

# Good Afternoon and Welcome



## Building Psychological Safety for Team Engagement & Performance



# John Bentley

*Think of a team you are part of...*



“Think of a team you are part of...”

Have you ever held back an idea?

- YES
- SOMETIMES
- RARELY



“Think of a team you are part of...”

Have you ever avoided admitting a mistake?

- YES
- SOMETIMES
- RARELY



“Think of a team you are part of...”

Have you ever stayed silent in a meeting?

- YES
- SOMETIMES
- RARELY



# Psychological Safety Questionnaire — Inclusive (Work & Personal Settings)

**Instructions:** For each statement, rate yourself on a 1–5 scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree · 2 = Disagree · 3 = Neutral · 4 = Agree · 5 = Strongly Agree.      *Aim to complete in about 3 minutes.*

<u>Section 1:</u>	<u>Section 3:</u>
Q1: 4	Q1:
Q2: 5	Q2:
Q3: 1	Q3:
<u>Section 2:</u>	<u>Section 4:</u>
Q1:	Q1:
Q2:	Q2:
Q3:	Q3:
	Q4:
	Q5:
	Q6:



# Psychological Safety Questionnaire — Inclusive (Work & Personal Settings)

**Instructions:** For each statement, rate yourself on a 1–5 scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree · 2 = Disagree · 3 = Neutral · 4 = Agree · 5 = Strongly Agree.  
*Aim to complete in about 3 minutes.*

## Section 1 — Emotional Wellbeing Under Stress

1. Recent events in the region have increased my stress or anxiety.
2. The situation makes it harder to stay present or focused.
3. I experience moments of worry, fear, or tension during the day.

## Section 2 — Sense of Safety & Support

1. People around me communicate openly during stressful times.
2. I feel safe expressing concerns without fear of judgment.
3. I receive support when feeling overwhelmed (workplace, family, or friends).

## Section 3 — Coping & Resources

1. I know who I can talk to if I am feeling unsettled.
2. I feel comfortable asking for flexibility or space if stress increases.
3. My main environment encourages emotional wellbeing.

## Section 4 — Interpersonal Dynamics (Work, Family & Social Contexts)

1. When mistakes happen, people around me respond with learning rather than blame.
2. My ideas or concerns are listened to with respect at work and in personal settings.
3. It is easy to ask basic questions without fear of being put down.
4. People (including me) take accountability for actions without defensiveness.
5. Differences of opinion are discussed respectfully and usually resolved fairly
6. People respect my boundaries when I express needs or limits.



The measure of *Psychological Safety* is not about comfort.

It is about whether it feels safe to take interpersonal risk.



Why is this important?



# PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

## BY THE NUMBERS



**#1 PREDICTOR OF  
TEAM EFFECTIVENESS**  
(Google, Project Aristotle)



**4.6x MORE LIKELY TO  
PERFORM AT BEST  
WHEN FEELING HEARD**  
(Harvard Business Review)



**21% HIGHER PROFITABILITY  
IN ENGAGED TEAMS**  
(Gallup)



**70% OF CHANGE INITIATIVES  
FAIL DUE TO PEOPLE FACTORS**  
(McKinsey)



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY DRIVES ENGAGEMENT,  
INNOVATION, AND PERFORMANCE.



# What is *Psychological Safety*?



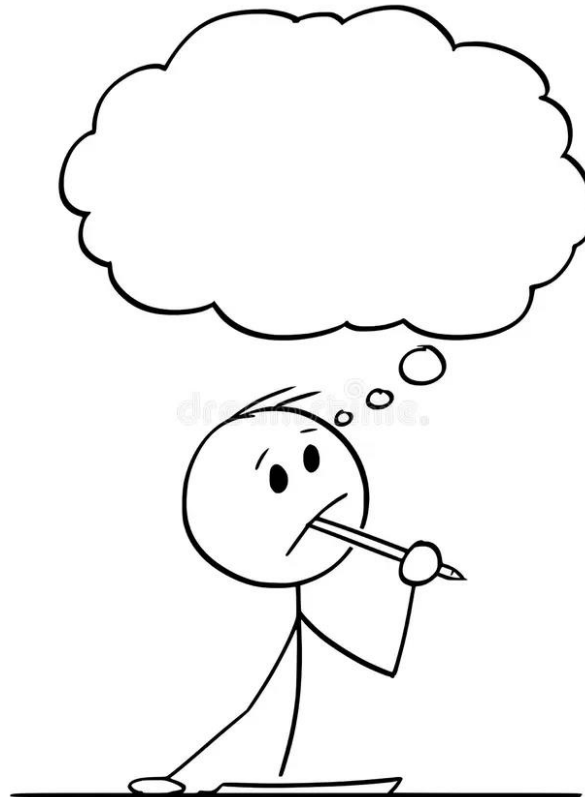
***“Psychological safety is not about lowering standards.  
It is about raising the quality of thinking.”***

Amy Edmondson



Definition from **Amy Edmondson**:

“A shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.”



*Do you take care how you tread...?*





# Question ...

What is  
Psychological  
Safety?



# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



# What is Psychological Safety?

- **Psychological safety** = shared belief that team is safe for interpersonal risk taking
- **Definition:** being able to show oneself without fear of negative consequences of self-image or career

**Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.**

Amy C. Edmondson  
Faculty & Research  
Harvard Business School

# Psychological Safety × Performance Standards Matrix

## Low Psychological Safety

### Low Standards

#### Apathy Zone

- Low accountability
- Minimal effort
- Disengagement
- “Why bother?” mindset

#### Comfort Zone

- Friendly but unchallenging
- Avoiding difficult conversations
- Low stretch
- “Nice but not ambitious”

### High Standards

#### Anxiety Zone

- Fear of mistakes
- Blame culture
- Silence in meetings
- High pressure, low voice

#### Learning Zone ★

- Open dialogue
- Constructive challenge
- Accountability with trust
- High performance & innovation

# Reflection ... where is your organization now?



# challenge



**Fear Zone**



**Comfort Zone**



**Learning Zone**

**Can you identify the zone?**

## Scenario

During a project update, a team member says:

***“I’m not sure this timeline is realistic given the supplier delays.”***

The leader responds quickly:

***“We’ve already agreed the deadline. We don’t have time to reopen that discussion. Let’s move on.”***

No one else speaks up for the rest of the meeting.



- What **zone** is this?
- What message did the leader unintentionally send?
- What will likely happen next time someone spots a risk?
- What one phrase could the leader have used differently?

## Scenario

A mistake in a client presentation is discovered.

In the next team meeting, the manager says:

***“This error should never have happened. Who was responsible for this slide?”***

The room goes quiet. Eventually, one team member admits it was theirs.

The manager replies:

“This reflects poorly on all of us. Please be more careful.”

After the meeting, people double-check their work obsessively — but stop asking for peer input.



- What **zone** is this?
- What behaviour is being reinforced here?
- What will happen to innovation and collaboration?
- Is accountability present? Is safety?
- What one phrase could the leader have used differently?

## Scenario

A team meeting runs smoothly. Everyone agrees with the proposal presented.

The leader asks:

“Any concerns?”

There’s silence.

The leader smiles:

“Great — sounds like we’re aligned.”

After the meeting, two team members privately discuss flaws in the plan but decide not to raise them.



- What **zone** is this?
- Is this safety — or avoidance?
- Are standards high or low?
- What risk does this create?
- What one phrase could the leader have used differently?

## Scenario

A quarterly target is missed.

The leader opens the review session by saying:

***“Let’s walk through what we learned. Where did our assumptions not hold up?”***

A team member admits:

***“We underestimated the onboarding time for new clients.”***

The leader responds:

***“That’s useful insight. How do we adjust the model going forward?”***

**Multiple people contribute ideas for improvement.**



- What **zone** is this?
- What behaviour is being reinforced here?
- What will happen to innovation and collaboration?
- Is accountability present? Is safety?

## Learning Zone

### Psychological safety and high standards

- In the Learning Zone:
  - People speak up
  - Mistakes analysed, not punished
  - Challenge welcomed
  - Accountability high
- Not a 'nice' zone - rather a high-expectation environment
- People feel safe enough to take interpersonal risks:
  - Test
  - Admit
  - Improve
- Innovation, engagement, performance thrive



The real leadership challenge is this:  
**How do we hold high standards — without triggering fear?”**





# PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



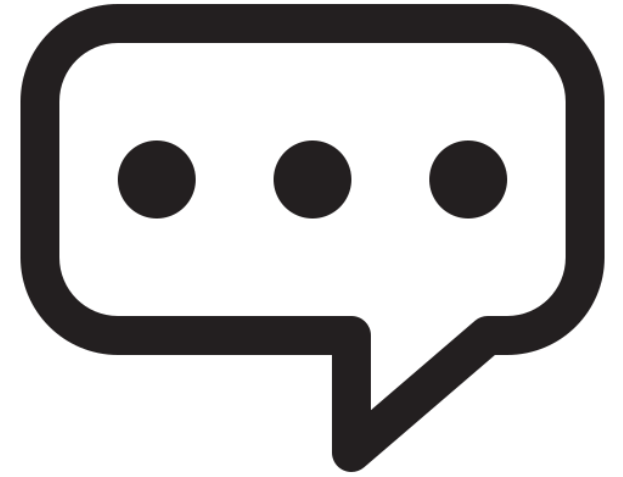
**A TEAM ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE FEEL SAFE TO:**

- Be honest
- Ask questions
- Admit mistakes

# The Leader's Role: Micro-Behaviours That Matter



Consider ...



