# Psychological safety

Psychological safety is now a de rigueur topic of major relevance to leaders. The relevance is related to the knowledge that organisations benefit from a diversity of thought and teams made up of diverse people. Problem-solving is enhanced and creativity and innovation blossom.

This works well when everyone speaks up, but when someone doesn't feel safe and holds back, the team is deprived and functions sub-optimally. The evidence is clear. For example, 3 in 10 staff strongly agreed that their opinions don't count at work and 20% of women feel overlooked in virtual meetings.
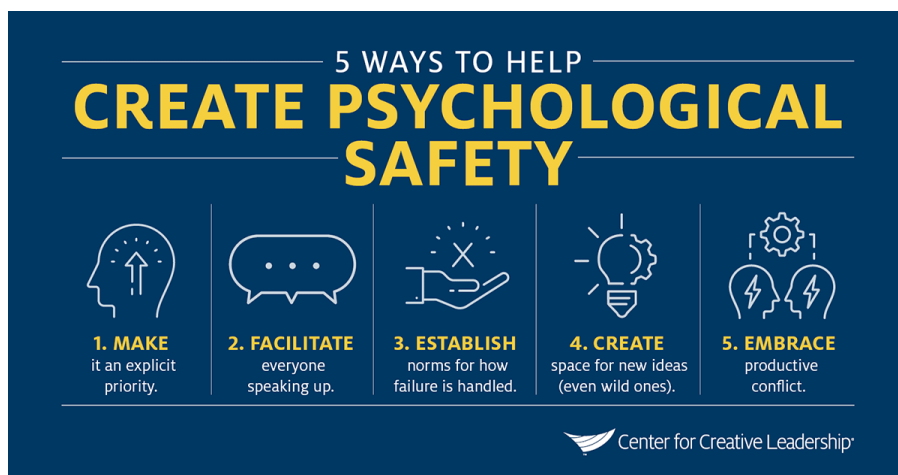
A lack of psychological safety at work has real business repercussions. It's a leader's job to ensure no one is worried about rejection or retribution.

### What is psychological safety?

A feeling of being psychologically safe stems from the belief that you won't be intimidated or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions and concerns or about making a mistake. This enables people to bring their full selves to work and put themselves on the line.

On the other hand, feeling psychologically safe does *not* mean that everybody is nice all the time. Rather, you engage with the conflict knowing your team has your back, and you have theirs.

### Five ways for leaders to create more psychological safety



5 WAYS TO HELP
**CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

1. MAKE it an explicit priority.
2. FACILITATE everyone speaking up.
3. ESTABLISH norms for how failure is handled.
4. CREATE space for new ideas (even wild ones).
5. EMBRACE productive conflict.

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> *1. Make psychological safety an explicit priority.* Talk about how psychological safety promotes innovation, teamwork and a sense of inclusion.

> *2. Facilitate everyone speaking up.* Be genuinely curious about people's views and be willing to listen when someone has the courage to challenge the status quo

> *3. Establish norms for how failure is handled.* Encourage learning from failure and openly share hard-won lessons learned from mistakes.

> *4. Create space for new ideas, including wild ones.* Make clear your willingness to contemplate out-of-the-box and not-yet well-formulated ideas.

> *5. Embrace productive conflict.* Promote dialogue and debate and resolve conflict openly and productively by seeking win-win outcomes.

### Conclusion

If all this sounds like a tall order, remember that psychological safety represents an organization's climate and culture. And when you consider the enormity of changing a culture, it can feel overwhelming and rewarding at the same time.

### More on this topic

✓ Psychological safety and the critical role of leadership development from McKinsey & Co

✓ What is psychological safety at work? from the Center for Creative Leadership

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