



College of Engineering
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

The Role of Psychological Safety in the Workplace

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Learning outcomes:

- Understand the impact of psychological safety on the
 - Individual
 - Team
 - Organization
- Learn strategies to cultivate psychological safety

Community compact

- Be open to challenging ideas.
- Share intentions, with your personal stories. Be careful when sharing opinions versus knowledge from lived experience or sustained study.
- Notice your defensive reactions and reflect on them as entry points for gaining deeper self-knowledge.
- Recognize how your own social positionality (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability) informs your perspectives and reactions to others.
- Accept discomfort as necessary for growth.
- Identify where your learning edge is and push it.

Adapted from: Sensoy, O., and DiAngelo, R. (2014)



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Introduce yourself to a partner

Prompt:

Share name and department/unit *as well as* a story you tell other people to help them *either* remember your name *or* learn how to pronounce your name correctly.

Key vocabulary

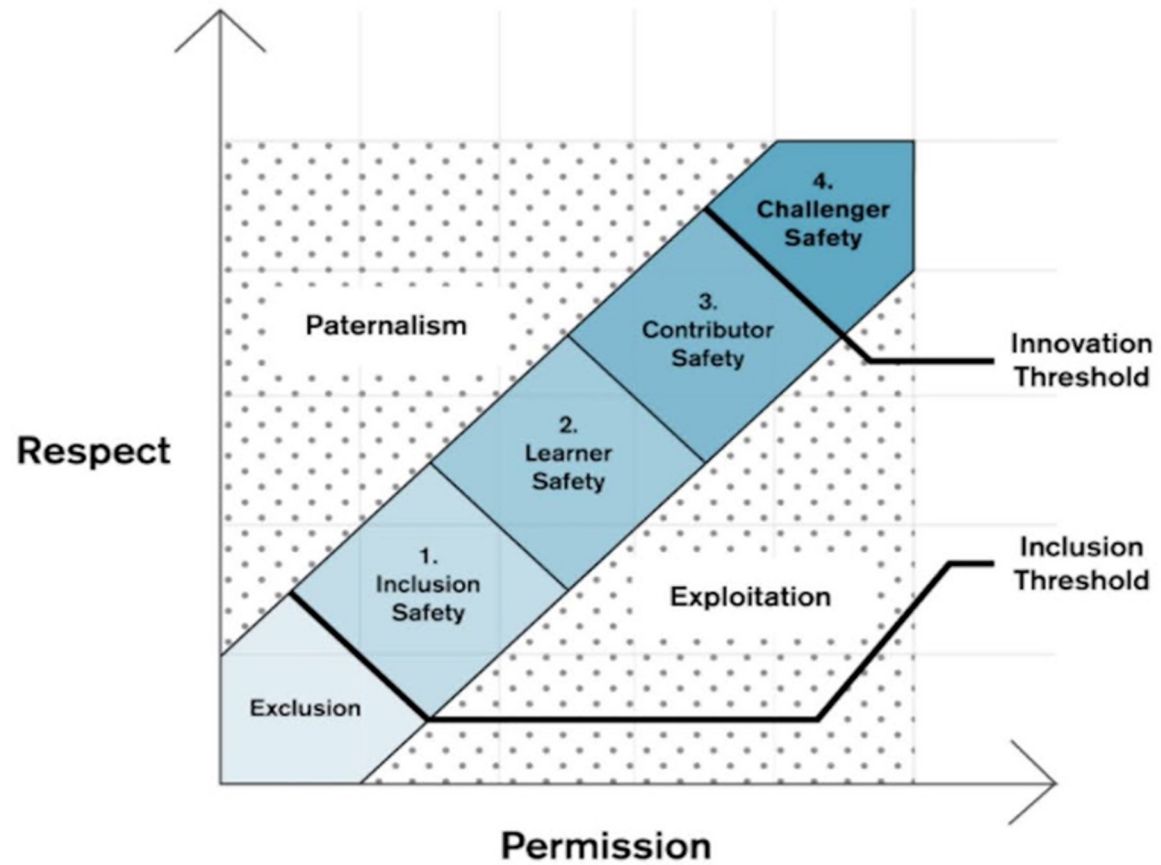
- **Personal identity** - the personal traits you hold, and how they make you uniquely you, and different from others.
- **Social identity** - the identities that you share with others—the groups to which you belong. A way of naming the complex interactions between how we understand ourselves and how others see us with respect to major social categories.
- **Power** - the ability to influence others.
- **Privilege** - a group of unearned cultural, legal, social and institutional rights extended to a group based on their social group membership.

