



Psychological Safety

Action Pack

[Psychsafety.co.uk](https://psychsafety.co.uk)

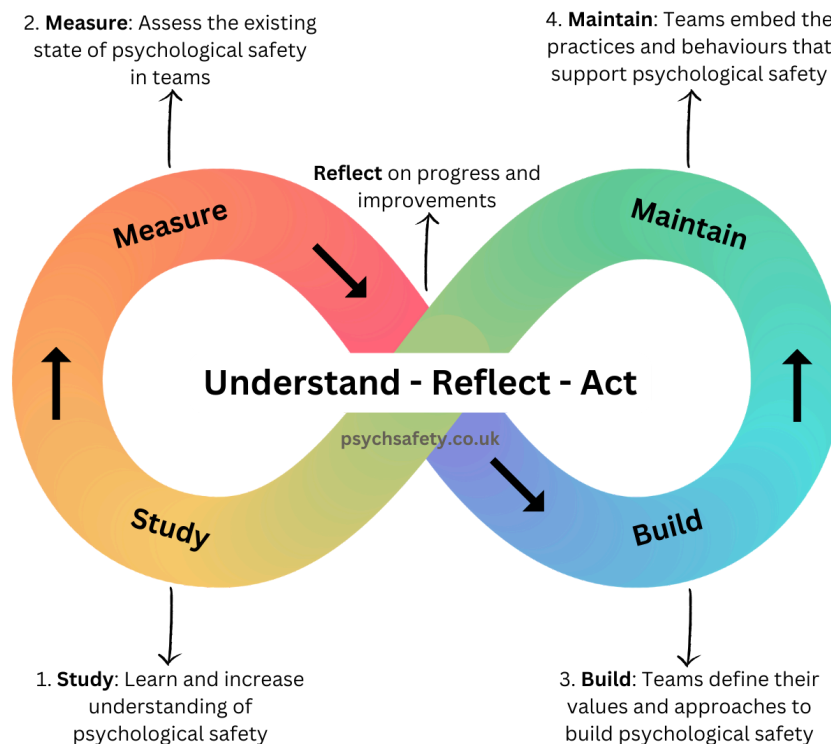
Iterum Ltd

Welcome to the Psychological Safety Action Pack.

Psychological safety is the most important factor in the success of high-performing teams, and high-performing teams are also happier. When team members possess psychological safety, they feel able to ask for help, admit mistakes, raise concerns, suggest ideas, and challenge existing practices and others' suggestions, including those from authority figures. Such openness and honesty minimises risks, helps generate new ideas, and allows for the effective implementation of those ideas.

Use this action pack as a resource to study, measure, build and maintain psychological safety in your organisation. You may use the Programme Planner to develop a structured plan, or you may simply wish to use some of the resources to complement your existing team building and leadership programmes.

The Action Pack is structured around a feedback loop of continuous learning, implementation and reflection. It's usually best to begin by studying psychological safety as a concept, then measuring it in your context, before building and maintaining it. After reflection, you can loop back to Study, and repeat the cycle to continue improving your own capability and the level of psychological safety in your team.



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17. TRIZ
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Additional Resources:

- A. Grace Hopper Leadership and Management Poster
- B. "The 3 Fundamentals of Psychological Safety" Poster
- C. Tuckman's Model of Team Development
- D. "You don't have to be told you're a leader" Poster
- E. The Psychological Safety Team Performance Quadrant
- F. Psychological Safety Checklist
- G. Remote Psychological Safety Checklist

Appendix: Further Reading and References

Using the Action Pack

We hope you get a lot of value from this action pack, and enjoy the process.

For assistance running workshops, or for further information about concepts introduced in this action pack or anything else, please get in touch: enquiries@psychsafety.com

If you have a few minutes to spare to provide feedback and improvements to the action pack and its contents, please do so [here](#).

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An Introduction to Psychological Safety

Where did the concept come from?

