



# PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The key to happy, high-performing people and teams

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## What is Psychological Safety?

The term Psychological safety was originally coined by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson whose research focused on psychological safety as it applies to work teams. In this context Edmondson defined psychological safety as:

“a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.”  
(Edmondson, 2014)

## Why is it important?

Recent neuroscience research has revealed the importance of Psychological Safety for personal mental and physical health, engagement and productivity.

In fact, studies have demonstrated that a “hit” to our psychological safety (through bullying or social rejection) can have a stronger impact on the brain than a punch to the face.

When our psychological safety is threatened, our brain is triggered into a stress response which compromises our cognitive abilities and impacts our ability to think, be creative, make decisions, and regulate emotions.

Experiencing psychological threat over a prolonged period can have more serious impacts on mental and physical health and wellbeing and can lead to burnout and illness.

## Why is it relevant in the workplace?

In 2015 Google published the results of Project Aristotle, an in-depth study to find the factors common to high-performing teams. Research on 100s of their teams revealed the most agile and high-performing teams were those with a high sense of Psychological Safety.

Members of these teams felt a sense of trust and security within the team which enabled them to speak up and be themselves, without fear of retribution or ridicule. This led to a more engaged and collaborative team where members were more trusting, less likely to leave and more likely to harness the power of diversity, leading to greater team performance and success.

## How do you measure and build it?

Until recently, we haven't had the knowledge or tools to unpack Psychological Safety. The logical starting place is its root - the brain - yet we lacked the ability to measure, track or implement strategies for something so subjective and invisible.

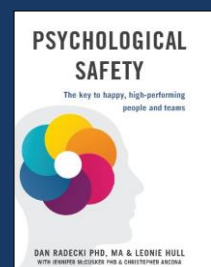
Thanks to recent breakthroughs in neuroscience we are now gaining this visibility by uncovering the brain's social needs that determine and impact our sense of Psychological Safety.

Understanding these needs and triggers and how we prioritize them, as well as how to manage them can help us protect and build psychological safety.

*If harming psychological safety is so damaging, and the benefits of protecting psychological safety are so great, why don't we give it the same attention in society as we do physical safety?*



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## Your brain is hardwired for safety!

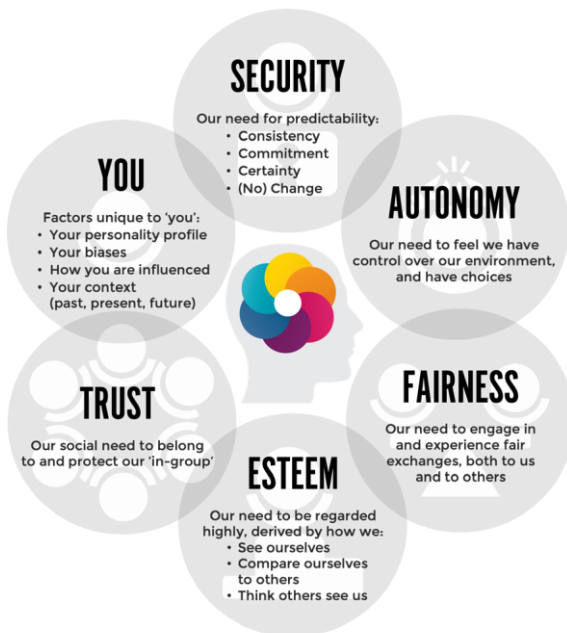
As society has evolved, our brains have become acutely sensitive, not only to physical threats, but to psychological threats we perceive in our social interactions. These can be things like attitudes, behaviors, motivations and judgements.

Mostly these perceived threats are monitored and detected by our brain at a nonconscious level. In fact more than 99% of our decisions, motivations and reactions are influenced by automatic, nonconscious processes, meaning that most of the time ... you are on autopilot!

So how do you identify and manage the triggers that threaten psychological safety and hijack your brain?

## The S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ Model

Based on the latest neuroscience research, the S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ Model outlines six domains of threat and reward that are important to the brain and that impact our behavior and motivation. Understanding the needs, rewards, motivations, biases and stress triggers of each domain provides insight into yourself and others, to help you nurture your own, and other's psychological safety.



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## S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ Assessment

The S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ assessment, is a validated tool that ranks and quantifies how important the S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ social drivers are to you. Only the first five components of the acronym are measured as the “Y” (You) is so incredibly complex and variable between individuals.

The S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ profile report helps you understand what drives you and the relative importance you place on each domain. It also identifies how you might experience threats and how other people might experience your behavior.



## Building safety one brain at a time!

ABL's scientifically-driven solutions equip leaders and teams with the language, awareness, tools and skills they need to foster psychological safety personally and collectively.

S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ debrief sessions use the assessment and the S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ toolkit as reflection tools to build self-awareness of psychological safety needs and triggers, and the strategies to communicate and manage them.

Team S.A.F.E.T.Y.™ Debrief sessions build on this to increase interpersonal awareness and emotional intelligence to improve team collaboration, engagement, wellbeing and performance.

*This has been by far the most powerful personal transformation journey. I highly recommend this approach to anyone curious to understand themselves better and passionate about nurturing an environment where everyone can feel like they belong.*

—Hasan Rafiq, Diversity & Inclusion Leader, Facebook



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Rebecca is a multidisciplinary strategist with MillerKnoll and an internationally certified leadership development coach and an ABL Psychological SAFETY Team Facilitator.

Trained in the ATT and UTC leadership academies, Rebecca can provide insights into various leadership topics, including communication, delegation, conflict resolution, decision-making, psychological safety, and more.

With her corporate leadership experience, Rebecca has worked with a broad cross-section of individuals to identify their strengths and areas for development, set goals, and help them chart their path to achieving those goals.

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