

4 Steps to Boost Psychological Safety at Your Workplace

by Amy C. Edmondson and Per Hugander

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These days, mentions of psychological safety in the business press are extraordinarily common, and its importance seems to be recognized across industries ranging from healthcare to tech to financial services. A popular topic before the pandemic, psychological safety has become that much more so due to its relevance to agility, diversity and inclusion, and remote working. But with this ubiquity comes misunderstanding. One crucial misconception among business leaders is that psychological safety will be present in any reasonably healthy work environment, like freedom from harassment or a commitment to keeping workers injury-free are. In fact, psychologically safe work environments are rare. Creating psychological safety — the confidence that candor and vulnerability are welcome — in a workplace is truly challenging and takes an unusual degree of commitment and skill. The reason for this is simple: It's natural for people to hold back ideas, be reluctant to ask questions, and shy away from disagreeing with the boss. Given this tendency, the free exchange of ideas, concerns, and questions is routinely hindered — far more often than most managers realize. To reverse it takes focus and effort; it's a process of helping people develop new beliefs and behaviors, and none of it is easy or natural.



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