

Psychological Safety Isn't a Perk — It's the Performance Lever We Keep Ignoring

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Psychological safety is not soft. It's not about protecting feelings, or indulging sensitivities. It's about performance. It's about whether people can bring their full selves to work—unfiltered, unafraid, and unleashed.

In my research involving over 1,900 senior leaders, across industries and geographies, one truth comes up again and again: the most consistent driver of sustained high performance is psychological safety. Not strategy. Not structure. Not even intelligence. It is whether people feel safe enough to speak, screw up, or challenge what's not working—without fear of humiliation or retribution.

We've known this for years. Harvard's Amy Edmondson first introduced the term. Google's internal "Project Aristotle" later confirmed it as the critical success factor for team effectiveness. But beyond the academic literature, the real-world implications are even starker.

In my sample, those organisations with high psychological safety saw:

- Better decision-making under pressure
- Faster learning from failure
- Greater innovation output and follow-through
- Significantly improved well-being, retention, and discretionary effort

When safety is absent, a slow rot begins. People self-censor. Mistakes go unreported. Mediocrity becomes the culture. Silence wins.

Critically, psychological safety is not just a feeling—it's a set of observable behaviours. You can see it in meetings where junior voices are heard. In leaders who admit they don't have all the answers. In teams that laugh, challenge, and care in equal measure.

It doesn't come from perks or posters. It comes from leadership. And it's built—or broken—every day in the small moments:

Who gets interrupted?

Who gets credit?

Who gets punished for honesty?



Here's what I tell every leader I coach: if your team isn't disagreeing with you, they're not aligned—they're surviving. If we want to solve complex problems, build resilient cultures, and deliver real results, we need to stop treating psychological safety like a "nice to have" and start embedding it as core infrastructure.

It is the hard edge of high performance.