*What behaviours **erode** safety in your organisation?*



# Leadership Reactions That Shut Down Voice

- Public criticism or humiliation
- Reacting defensively to challenge
- Interrupting or talking over people
- Dismissing ideas too quickly (“That won’t work”)
- Blaming individuals instead of examining systems
- Asking for input — then ignoring it

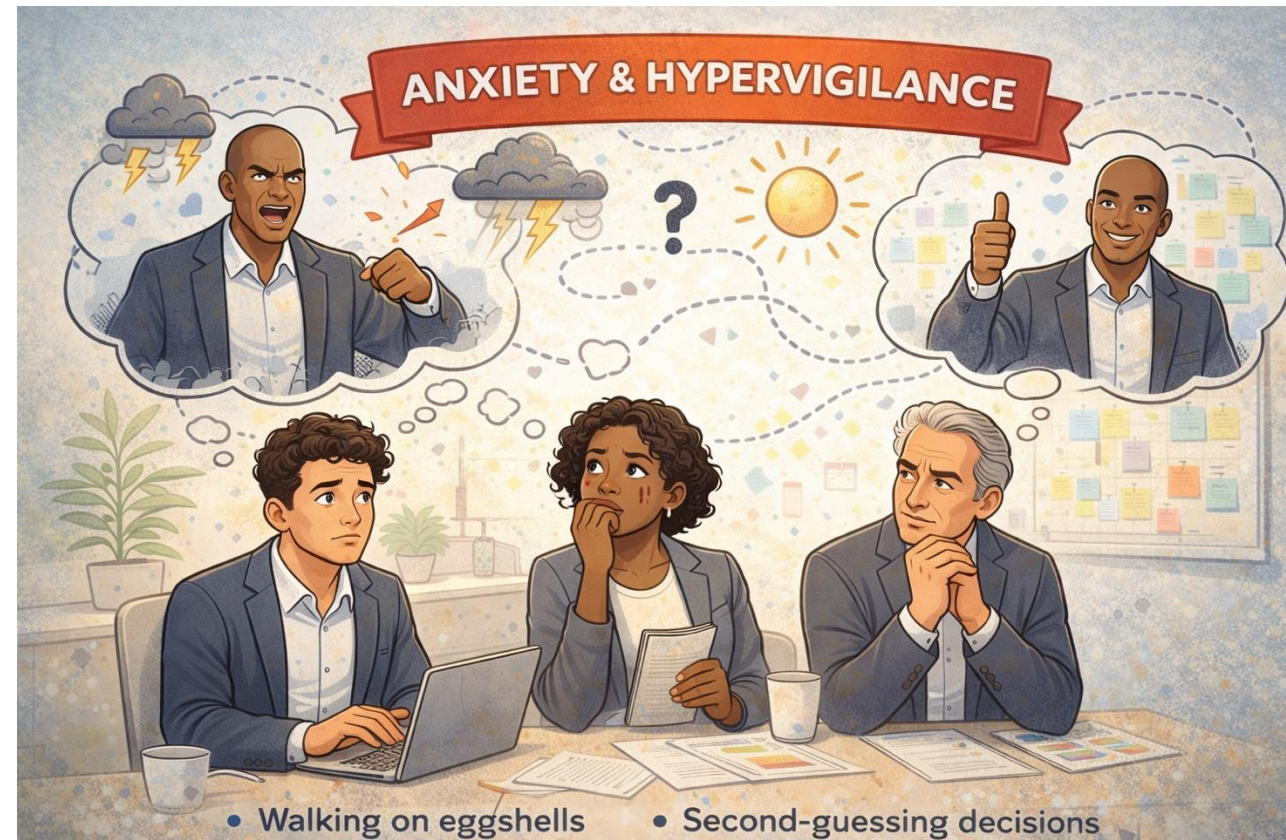
These create *fear of speaking up*.



## Inconsistent Standards & Unpredictability

- Mood-driven leadership
- Different rules for different people
- Sudden shifts in expectations without explanation
- Micromanagement after mistakes

These create *anxiety and hypervigilance*.



## Punishing Mistakes Instead of Learning

- “Who did this?” instead of “What happened?”
- Zero tolerance for errors in learning environments
- Rewarding only flawless performance
- Over-focusing on short-term results

These create *risk aversion and silence*.





## Performance-Only Culture

- Overemphasis on targets without dialogue
- Constant urgency with no reflection time
- Treating disagreement as disloyalty
- “We don’t have time for discussion”

These create ***compliance, not commitment.***



# MICRO-BEHAVIOURS THAT QUIETLY DAMAGE SAFETY

**The Reality:**  
Psychological safety rarely collapses dramatically —  
*It erodes gradually.*

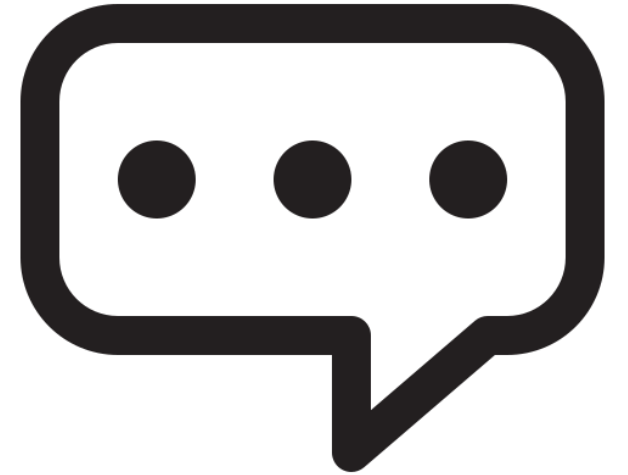
• Tone of voice

Timeliness  
of feedback

• Facial expression

• Who gets airtime

Consider ...



