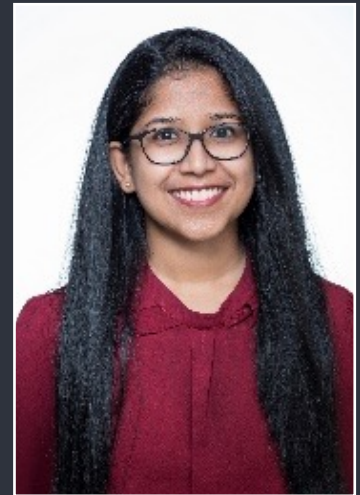


Perceptions of Psychological Safety in Construction

Arya Ambujakshan, 2025



Psychological safety is defined as the shared belief where one can speak up without fear of negative consequences. It was first articulated by Amy Edmondson and is now recognised as foundation for healthy, high-performing teams, fostering learning, innovation, and error reporting in safety-critical environments. Although organisations may formally embrace psychological safety, individual experiences often diverge across teams and settings, suggesting a gap between policy and practice. The construction industry, a human-centric sector characterised by high physical risk, transient crews, and rapidly evolving site conditions, is still largely overlooked in psychological safety research. Unvoiced concerns in this context can directly affect both worker well-being and project outcomes. Addressing this gap is therefore imperative for designing targeted interventions that enhance human and operational safety across global construction sites. To investigate these dynamics, a qualitative study within a multinational contractor's regional hubs in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates was undertaken. Using semi-structured interviews, three core questions were explored: (1) the extent to which formal psychological-safety policies translate into felt experiences on-site and in office environments; (2) the comparative influence of leadership behaviours versus individual agency in fostering psychological safety; and (3) the strategies employees employ to feel secure when voicing concerns.

Findings indicate that participants across all hubs share a clear and consistent definition of psychological safety at an organisational level. However, the translation of these policies into everyday practice was found to be more problematic on construction sites than in office contexts. Physical hazards, shifting team compositions, tight timelines, and hierarchical site structures appeared as significant barriers. Based on these insights, context-sensitive, leadership driven interventions, including embedding open-door policies, site inductions, integrating leadership quality metrics into recruitment and performance appraisals are recommended. While this study captures experiences at a single point in time, future research should adopt a longitudinal, project lifecycle design to examine how psychological safety evolves throughout project phases and to confirm the long-term efficacy of tailored practices. These efforts will be crucial for translating organisational intent into sustained, positive safety cultures on construction sites.