



01

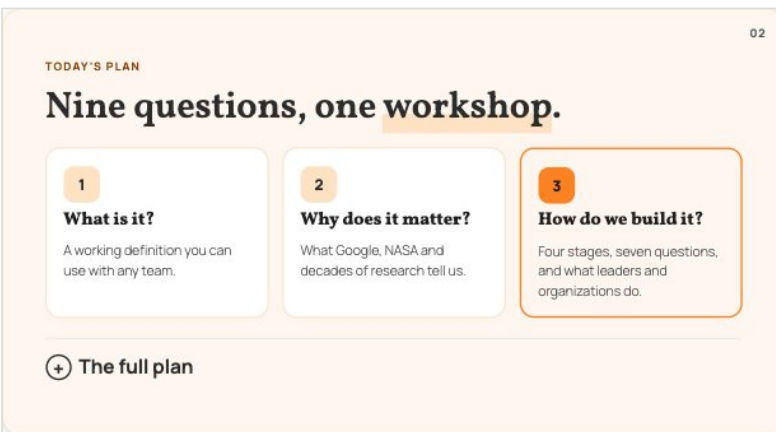
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

People do their best work when it is safe to speak up.

Psychological safety is not about being nice. It is the shared belief that you can raise an idea, a question, a concern or a mistake without being punished or embarrassed for it. Leaders build it on purpose, one conversation at a time.

Photo by on Unsplash

Slide 1



02

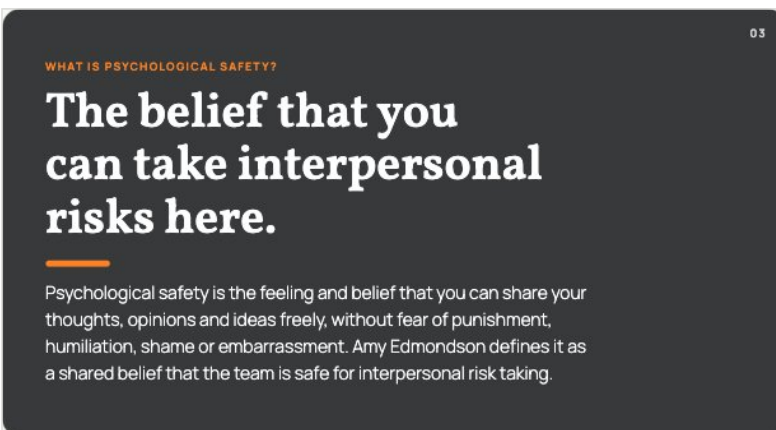
TODAY'S PLAN

Nine questions, one workshop.

- 1 What is it?**
A working definition you can use with any team.
- 2 Why does it matter?**
What Google, NASA and decades of research tell us.
- 3 How do we build it?**
Four stages, seven questions, and what leaders and organizations do.

+ The full plan

Slide 2



03

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

The belief that you can take interpersonal risks here.

Psychological safety is the feeling and belief that you can share your thoughts, opinions and ideas freely, without fear of punishment, humiliation, shame or embarrassment. Amy Edmondson defines it as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.

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04

HUMANS ARE HUMAN

We all carry baggage into work.

Nobody wants to be criticized for simply being human. Every one of us brings a web of past experiences, attachments and hurts into the room, and those shape how safe we feel before anyone says a word.

Notice it
Silence is information, not agreement.

Name it
Talk about what makes speaking up hard.

Lighten it
Respond to risk with thanks, not judgment.

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06

MORE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

It is not soft, and it is not comfort.

1

Not warm and fuzzy

Too comfortable means low productivity and the status quo. Safety exists so people will take real risks.

2

Created by the group

A shared set of behaviors, not the actions of one person. Everyone builds or erodes it.

3

Physical, not just emotional

When we sense a threat we flee, shut down or avoid. Our bodies react before our words do.

4

Power cuts both ways

Hierarchy is front and center in our brains. Silence from the top sends a strong message too.

Slide 6

07

FOUR WAYS HUMANS RESPOND TO THREATS

Under threat, we protect ourselves first.

The diagram consists of four colored boxes arranged horizontally. Each box contains an icon and text. The first box is red with a star icon and the word 'Fight'. The second is blue with a right-pointing arrow icon and the word 'Flight'. The third is grey with a starburst icon and the word 'Freeze'. The fourth is teal with a heart icon and the word 'Fawn'. Below each box is a brief description of the response.

Fight	Flight	Freeze	Fawn
Push back, argue, defend the position	Leave the room, change the subject	Go quiet, stop contributing	Agree, please, smooth it over

And sometimes a fifth: we fake it, and look fine while checking out.

Our own drawing.

+ Text version of this diagram

Slide 7

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WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Google's best teams stood on one foundation.

The diagram shows a stack of four boxes, each representing a component of the foundation. From top to bottom: 'Impact' (Our work makes a difference), 'Meaning' (The work matters to each of us), 'Structure and clarity' (Clear roles, plans and goals), and 'Dependability' (We do quality work on time). At the bottom is a larger orange box labeled 'Psychological safety' (We can take risks without feeling insecure or embarrassed). Below this stack is the text 'THE FOUNDATION'.

THE FOUNDATION

Our own drawing, based on Google's Work's Project Aristotle findings.

+ Text version of this diagram

Slide 8

09

THE BENEFITS OF PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORKPLACES

Safe teams outperform.

The diagram shows four numbered boxes arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each box contains a number, a title, and a description of the benefit.

