

Foster Psychological Safety in Teams

Brief Summary

Psychological safety, first introduced as a construct by Harvard researcher Amy Edmondson, is the belief that you won't experience negative consequences for speaking up to share ideas, concerns, questions, or for making honest mistakes. It's "[an environment of rewarded vulnerability](#)" in [4 types of behavior](#): connecting, learning, contributing & challenging. Without rewarded vulnerability, you can't bring your whole self to work, learn with intellectual bravery, contribute at full capacity, or challenge the status quo. A [study](#) shows that the key to diverse teams working better together and tapping the potential of diversity is to create a psychologically safe environment. Psychological safety is a [critical element](#) of higher performance and greater engagement.

Challenge

Psychological safety is sometimes misconstrued; it isn't a [shield from accountability](#), it isn't niceness, coddling, consensus decision making, unearned autonomy, political correctness, or rhetorical reassurance. [Three myths companies](#) must overcome about psychological safety:

1. They already have psychological safety (fact: only 43% of employees report a positive climate within their team).
2. It's senior leadership's responsibility to create, & maintain psychological safety (fact: it must be embraced by every team leader, at every level).
3. Once created, psychological safety will always exist (fact: it isn't only rare, but fragile).

Recommendation

[McKinsey](#) found that leaders can increase team members' psychological safety by demonstrating specific leadership styles: "Consultative" & "Supportive" and avoiding others: "Authoritative" & "Challenging". As a leader, follow [these behaviors](#) to build psychological safety:

1. **Empathy**: show care and understand employees' feelings; value their perspectives and opinions.
2. **Engagement**: be fully present during meetings, listen actively.
3. **Trust**: use collaborative and engaging language with a focus on solutions.
4. **Collaboration**: consult your team, ask for feedback.
5. **Empowerment**: invite your team to challenge ideas and share their perspectives.

Proposed Actions

1. Rise psychological safety to the level of a **strategic objective** rather than a "nice-to-have." [Connect Psych Safety to ESG](#) in your organization - it maximizes human capital, increases retention and innovation, and reduces risk.
2. [Foster connections](#), including ERGs/affinity groups and buddy/ mentorship programs. Ensure regular 1:1 **Check ins**, not only with your direct reports, but those across your "pyramid".
3. [Frame meetings](#) as opportunities for information-sharing and **differences** as a source of value; welcome dissent without judgment through dialogue, not debate. Encourage **outside-the-box thinking**. Promote a **growth mindset** and treat mistakes as learning opportunities
4. Expect & exhibit [ethical decision making & integrity](#): prohibit retaliation against "upstanders" & ensure employees have a safe channel for raising concerns.

Valued Guidance

Read



Forbes: [How To Cultivate Psychological Safety And Create More Effective Teams](#)

BetterUp: [Why psychological safety at work matters](#)

HBR: [4 Steps to Boost Psychological Safety at Your Workplace](#)

Watch / Listen



TEDx Talks: [Building a psychologically safe workplace](#)

HBR: [Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace](#)

Learn / Study



LinkedIn: [Psychological Safety: Clear Blocks](#), by Amy Edmondson

Amy Edmondson: [The Fearless Organization](#)

McKinsey: [Psychological safety and the critical role of leadership development](#)



About the Author

[Betsy Bagley](#) is Pulsely's Co-Founder and DEI Director.