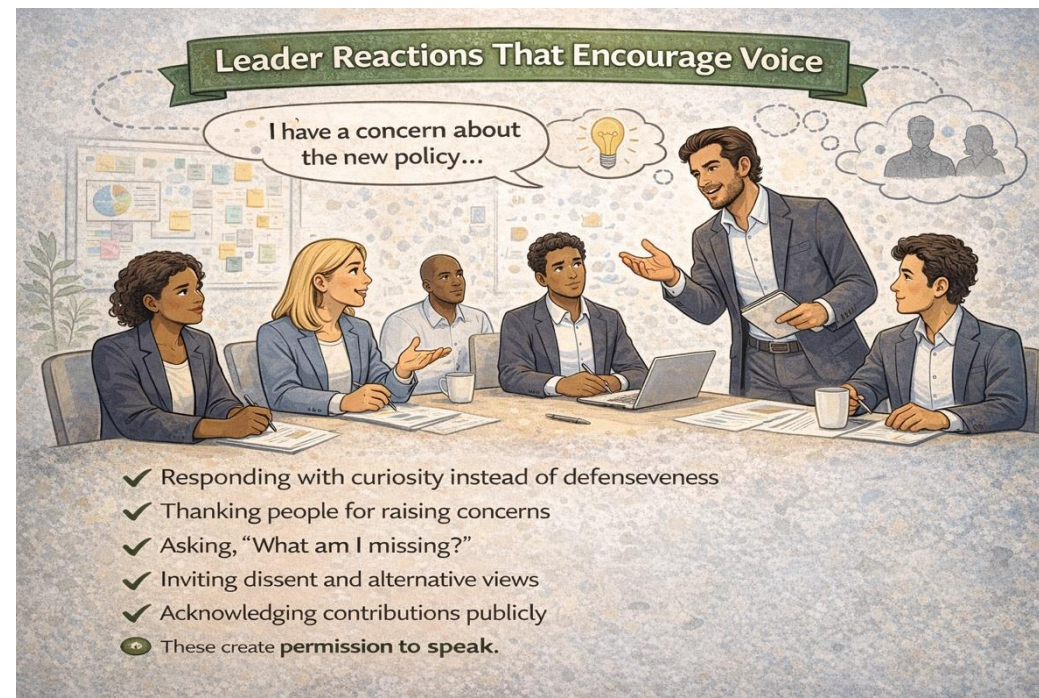
*What micro-behaviours **build** safety?*



## Leader Reactions That Encourage Voice

- Responding with curiosity instead of defensiveness
- Thanking people for raising concerns
- Asking, “*What am I missing?*”
- Inviting dissent and alternative views
- Protecting those who surface difficult issues
- Acknowledging contributions publicly

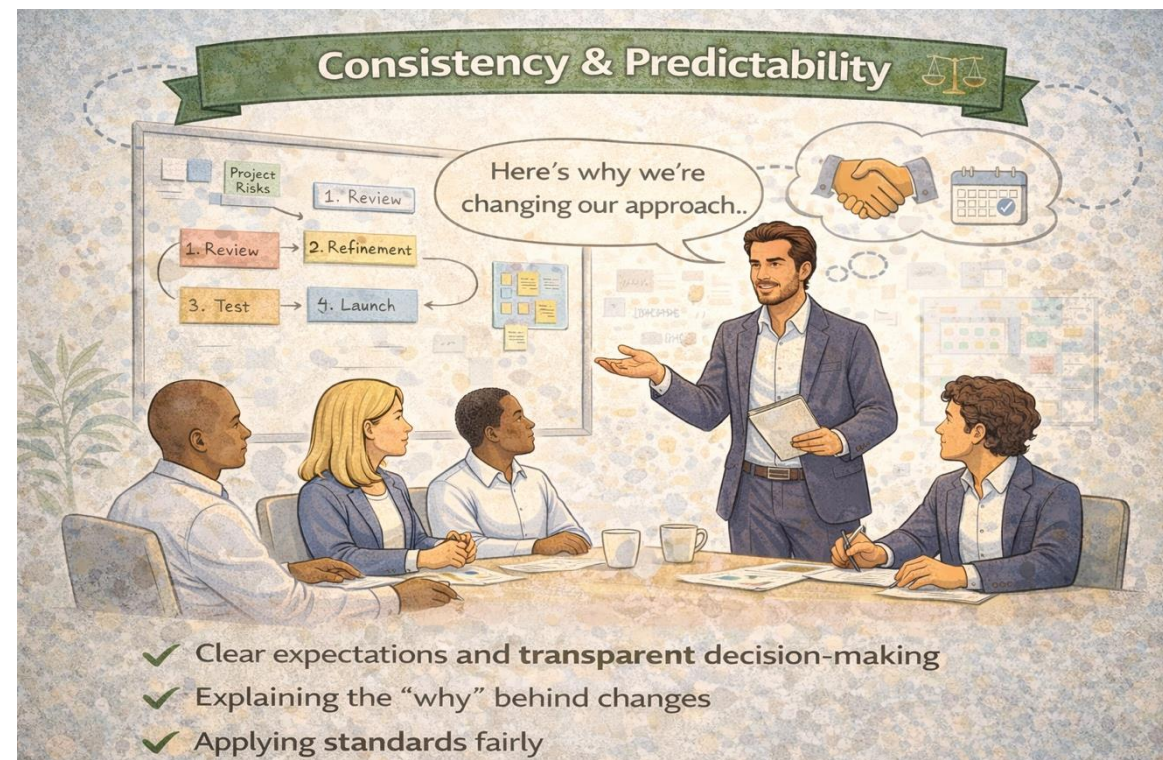
These create **permission to speak**.