Psychological safety, first introduced by psychiatrist Carl Rogers in the 1950s and later discussed in an organisational context by Schein and Bennis in the 1960s, was initially described as a group phenomenon that reduces interpersonal risk. In their 1965 paper, Schein and Bennis described psychological safety as a state that reduces “a person’s anxiety about being basically accepted and worthwhile.”

Deming’s 14 Points for Management, introduced in 1982 in his seminal book “Out of the Crisis”, also highlight the importance of eliminating fear to enhance workplace efficiency:

“Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.”

This approach represents a shift from reductionist and Taylorist views of workers towards a focus on empowerment and engagement, marking a move to a more progressive paradigm aimed at improving business outcomes.

The 1986 Chernobyl power plant disaster starkly illustrated the consequences of lacking a culture of psychological safety. The catastrophe, which directly claimed 31 lives and is estimated to have indirectly caused over 4,000 deaths, stemmed not only from the plant’s inherently unsafe design but also from a culture within the Soviet Union that discouraged voicing concerns or admitting mistakes. The desire to appease authority figures and political leaders fostered a culture of fear. During a simulated power shutdown, operators, not fully equipped to handle the situation, made a series of protocol mistakes leading to a steam explosion and subsequently a nuclear explosion. A significant factor in the disaster was the operators’ reluctance to speak up about their concerns, underscoring the critical need for psychological safety to prevent such tragedies.

William Kahn’s 1990 paper “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work” renewed interest in psychological safety. He described psychological safety as the ability for someone to “employ or express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally”. At the same time, progressive management paradigms such as safety culture and the Toyota Production System (TPS) were emerging. These emphasised the importance of empowering employees to raise issues or concerns around safety and process.

The connection between psychological safety and team performance

Then, in 1999, Dr Amy Edmondson was studying clinical teams and the number of mistakes that they made. She was surprised to find that the teams with a higher number of good outcomes appeared to have made more mistakes than teams with fewer good outcomes. After further investigation, Dr Edmondson discovered that in fact the teams with better outcomes weren’t necessarily *making* more mistakes, but they were *admitting* more, whilst the teams with poorer outcomes were more likely to hide theirs. As a result, she codified the concept of psychological safety, namely: **the belief that one will not be**

punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. She believed that psychological safety was a key factor in team performance.

However, it was through [Google's Project Aristotle](#) that the importance of psychological safety became more widely recognised. Led by Julia Rozovsky in 2013, this organisational research study identified four key factors that are essential to team performance: Dependability, Structure and Clarity, Meaning, and Impact. Yet, the research also indicated the presence of other elusive factors affecting team performance. Upon discovering Amy Edmondson's 1999 research, the team used her methodology to assess psychological safety. The results highlighted it as the crucial element for high-performing teams, revealing that "even the extremely smart, high-powered employees at Google needed a psychologically safe work environment to contribute the talents they had to offer."



This marked a turning point for psychological safety. Google's Project Aristotle provided evidence supporting what many of us instinctively know: feeling safe to be yourself in a team, where you can contribute ideas, admit mistakes, challenge others respectfully, and try without fear of failure, is one of the most powerful aspects of human performance.

How Psychological Safety Actually Feels

Let's relate this now to your own experience. Think about the **best** team you've been a member of. It could be a sports team, a work team, or any other group of people with a shared goal. Being in that team probably felt good, maybe even energising and inspiring. Whilst the members of that team may well have been highly competent, it's likely that being in that team felt good because you, and they, felt safe to be yourselves. In teams that feel great, it's easier to admit mistakes, ask for help, and even challenge ideas from other team members without fear of humiliation or embarrassment.

Now think about one of the **worst** teams you've been a member of. Perhaps you felt that you had to put on a metaphorical "mask" in order to fit in. You may have avoided admitting mistakes, or asking for help, in case members of the team thought less of you. Chances are, you didn't feel very "safe" in this team.

Think of these two teams when thinking about levels of psychological safety. Psychological safety isn't a binary "on or off" factor, it's a multifaceted sliding scale. Teams and team members possess it to varying degrees and in different ways. The best team you've been on probably possessed a lot, whilst the worst probably did not possess much at all.

This pack will support you to increase the psychological safety experienced by your team right now.