Key vocabulary

- **Culture** - the customs, social institutions, and achievements of a particular group of people (e.g., department, college, university).
- **Belonging** is defined as feeling valued, accepted, included - not just surface level diversity
- **Psychological safety** is a shared belief held by members of a team that it's OK to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes – all without fear of negative consequences. (HBR, 2023)

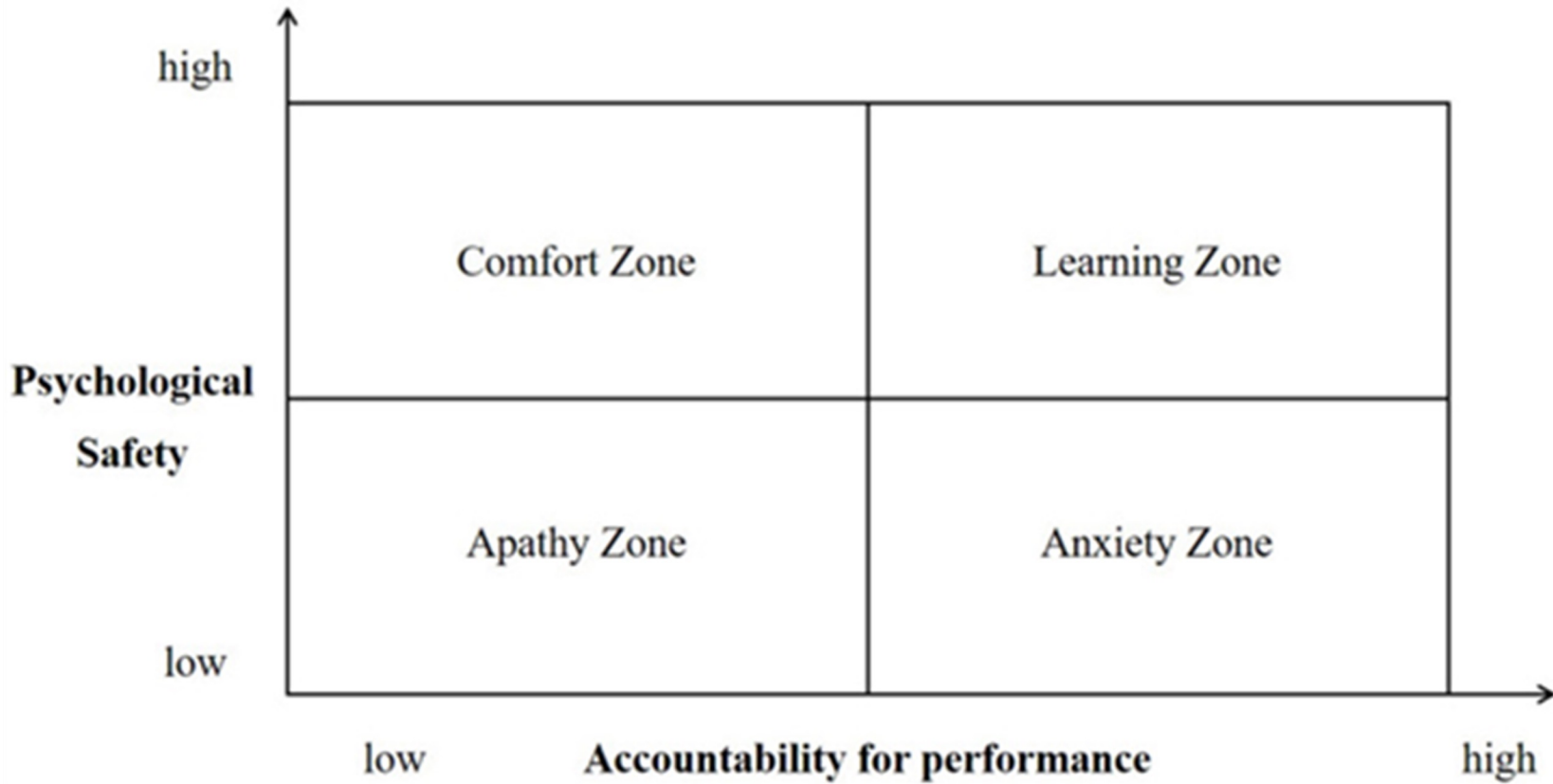
Stages of Psychological Safety

The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety



The Four Stages of Psychological Safety, Clark

Performance Framework



Edmondson's psychological safety-accountability for performance framework

Individual-level Reflection

- What identities are most salient or important to you as a UW-Madison employee?
- What identities do you hold that signal to others that you belong here at UW-Madison?
- What is the relationship between the identities that are most salient to you and those that signal to others that you belong?
- What experiences have made these identities matter to you?



Psychological safety

- The number one predictor of team success is a climate of *psychological safety* (team members comfortable expressing their opinions and being themselves)
- In the absence of psychological safety, fear inhibits learning and cooperation, and overall team performance suffers.
 - (Especially critical for teams that have a transient membership and rigid hierarchy, and for whom continuous learning, experimentation, and boundary-pushing are essential.)

Source: Dr. Betsy Rolland | *Institute for Clinical and Translational Research (ICTR) Team Science Core* | Becoming Fearless: Building Psychological Safety in Science Teams | October 25, 2022



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Psychological safety

- Psychological safety leads to benefits like creativity, learning, problem solving, speaking up about concerns
- Mutual trust allows for taking risks without fear of reprisal
- Enabled by leaders demonstrating openness, setting ground rules, signaling approachability and cultivating mutual trust
- Failure on teams can be destigmatized by reframing it as an opportunity for growth
- You can create psychological safety by asking questions and responding productively in ways that invite dialogue rather than shutting down discussion

Team-level Reflection

- What hierarchies are in place that are both unspoken and integral to the lived experiences of team members in your unit?
- How do those hierarchies impact the sense of psychological safety in the workplace?