## Consistency & Predictability

- Clear expectations and transparent decision-making
- Explaining the “why” behind changes
- Applying standards fairly
- Staying emotionally steady under pressure
- Following through on commitments

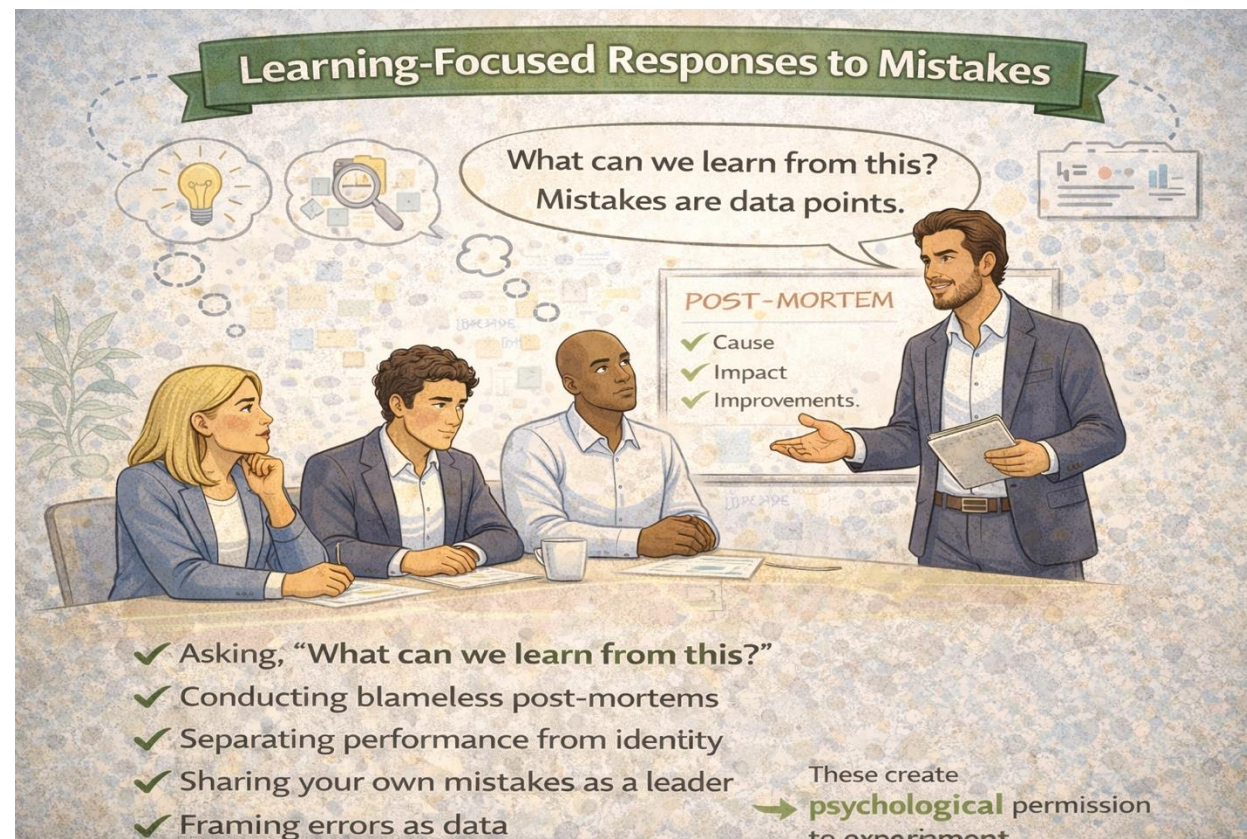
These create **trust and stability**.



## Learning-Focused Responses to Mistakes

- Asking, “What can we learn from this?”
- Conducting blameless post-mortems
- Separating performance from identity
- Sharing your own mistakes as a leader
- Framing errors as data

