



# LEADERSHIP SERIES

## INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

**A SERIES FOR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LEADERSHIP**

*By Stephanie Fleming, Viri Group*



## PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ORIGIN STORY

*The New York Times* in 2016 first reported on the results of [Google's Aristotle Project](#) on what makes a high-performance team.

Google studied team effectiveness for nearly a decade. In 2012, Google launched Aristotle, engaging nearly 200 teams over 3 years, asking: *What makes teams, objectively, successful?*

### *Results*

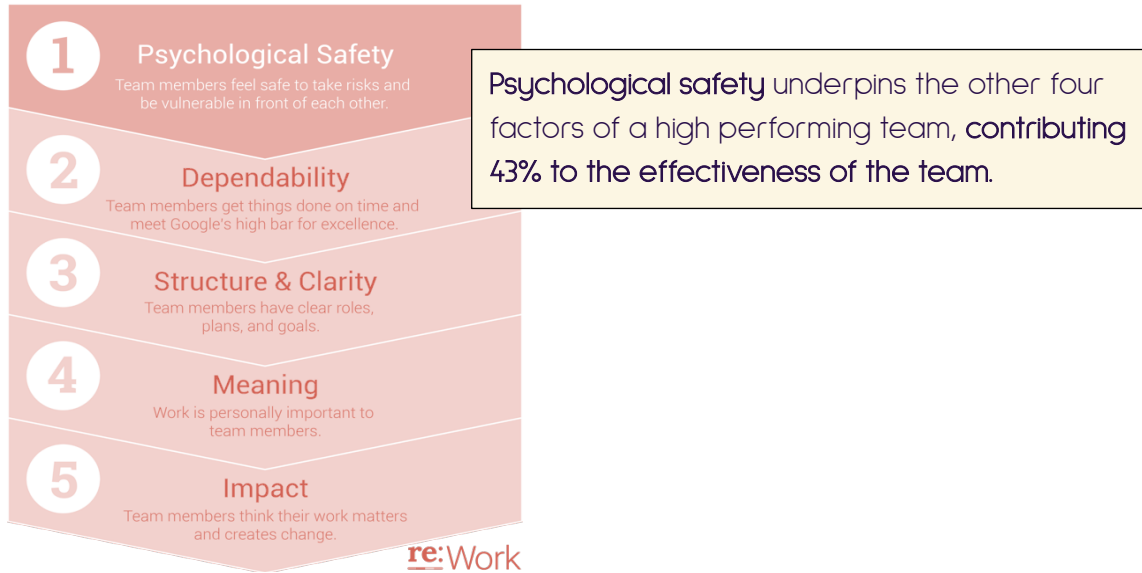
Myths about team performance were debunked. For example, the influence of a shared educational background or socializing outside of work proved to be *insignificant* indicators for team effectiveness.

Google learned *without a doubt* there are [5 factors to a high performing team](#). Each of these metrics have a significant effect on team performance.

- 1) Dependability- we can count on each other
- 2) Structure and Clarity - we have clear goals, roles, and plans
- 3) Personal Meaning - the work is personally important
- 4) Impact - the work matters and is making a difference
- 5) Psychological safety - we can take risks (speak up) without feeling insecure

The 5<sup>th</sup> metric is the magic - and is absolutely required if the other 4 are going to work: *psychological safety*. "a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes" according to [Amy Edmondson](#) - a Harvard Business School professor and expert on psychological safety.

Google found *psychological safety* to be the #1 predictor of team success. *The other four factors only prove to be valuable when a team is psychologically safe.* For the first time, 30 years of research on psychological safety and team effectiveness was quantified.



## Why Psychological Safety Matters

Psychological safety is central not only creating high performance teams, *but is also the crucial element to creating inclusive and innovative cultures.*

Hiring great talent is not enough. *To unleash collective talent,* we need to foster a climate where employees feel free to contribute ideas, share information, and report mistakes.

We spend 50% more time collaborating at work than 20 years ago. Psychological safety allows people to focus on achieving shared goals rather than on self-protection. It helps overcome the defensiveness and learning anxiety faced at work especially when something doesn't go as planned.

Fear *limits* our ability for effective thought and action: inhibits learning, speaking up and impairs analytic thinking, creative insight, and problem solving.

