

VISION EXPO

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY  
IN THE WORKPLACE

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WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

Research reveals *psychological* pain has a deeper and longer-lasting impact compared to *physical* pain.<sup>3</sup>

*"Over time, the pain associated with a physical attack is difficult or impossible to recall. The memory of social rejection, however, even many years after the fact, can elicit the same strength of emotion as it did at the time of the event."*<sup>4</sup>

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IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFETY

A 2017 Gallup® survey revealed only **3 in 10** US workers strongly agreed their opinions matter in the workplace.<sup>8</sup>

Workplaces in which **6 in 10** workers felt their opinions mattered have a:

- 27% reduction in turnover
- 40% reduction in safety incidents
- 12% increase in productivity<sup>9</sup>

Psychologically Safe environments are better for employees,  
AND better for business.

GALLUP POLL

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

Psychological safety is comprised of several parts- which are weighted *differently* by each individual.

- Predictability** – need for **security** and consistency
- Approval** – need to be **well-regarded & belong**
- Control** – need for **autonomy**
- Equity** – need to feel environment is **fair**



Humans have a "negativity bias" that draws our attention to threat and danger above all else.<sup>10</sup> The amygdala constantly watches for threats of all kind (including psychological).<sup>11</sup>

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

**PREDICTABILITY – need for security and consistency**

Our brains are prediction machines. Although predictability may make for a boring movie, in real life it conserves the brain's resources and makes us feel "safe."<sup>15</sup>

You probably wouldn't be comfortable following *this* vehicle on your drive to the office.

Sudden changes *at* the office can also cause discomfort as well.

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

**PREDICTABILITY – need for security and consistency**

Individuals who have a **high need** for **PREDICTABILITY**...

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loyal and dependable</li> <li>Detail-oriented and consistent</li> <li>Quickly spot risks</li> </ul>	<p><b>VULNERABILITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uncomfortable with (and may resist) change</li> <li>Tendency to micromanage</li> <li>Requires reassurance regarding performance</li> </ul>
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Individuals who have a **low need** for **PREDICTABILITY**...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovative</li> <li>Generally self-confident</li> <li>Highly adaptive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes lacks follow-through</li> <li>May not always follow "proper procedures"</li> <li>Tendency to become bored and apathetic<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>
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**CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT**  
**PREDICTABILITY – need for security and consistency**

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **high need for PREDICTABILITY...**

- Always keep your promises
- Provide a lot of detail, and a procedure for everything
- Overcommunicate – give expectations and recognize potential risks
- Be willing to listen to- and answer- any and all questions
- Don't change too many things at once

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **low need for PREDICTABILITY...**

- Partner them with detail-oriented people who will be happy to "manage the mundane"
- Hold accountable to processes- but be open to "suggestions for improvement"
- Provide new challenges / areas of learning
- Do not micromanage<sup>18</sup>

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
**APPROVAL – need to be well-regarded and belong**

One of the largest studies into human behavior (1995) concluded:  
 "At present, it seems fair to conclude that human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a **need to belong.**"<sup>19</sup>

The study found individuals who felt lonely or ill-regarded suffered negative impacts to:

- Intelligence
- Emotional well-being
- Behavior
- Immunity (supported by numerous objective measurements)



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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
**APPROVAL – need to be well-regarded and belong**

Individuals who have a **high need for APPROVAL...**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>VULNERABILITIES</b>
Easily motivated	Easily discouraged
Charismatic and communicative	Uncomfortable with confrontation
Ambitious	Can become (extremely) defensive

Individuals who have a **low need for APPROVAL...**

Generally self-confident	Sometimes difficult to motivate
Comfortable delivering unpopular news	Uncomfortable with attention
Great team player	May appear to be unambitious

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**CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT**  
**APPROVAL – need to be well-regarded and belong**

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **high need for APPROVAL...**

- Recognition and praise go a long way- acknowledge their individual accomplishments
- Constructive feedback needs to be handled delicately and 1:1
- Avoid putting in situations where s/he has to implement an unpopular decision
- Motivate with status  
(titles are important)

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **low need for APPROVAL...**