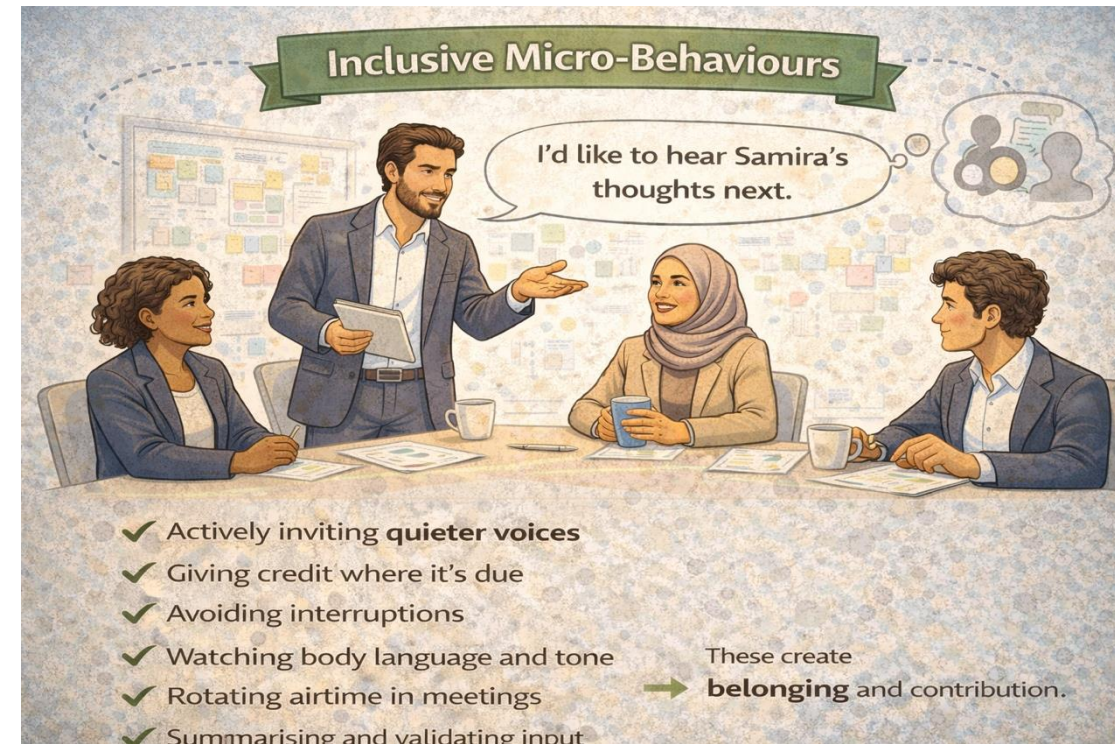
These create **psychological permission to experiment**.



## Inclusive Micro-Behaviours

- Actively inviting quieter voices
- Giving credit where it's due
- Avoiding interruptions
- Watching body language and tone
- Rotating airtime in meetings
- Summarising and validating input

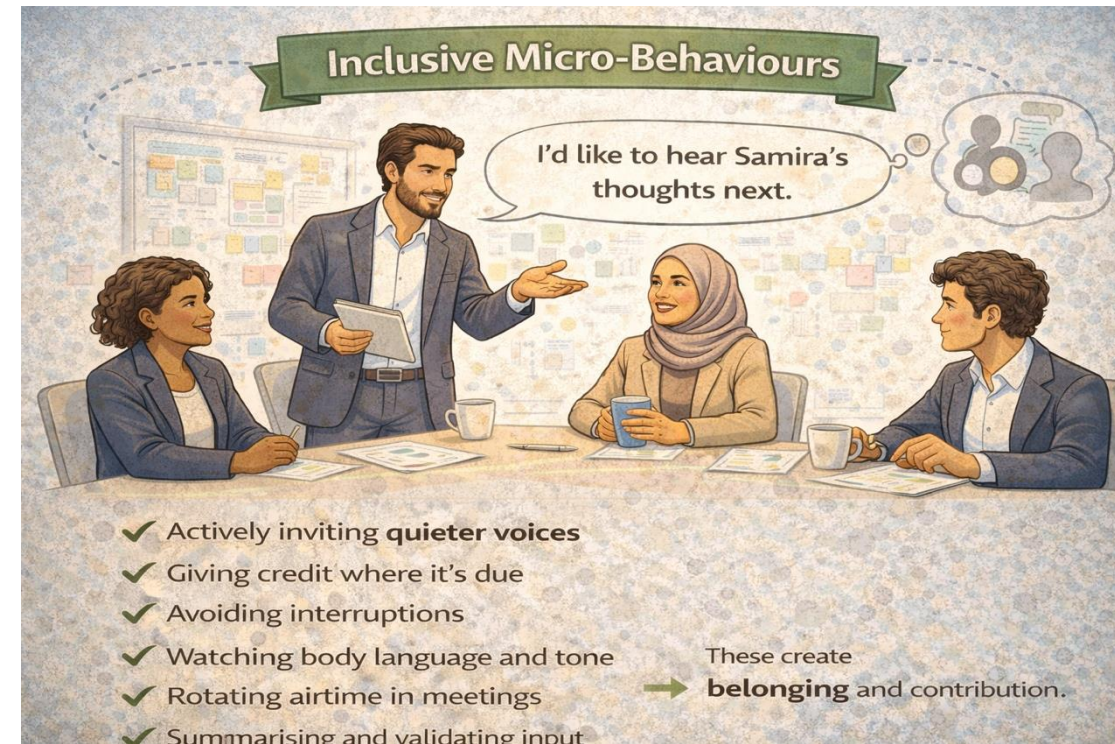
These create **belonging and contribution**



