

# Psychological Safety in the Workplace

Google recently published results from a three-year research project to find out what makes teams effective. After surveying and studying almost 200 teams, Google identified five key dynamics of effective teams with 'psychological safety' standing out dramatically as the most important dynamic. The study highlighted that it is not who is on the team that counts, but how the team works together.



## What is Psychological Safety?

The term psychological safety was coined by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson as "the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes".

In a team, psychological safety means team members feel safe to take interpersonal risks and feel confident that they won't be seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative or disruptive. They feel assured that no one will humiliate or punish them or anyone else for voicing a concern, admitting a mistake, offering a suggestion or asking a question.

## Why is Psychological Safety important?

Google found that teams with high levels of Psychological Safety were more effective because they operated in environments where team members felt comfortable to take risks and therefore fostered greater innovation and creativity.

Individuals on teams with higher psychological safety were less likely to leave the organisation, brought in more revenue and were more likely to 'harness the power of diverse ideas' from their teammates. Google's research shows us that teams with higher levels of psychological safety are more productive and effective, and more effective teams make more effective organisations.

## How can Organisations encourage Psychological Safety in Teams?

Amy Edmondson suggests three steps managers can take to foster psychological safety in their teams.

1. Frame work as a learning problem not an execution problem. Explain to the team that everyone's input and voice is needed. This creates the rationale for speaking up.
2. Acknowledge your own fallibility. Point out that you don't know everything and that you need to hear from team members because what they have to say is valuable. This creates more safety for speaking up.
3. Model curiosity and ask lots of questions. When you ask questions, this creates an environment where voice is not only encouraged, but required.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't hold people accountable for their performance, rather high accountability and motivation should be balanced with high psychological safety. Rather than creating an environment of anxiety by having high accountability and low psychological safety, an environment that fosters high psychological safety and has high standards of excellence develops a learning organisation with more successful organisational outcomes.

Check out this TED talk by Amy Edmondson [here](#) and Google's resources on teams at [re.work.withgoogle.com](https://re.work.withgoogle.com)