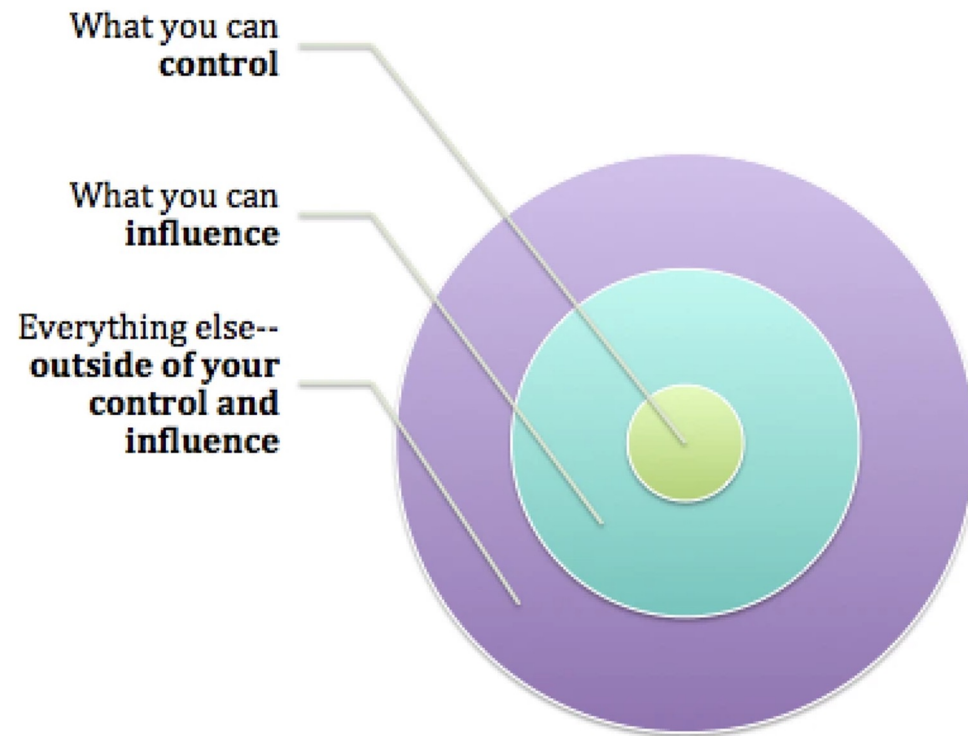
Organizational-level Reflection

- How effective is your department or unit at creating a sense of psychological safety for you, your colleagues as well as students?
- What factors currently contribute to feelings of safety or lack of safety in your department or unit?
- Who are the people in your department or unit who influence your sense of psychological safety or lack there-of?

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Sphere of influence



Graphic source: Aguilar, E., 2014, Spheres of Control, Education Week
<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-spheres-of-control/2014/01>



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY: A KEY PART 1 ELEMENT OF KINDNESS AT WORK

What Leaders Can Do

- Acknowledge Your Own Fears
- Create “Community Agreements” or “Rules of Engagement” for/with Your Group
 - Start with an outline
 - Ask for input from your employees
 - Ask for input from Human Resources
 - Consider the rules/agreements open to revision, always evolving
- Articulate the norms and boundaries before the conversation and adhere to them even when things get intense
- Communicate decision-making processes and conflict management processes before we start

Source: Sanders Consulting | Psychological Safety: A Key Element of Kindness at Work (Online webinar Part 1; 02/15/23)

<https://katherinesandersphd.com/>



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Reflection prompts for discussion

- What power dynamics do you see existing in your department or unit that are based on hierarchies as well as social and cultural identities?
- How do these impact psychological safety in your department or unit?
- How might we address power dynamics, hierarchies and biases in our departments or units that undermine psychological safety?
- Given your sphere of influence in your department or unit, what proactive steps could you take to promote psychological safety?
- How will we as a campus know if we're succeeding in building greater psychological safety?
 - What changes might we see over time?

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Moving to Action

Individual Actions:

- Do the self-work
- Adopt a curious, non-judgmental mindset when others speak.
- Ask for constructive feedback on how you listen and respond.

Group Actions:

- Establish group norms allowing everyone a chance to be heard.
- Role model vulnerability by admitting mistakes without blame.
- Take ownership of decisions and their impact on others.

Key takeaways

- What are your key takeaways from today's session?
- How will you apply what we discussed to your work in the University?
(Plan to share out)



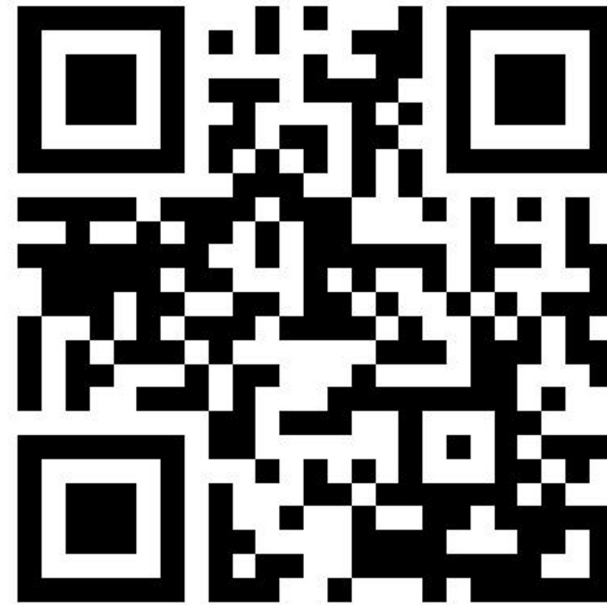
Thank you!

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Scan for Resources



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