## Inclusive Micro-Behaviours

- Actively inviting quieter voices
- Giving credit where it's due
- Avoiding interruptions
- Watching body language and tone
- Rotating airtime in meetings
- Summarising and validating input

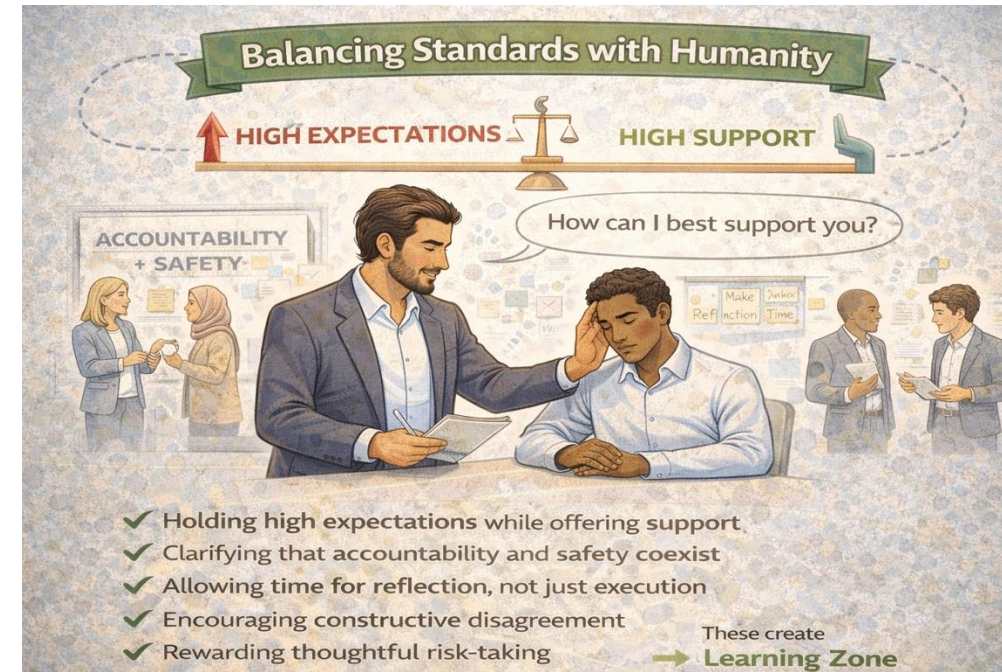
These create **belonging and contribution**



## Balancing Standards with Humanity

- Holding high expectations while offering support
- Clarifying that accountability and safety coexist
- Allowing time for reflection, not just execution
- Encouraging constructive disagreement
- Rewarding thoughtful risk-taking

These create the **Learning Zone** (high standards + high safety).



# Micro-Behaviours That Quietly Strengthen Safety

Small moments that matter:

- Eye contact when someone speaks
- Pausing before responding
- Neutral tone when receiving bad news
- Saying, “Tell me more.”
- Admitting, “I don’t know.”
- Naming tension in the room

Psychological safety is built in **moments** — not **mission statements**.





Psychological safety is not built by policy.  
It is built by **predictable, respectful behaviour.**

# Psychological Safety

## as a Strategic Performance Lever

A 20% increase in psychological safety can significantly accelerate performance outcomes.

1

### Decision Quality & Risk Mitigation



- Earlier escalation of issues
- Reduced blind spots
- Stronger governance through voice

2

### Execution & Agility



- Faster course correction
- Less rework and delay
- Improved change adoption

3

### Talent & Innovation



- Higher engagement & retention
- Stronger discretionary effort
- Increased idea generation

Psychological safety strengthens accountability, not weakens it.  
It enables high standards to translate into sustained results.

# FEAR ZONE

When Safety Is Low:

- ✓ Silence
- ✓ Defensive behaviour
- ✓ Risk avoidance
- ✓ Blame culture
- ✓ Compliance without commitment
- ✓ Hidden mistakes

## LEADER BEHAVIOUR

Curiosity • Consistency • Inclusion • Learning  
Humanity

# LEARNING ZONE

When Safety Is High:

- ✓ Open dialogue
- ✓ Constructive disagreement
- ✓ Thoughtful risk-taking
- ✓ Early problem surfacing
- ✓ Shared accountability
- ✓ Continuous improvement