1	2
Inclusion Everyone gets a fair chance to contribute and flourish, whatever their role or background.	Innovation People take smart risks, stay open-minded and offer the half-formed ideas that become breakthroughs.
Issue prevention When mistakes are easy to admit, problems surface early, while they are still small and cheap to fix.	Retention People who feel safe on their team are less likely to leave it.

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CASE: CHALLENGER, 1986

The warnings were there. They did not travel.

What happened
Challenger broke apart 73 seconds after launch. Seven crew members died.

The cause
O-ring seals failed in the cold.

The silence
Engineers had warned about the cold. Their concerns never reached the final decision.

+ The leadership lesson

Slide 10



CASE: COLUMBIA, 2003

Seventeen years later, the same pattern.

What happened
Foam struck the wing at launch. Columbia broke apart on re-entry. Seven crew members died.

The unasked
Engineer Rodney Rocha asked for images of the wing, was turned down, and felt he could not push harder.

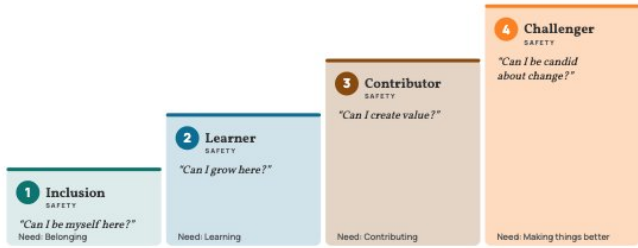
The finding
The accident board named NASA's culture as a cause.

+ The leadership lesson

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THE FOUR STAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Safety is earned in stages.



1 Inclusion
SAFETY
"Can I be myself here?"
Need: Belonging

2 Learner
SAFETY
"Can I grow here?"
Need: Learning

3 Contributor
SAFETY
"Can I create value?"
Need: Contributing

4 Challenger
SAFETY
"Can I be candid about change?"
Need: Making things better

Our own drawing, based on Timothy R. Clark's The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety.

+ Text version of this diagram

Slide 12

INSIDE EACH STAGE 13

What it looks like with and without safety.

When you have it

- **Inclusion:** you can bring your whole self, and the team knows you.
- **Learner:** learning is celebrated and learners are protected.
- **Contributor:** roles are clear and small wins are celebrated.
- **Challenger:** people speak up and disagree productively.

VS

When you do not

- **Inclusion:** superiority and hierarchy dominate.
- **Learner:** mistakes are punished and hidden.
- **Contributor:** autonomy comes with no guidance, and people feel like benchwarmers.
- **Challenger:** teams fall silent and challengers are punished.

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A WARNING FOR EVERY LEADER 14

You lose talent long before people walk out the door.

You lose it the day people stop speaking up, and most leaders do not notice until it is too late.

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LET'S PLAY: SEVEN QUESTIONS 15

How safe is **your** team?

1

Mistakes

Is a mistake held against you?

2

Tough issues

Can people bring up problems?

3

Differences

Are people rejected for being different?

4

Risk

Is it safe to take a risk here?

5

Help

Is it hard to ask for help?

6

Trust

Would anyone undermine your efforts?

7

Strengths

Are your unique skills valued and used?

➔ Where these come from

Slide 15



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HOW LEADERS CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Leaders go first.

- Admit fallibility**
"I may miss something. I need to hear from you."
- Ask, then listen**
Real curiosity, not leading questions.
- Thank the messenger**
Especially for bad news.
- Invite challenge**
Healthy conflict makes better decisions.

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HOW ORGANIZATIONS CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Systems make safety stick.

- Normalize mistakes**
Errors are information for learning.
- Look forward**
"How do we do better next time?"
- Praise effort**
Not just results.
- Open the floor**
Town halls where anyone can ask anything.



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STINKY FISH

Put the stinky fish on the table.

The thing you carry around but never talk about. The longer you hide it, the worse it smells.

- Uncertainties**
What do we not know?
- Fears**
What makes us anxious?
- The unsaid**
What is everyone thinking but no one saying?
- The past**
What can we not get over?

⊕ How to run it



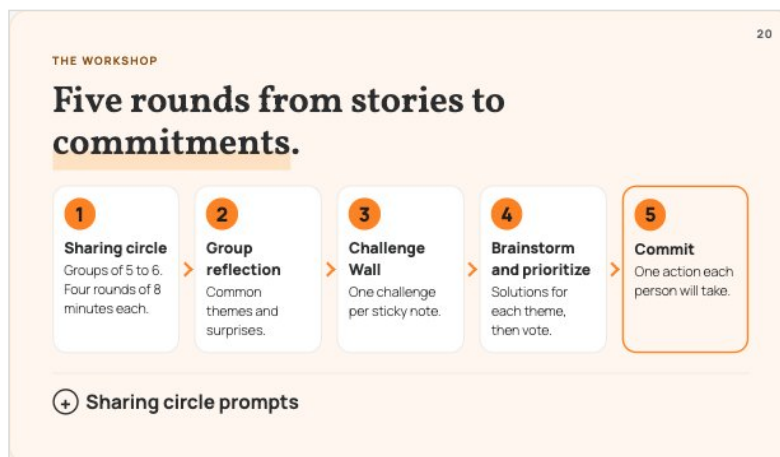
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Slide 19



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REFLECTION AND COMMITMENT

What will you do Monday morning?

Name one challenge to psychological safety you can address, and one specific action you will take. Write it down. Share it if you want to. Then come back in a month and ask your team how it is going.

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