- Authenticity and modesty are "safe zones-" acknowledge their contribution to the team
- Don't create situations where s/he is competing with teammates
- Use concrete (e.g., monetary) rewards- status is not a motivator  
(may be happy to stay in one position for years, but raises are still necessary)
- Avoid putting him/her in the spotlight, attention can be viewed as threatening

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
**CONTROL – need for autonomy**

In both animal and human studies, the inability to *control* our environment leads to:



- Sad mood
- Loss of interest
- Weight loss
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Worthlessness
- Indecisiveness / poor concentration
- Psychomotor problems

These happen to also be the symptoms of clinical depression.<sup>22</sup>  
 Everyone feels some level of need to have at least the perception of "control."

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
**CONTROL – need for autonomy**

Individuals who have a **high need for CONTROL...**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>VULNERABILITIES</b>
Self-motivated	Needs to do things "my way"
Enjoys making decisions	Can be impatient with team mates
Likes to manage people/processes	May not always "follow the rules"

Individuals who have a **low need for CONTROL...**

Very supportive of others	Can require a lot of direction
Gets "on board" quickly	Does not enjoy making decisions
Reliably "follows the rules"	Difficulty with expressing opinions

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**CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT**  
**CONTROL – need for autonomy**

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **high need** for **CONTROL**...

- Provide the objective- but allow freedom in how to achieve it
- Provide projects that can be accomplished independently
- Never, ever (ever, ever, ever) micromanage!
- Whenever possible, wait to be asked for feedback and direction

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **low need** for **CONTROL**...

- Provide adequate direction as to how an objective should be accomplished
- Don't force him/her to express an opinion unless it is absolutely necessary
- Provide projects that require teamwork
- Ensure s/he is comfortable before placement in a management position

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
**EQUITY – need to feel environment is fair**

Studies show the perception of unfairness triggers the anterior insular region of the brain (which also causes disgust when tasting bitter food that might be poisonous).<sup>24</sup>

The insula can interfere with the pre-frontal cortex. That is, when you perceive unfairness it becomes harder to control emotion.

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**COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
**EQUITY – need to feel environment is fair**

Individuals who have a **high need** for **EQUITY**...

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>VULNERABILITIES</b>
Tendency towards high EQ	Long memory for perceived wrongs
Strong sense of accountability	Desire for consensus may slow progress
Dependable team player	Can be overzealous in pursuit of fairness

Individuals who have a **low need** for **EQUITY**...

Very result-oriented	Tendency towards low EQ
Thick skinned / unemotional	May seem opportunistic
Motivated by successful outcomes	Can view people as a "means to an end"

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**CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT**  
**EQUITY – need to feel environment is fair**

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **high need for EQUITY...**

- Avoid favoritism (even the appearance of it) at all costs
- Make decision processes transparent as possible
- Motivate with rewards for adherence to the process
- Make sure everyone has a voice

Creating a safe environment for individuals who have a **low need for EQUITY...**

- Whenever possible, focus on the outcome- not the process
- Be careful when putting political correctness over results
- Motivate with result-oriented rewards
- Don't force participation in discussions about social issues

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**CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

This is where leadership comes in...  
 Rate your agreement on these questions from 1-5 (5 = completely agree).  
 Then ask your team to do the same...

1. On this team, I understand what is expected of me.
2. We value patient outcomes more than the volume of output.
3. If I make a mistake on this team, it is never held against me.
4. When something goes wrong, we work as a team to find the systemic cause.
5. All members of this team feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.
6. Members of this team never reject others for being different and nobody is left out.
7. It is safe for me to take a risk on this team.
8. It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help.
9. Nobody on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
10. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.<sup>28</sup>

**CULTURE**

Determine your averages, combine, and you have your **baseline...**  
 If the answer is "50," you should teach this course- if it is <50, proceed...

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**RECOMMENDED READING**

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
 The key to happy, high-performing people and teams  
 DAN RADECKI PHD, MA & LEONIE HULL  
 WITH JENNIFER MCCLOSKEY PHD & CHRISTOPHER ANSELMI

TIMOTHY R. CLARK  
**THE 4 STAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**  
 Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation

the **fearless** organization  
 Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth  
 Amy C. Edmondson  
 HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL  
 WILEY

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