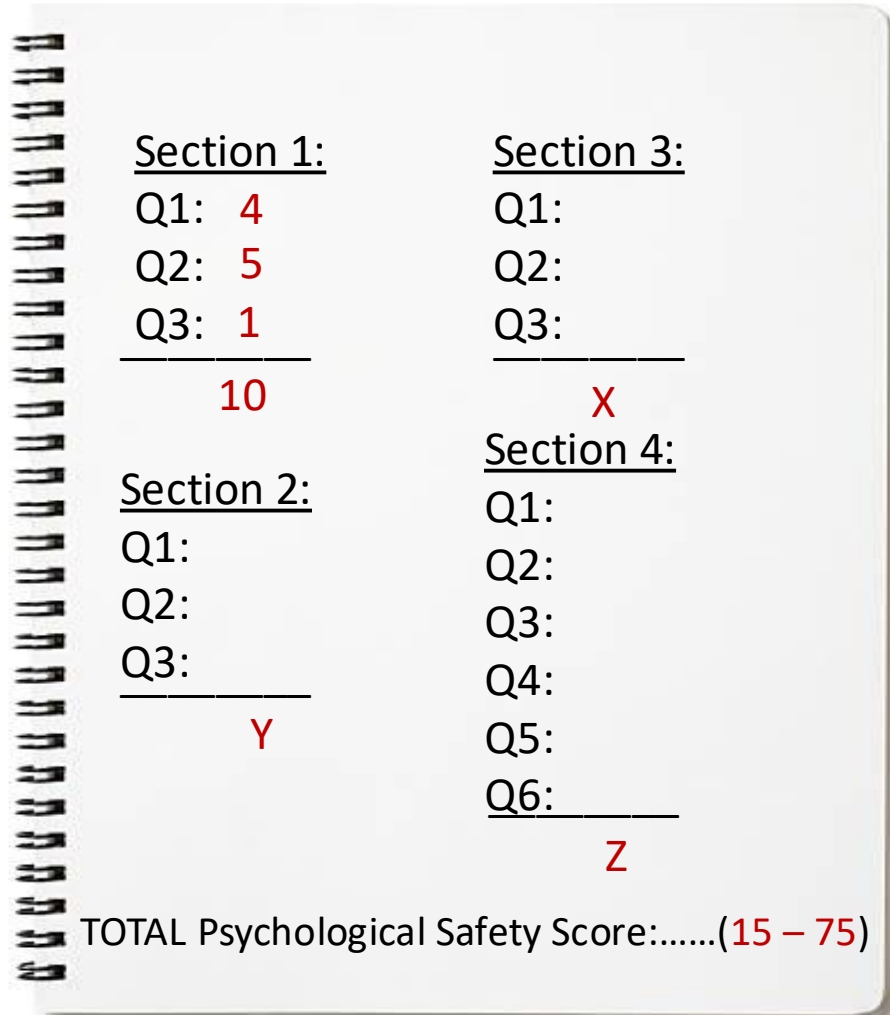
*Energy goes into protection, not performance.*

*Energy goes into growth, not protection.*

**Psychological safety is the bridge between pressure and performance.**

# Psychological Safety Questionnaire — Inclusive (Work & Personal Settings)

**Instructions:** For each statement, rate yourself on a 1–5 scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree · 2 = Disagree · 3 = Neutral · 4 = Agree · 5 = Strongly Agree.



<u>Section 1:</u>	<u>Section 3:</u>
Q1: 4	Q1:
Q2: 5	Q2:
Q3: 1	Q3:
<hr/>	<hr/>
10	X
<u>Section 2:</u>	<u>Section 4:</u>
Q1:	Q1:
Q2:	Q2:
Q3:	Q3:
<hr/>	Q4:
Y	Q5:
	Q6:
	<hr/>
	Z
TOTAL Psychological Safety Score:.....(15 – 75)	

## Scoring & Interpretation

**Section Scores:** Add your 1–5 ratings within each section to get a section total. Higher scores indicate stronger psychological safety in that dimension.

## Overall Score (All Sections Combined)

Add the four section totals for an overall score. Range: 15–75.

## *How Psychologically Safe do you feel?*

**High (58–75):** Strong psychological safety across key settings; *maintain and model best practices.*

**Medium (40–57):** Mixed signals; *prioritize 1–2 actions to strengthen weaker areas.*

**Low (15–39):** Low perceived safety; *harness your 'assertiveness' - consider targeted supports and specific behaviour changes.*

## Moment of Truth



*Any Questions?*



# Key Takeaways

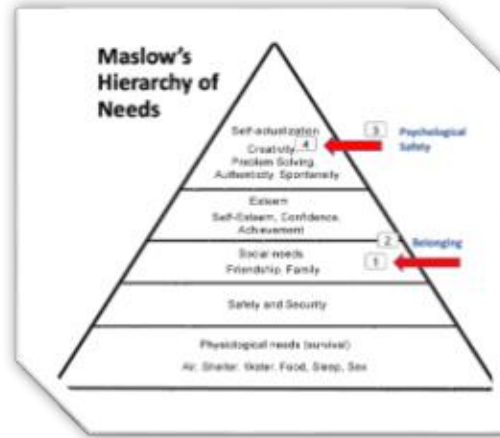


## What is Psychological Safety?

**Psychological safety** = shared belief that team is safe for interpersonal risk taking  
**Definition:** being able to show oneself without fear of negative consequences of self image or career

2 Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

Amy C. Edmondson  
 Faculty & Research  
 Harvard Business School



Can you identify the zone?

Can you identify the zone?



How Psychologically Safe do you feel?

- High (58-75): Strong psychological safety across settings; maintain and model best practices.
- Medium (40-57): Mixed signals; prioritize 1-2 actions to strengthen weaker areas.
- Low (15-39): Low perceived safety; harness or 'assertiveness' - consider targeted sports and specific behaviour changes.

## Moment of Truth



# Committing to Action

Do less of...	Keep doing...
Start doing...	Stop doing...

# Feedback: Building Psychological Safety for Team Engagement



Thank You