*Why silence?* Why do people hold back when they *know* what they have to say will help the organization, team, and maybe themselves?

- We learn "impression management" at a very young age to try to fit in or be accepted.
- *Silence is a protection mechanism for self-preservation.* Being silent is safe. No one wants to look ignorant, incompetent, or negative.
- We do not want to harm a relationship. Preserving a relationship is one of the top reasons for silence.
- The cost of silence: when we commit to silence, we rob the team of our learning, thoughts, and ideas.

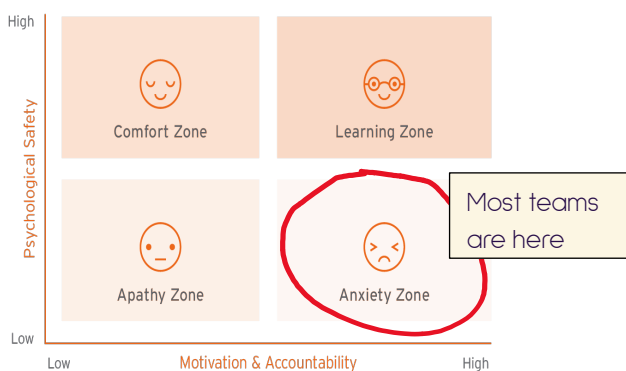


Psychological safety matters *now* as we figure out the next phase of working together post-pandemic.

Over the past couple of years, trust within the workplace has decreased significantly as has psychological safety.

*Leaders have an opportunity to meet these challenges, reset their culture, and increase employee engagement by cultivating psychological safety in their organizations.*

### Employee Experience: Psychological Safety + Accountability



Source: Amy C. Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization 2019 and 2021*

### Resources for Further Exploration

- Dr. Amy C. Edmondson *Tedx Talk: [Building a Psychologically Safe Workplace](#)* (12 min)
- New York Times: [Project Aristotle](#)
- *The Fearless Organization* by Dr. Amy C. Edmondson 2019

## THE FEARLESS ORGANIZATION

Amy Edmondson is the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School. She has researched psychological safety for nearly 30 years and is recognized as the leading thought-leader globally. Amy Edmondson’s company, *The Fearless Organization*, has operationalized this research into a measurement tool and signature leadership development practices.

The measurement tool measures psychological safety through 4 key domains:

- *Inclusion and diversity* (permission to belong, to be different)
- *Attitude to risk and failure* (permission to learn)
- *Willingness to help* (permission to contribute)
- *Open conversation* (permission and courage to challenge status quo, call out mistakes)



## VIRI GROUP



[Stephanie Fleming](#)

President & Chief Strategist, Facilitator

[ScheduleStephanie.com](http://ScheduleStephanie.com)

**My passion** is guiding organizations and teams through challenging situations and change.

I bring a combination of marketing, change management, and human-centered design to my approach, leveraging group behavior and dynamics to create the most impactful and sustainable results while building team strategic thinking and leadership capacity.

My industry experience includes executive and P&L positions with start-ups, nonprofits, and Fortune 500 companies such as: Time Warner, National Geographic Channel, Verizon, and Black & Decker where I built a track record of creating high-performing teams in VUCA environments.

*My quest to unearth barriers to peak performance and "flow" led me to psychological safety in 2016.*

*I am part of the invitation-only first cohort in North America to complete training and become certified from **The Fearless Organization** in psychological safety team development.*

**I work with leaders** and organizations to develop *better strategies and plans* with an inclusive, holistic approach that *addresses internal barriers to successful implementation*.

By working through these barriers while building trust through psychological safety, teams are able to create and sustain the conditions for high performance and well-being.

Our work together is integrated with your current priorities and becomes the foundation for creating inclusive team strategies and action plans.

### Selected Certifications

- The Fearless Organization Psychological Safety Practitioner
- RallyBright Resilient Teams Practitioner
- PROSCI Change Practitioner
- ScrumMaster (CSM) Scrum Alliance
- Demandbase ABM Advanced
- Artful Facilitation for Productive, Inclusive Groups
- Facilitation and Collaboration – University of Wisconsin
- Center for Creative Leadership: Leadership Development