

The Case for Psychological Safety

Should you need to obtain sign off or buy-in to adopt practices and approaches that build psychological safety, use this information to explain the importance of psychological safety to your business. The key takeaway is that psychological safety is not just about feeling good as part of a team; building psychological safety will have a significant impact on performance and your organisation's "bottom line."

What is psychological safety?

Psychological safety is the held belief that one *will not suffer any negative consequences through taking interpersonal risks*. This may include speaking up with an idea in a meeting, challenging the status quo, making a change or admitting a mistake.

Where does the concept come from?

In 1999, Dr Amy Edmondson was researching the performance of clinical teams. She was surprised to discover that the clinical teams with the best outcomes actually admitted to more mistakes than lower performing teams. From this, Dr Edmondson developed the concept of psychological safety and proposed that it is a key factor in team performance.

Later, in 2013, Google's Project Aristotle corroborated Edmondson's finding, identifying psychological safety as the **single most important** factor that a team must possess in order to perform at their highest potential. It topped their list of the five most influential factors in team performance:¹

1. **Psychological safety**
2. **Dependability**
3. **Structure and clarity**
4. **Meaning**
5. **Impact**

In 2019, the Accelerate State of DevOps report showed that psychological safety is essential to the performance not only of software delivery teams but entire organisations. Other elements such as easy-to-use tools and readily available information are also valuable, but psychological safety is undoubtedly the keystone of high performance.²

What are the benefits for your organisation?

Whether your organisation is a small startup, a global enterprise, a charity, or governmental body, building psychological safety will reap rewards.

1- <https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/>

2-

<https://cloud.google.com/blog/products/devops-sre/the-2019-accelerate-state-of-devops-elite-performance-productivity-and-scaling>

The tangible benefits of building psychological safety in your organisation range from improved innovation, better ideas, and products that thrill your customers, through to reduced risk of failures, breaches, and non-compliance. Psychological safety results in happier teams that take more intelligent risks, raise concerns sooner, stay on the team longer, are more resilient to change and external threats, and ultimately result in a real improvement to the bottom line of your business or organisation.

Whether you work for a private company, non-profit organisation, a government agency or a sports team, building psychological safety and working through this action pack will return real results:

1. Increased likelihood of successful innovation, resulting in **quicker time-to-market**.
2. An increased ability to learn from mistakes, resulting in **fewer problems or outages**, higher quality, and improved governance and controls.
3. Increased reporting of concerns and security issues, resulting in **decreased risk of security, health and safety or non-compliance incidents**.
4. Increased employee engagement, resulting in lower churn rates and **decreased costs** related to recruitment and absenteeism.
5. Improved reputation resulting in an **increased ability to recruit** the best people.
6. **Increased profitability** as a result of all of the above.

Fundamentally, building psychological safety is not only the right thing to do for members of your teams, but it's the right thing to do for your business or your organisation.

For further information, see “an Introduction to Psychological Safety” (item 1) for an introduction to psychological safety, see the Further Reading (item M), or get in touch at psychsafety@tomgeraghty.co.uk.

1- <https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/>

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