Introduction to psychological safety

A prerequisite for team learning and high performance

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We’re a Nerdy Movement Study Group
The problem
Building and wielding power is complex, not complicated
In complex environments, the challenge is often “can we learn fast enough to win?”
One solution: Increase psychological safety to unlock team learning and performance
How do you build psychological safety?
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

Adapted from the Weaponisation of Psychological Safety, Tom Geraghty
Psychological safety is a prerequisite for team learning, especially in complex, uncertain and interdependent environments.
On your own: 
Start the Psychological Safety Leadership Self-Assessment.
Some failures should be celebrated
Spectrum of reasons for failure

Preventable failure  Complex failure  Intelligent failure

Blameworthy*

*but be thoughtful about where the blame lies.

Praiseworthy

Adapted from Amy Edmondson
Strategies for Learning from Failure (2011)
# Types of failure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Intelligent failure</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Unique and novel combinations of events give rise to unwanted outcomes</td>
<td>Novel forays that into new territory that lead to unwanted outcomes</td>
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Adapted from Amy Edmondson  The Fearless Organization (2018)
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<td>Unsuccessful trial</td>
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Adapted from Amy Edmondson  *The Fearless Organization* (2018)
# Productive responses to failure

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<td>Training</td>
<td>Failure analysis from diverse perspectives</td>
<td>Failure parties</td>
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<td>Retraining</td>
<td>Identification of risk factors to address</td>
<td>Failure awards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process improvement</td>
<td>System improvement</td>
<td>Thoughtful analysis of results to figure out implications</td>
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<td>System redesign</td>
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<td>Brainstorming of new hypotheses</td>
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<td>Sanctions, if repeated or otherwise blameworthy actions are found</td>
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<td>Design of next steps or additional experiments</td>
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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
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
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

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