Safe Space:

Psychological safety at the workplace
by and with attorney at law Dr. Yara Hofbauer

1. Survey

I am here today, because…

- … I am interested in the topic.
- … I feel unsafe at work.
- … as a manager I want all employees to feel comfortable and safe.
- … as a manager, I would like to know what I can do to ensure psychological safety in the team.

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- What characterizes psychological safety in a team for you?

(Feel free to write it in the chat.)

Definition 1:

"Team psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that it's OK to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes — all without fear of negative consequences."
(*Edmondson* 2023).

2. Survey

True or false?

The concept of psychological safety in the team aims to minimize the number of errors.

Definition 2:

"The sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career." (*Kahn,* 1990)

- What does team psychological safety have to do with diversity?

(Feel free to write it in the chat.)

Objectives of Team Psychological Safety

1. All group members feel confident enough to act proactively, contribute ideas and draw the attention of others - including those at higher hierarchical levels - to mistakes.

2. Mistakes are not seen as a weakness, but as an opportunity to grow and learn.

3. Everyone can rest assured that no team member will be exposed, rejected or penalized for

        - having made a mistake.
        - having pointed out a mistake made by someone else or
        - having expressed their opinion.

3. Survey

In your opinion, what are the obstacles to achieving psychological safety in a team?

- Fear of loss of status
- Desire for harmony
- Need to please
- Lack of trust in the team
- Covering up personal mistakes is more important than team success
- Belittling others in order to emphasize oneself
- Lack of role modeling by managers
- Lack of team spirit

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- Think back to a team (at work, school or in your free time) where you felt really uncomfortable and didn't dare to speak your mind.

- How would you describe the atmosphere in this team?

(Feel free to write it in the chat.)

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4. Survey

True or False?

Team Psychological Safety means that all team members think the same.

Groupthink:

"A mode of thinking that people use when the striving for unanimity in a cohesive group becomes so dominant that it tends to override the realistic assessment of alternative courses of action." (*Janis,* 1972)

→ **Group approves decisions that individual members would have rejected on their own**
→ **Important information is not exchanged/heard because it could disrupt the harmony**
→ **Critical group members are not viewed positively, but are seen as disruptive**

Can you think of any other negative consequences of groupthink?

- Think back to a team (at work, school or in your free time) in which you felt particularly comfortable and dared to speak your mind even in difficult situations.

- What was special about this team?

(Feel free to write it in the chat.)

6. Survey

True or false?

Interpersonal trust is an essential prerequisite for achieving psychological security in a team.

Trust

Trust is not the same as psychological safety in a team, because it is based on interpersonal behavior and not on how the team acts as such.

At the same time, trust is an important prerequisite for psychological security to develop:
- **We trust that the individual team members will not react negatively to our opinion.**
- **We trust that if we make mistakes, we will not be judged as individuals, but that we will try to learn together on the basis of the mistake.**
- **We trust that everyone will pull together to achieve the team's goals.**

6. Survey

True or false?

Psychological safety means that no high standards are set for work performance.

High performance standards remain in place

	Low Performance Standards	High Performance Standards
High psychological safety	Comfort Zone	Zone of learning and best performance
Low psychological safety	Apathy zone	Fear Zone

Source: *Edmondson* 2021, 16.

- Is it possible that the same team feels safe for some team members and not for others? What could be the reasons for this?

(Feel free to write it in the chat.)

Power and responsibility

It can happen that some members of the team believe that everyone feels comfortable and safe and dares to express themselves freely, while others see things differently. In this case, we need to ask ourselves the following questions:

- Is adaptation expected, or is everyone accepted and seen for who they are?
- Does the system work better for some than for others? Why is that the case? Which model of life is seen as the "standard model"?
- Is there a secure system that you can trust?

→ In a 2006 study, a significant correlation was found between perceived psychological safety and the hierarchical level at which a person is located within an organization: The higher the hierarchical level, the higher it was rated.

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7. Survey

True or false?

Most mistakes that are made are avoidable.

Mistakes are part of the game

There are avoidable and unavoidable errors. In general, the proportion of avoidable errors is massively overestimated. Most errors are UNavoidable!

When we are stressed, we tend to make even more mistakes. This creates a vicious circle:
Criticism for mistakes → Fear of making mistakes → New mistakes

We should avoid this and instead observe the following principles:

- Mistakes are part of the learning process!
- Mistakes are generally unavoidable!
- No ad hominem criticism, instead focus on the problem and the solution!

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