	Behavior, skill, and attention deficiencies
<b>Descriptive term</b>	Process deviation

# Types of failure

## Preventable failure

## Complex failure

## Intelligent failure

<b>Definition</b>	Deviations from known processes that produce unwanted outcomes	Unique and novel combinations of events give rise to unwanted outcomes
<b>Common causes</b>	Behavior, skill, and attention deficiencies	Complexity, variability, and novel factors impose on familiar situations
<b>Descriptive term</b>	Process deviation	System breakdown

# Types of failure

## Preventable failure

## Complex failure

## Intelligent failure

	Preventable failure	Complex failure	Intelligent failure
<b>Definition</b>	Deviations from known processes that produce unwanted outcomes	Unique and novel combinations of events give rise to unwanted outcomes	Novel forays that into new territory that lead to unwanted outcomes
<b>Common causes</b>	Behavior, skill, and attention deficiencies	Complexity, variability, and novel factors impose on familiar situations	Uncertainty, experimentation, and risk taking
<b>Descriptive term</b>	Process deviation	System breakdown	Unsuccessful trial

# Productive responses to failure

## Preventable failure

Training  
Retraining  
Process improvement  
System redesign  
Sanctions, if repeated or otherwise blameworthy actions are found

## Complex failure

Failure analysis from diverse perspectives  
Identification of risk factors to address  
System improvement

## Intelligent failure

Failure parties  
Failure awards  
Thoughtful analysis of results to figure out implications  
Brainstorming of new hypotheses  
Design of next steps or additional experiments

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## Three steps to increase psychological safety

1. Setting the stage
2. Inviting participation
3. Responding productively

## — **Setting the stage**

Set expectations about failure with reference to complexity and innovation

Emphasize the purpose of the work

Frame the work as a learning challenge rather than execution

Stress that input is required and that it is always possible to do better

Acknowledge your own fallibility

Step in if team members talk negatively about each other and make it clear that negativity is not tolerated

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## Inviting participation

Practice active listening

Be present and focus on the conversation

Ask a lot of open-ended questions

Share information about your own work style and preferences and invite your team members to do the same

Be available and approachable

Don't interrupt or allow interruptions when somebody is talking

Build rapport

Ask for and give feedback

Hold team activities aimed at uncovering what worries them





# Responding productively

Express appreciation

Destigmatize failure

Sanction clear violations

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## Learn more

Join the *We're a Nerdy Movement Study Group*.

“How fearless organizations succeed” by Amy Edmondson

“Why Is It So Hard to Speak Up at Work?” by Ruchika Tulshyan

*The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth* by Amy Edmondson

Join the Climate Advocacy Lab. It's free and you don't need to work on climate issues.

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