THE FEARLESS ORGANIZATION:
THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND EFFECTIVE TEAMS
IN THE CHANGING DUTCH ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE

Amy C. Edmondson
Novartis Professor of Leadership & Management,
Harvard University
Speaking Up and Teaming Up

to build an inclusive community in academia and beyond

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Novartis Professor of Leadership & Management,
Harvard University
An Approach to Relevance
An Approach to Relevance

Field Research

Collaboration across Knowledge Boundaries

Problems
Errors in Hospital Patient Care Teams

RQ: Do better teams make fewer medication errors?
Correlating Team Effectiveness Scores with Error Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORK UNIT</th>
<th>ERRORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMORIAL 1</td>
<td>23.68*</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY 1</td>
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<td>UNIVERSITY 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEMORIAL 3</td>
<td>2.34</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* preventable and potential adverse drug events (ADEs) per 1000 patient-days

The unexpected result: Survey measures of team effectiveness are POSITIVELY correlated with error rates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORK UNIT</th>
<th>DETECTED ERRORS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEMORIAL 1</td>
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Sorted by qualitative rating of unit climate

* preventable and potential adverse drug events (ADEs) per 1000 patient-days

Psychological Safety & Team Learning

RQ: Do teams vary in psychological safety within the same organization, and if so, does psychological safety influence team learning and team performance?

Next... triggered by: A Request for Help Assessing Team Effectiveness
Findings

- Empirical and psychometric support for the validity of team psychological safety as a construct and measure

- Empirical evidence of relationship between psychological safety and team learning

- Empirical evidence that psychological safety predicts team performance, mediated by team learning

What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter.

“When [Julia] Rozovsky and her Google colleagues encountered the concept of psychological safety in academic papers, it was as if everything suddenly fell into place”

Source: NY Times
A belief that the context is safe for interpersonal risk taking – that speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes will be welcomed and valued.

THINK OF IT AS FELT PERMISSION FOR CANDOR.
H1: Role-based Status explains differences in Psychological Safety

GLM Contrast Comparing Psychological Safety of

- Physicians to Nurses: p<.001
- Nurses to Therapists: p=.016
- Overall planned contrast: p = <.001

N=1100
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT:

• A personality factor
• Being nice
• Freedom from conflict
• A guarantee that all your ideas will be applauded
• Permission to slack off
• Oversharing
• The goal...
CONFRONTING A NEW REALITY

• **Volatile**: Rapid changes, ups & downs/big swings
• **Uncertain**: Difficult to predict future events/values
• **Complex**: Multiple interconnected elements
• **Ambiguous**: Unclear meaning of signals/events

= V.U.C.A.

SPEAKING UP MATTERS MORE THAN EVER...
CONFRONTING A NEW REALITY – IN ACADEMIA?

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= V.U.C.A.

SPEAKING UP MATTERS MORE THAN EVER...
BUT WAIT!

Doesn’t fear motivate people to work hard?
FEAR MOTIVATES... BUT WHAT DOES IT MOTIVATE?
FEAR MOTIVATES... BUT WHAT DOES IT MOTIVATE?

The World’s Largest Automaker

Green Car of the Year 2008

Volkswagen
THE ILLUSION OF HIGH PERFORMANCE IS REVEALED

The Study That Brought Down Volkswagen
ERIC JAEFF SEP 24, 2015

A closer look at the West Virginia report at the center of the VW emissions scandal.

Volkswagen C.E.O. Martin Winterkorn Resigns Amid Emissions Scandal

Volkswagen Agrees to $1.2 Billion German Fine in Emissions-Cheating Scheme

Source: City Lab (2014); NYT (2015); NYT (2018)
There was always a distance, a fear and a respect... If [Winterkorn] would come and visit or you had to go to him, your pulse would go up. If you presented bad news, those were the moments that it could become quite unpleasant and loud and quite demeaning.”

A Recipe for Failure: Stretch Goals + Closed Ears

Source: Reuters (2015)
FEAR: WHAT WE KNOW

Fear motivates hiding

Fear limits creativity, learning and problem solving
NO TRADEOFF BETWEEN HIGH STANDARDS & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Which quadrant do you believe researchers in your organization find themselves in most often?

What are the implications for research performance?
WHAT LEADERS DO TO BUILD A FEARLESS CULTURE

1. FRAME THE WORK
2. INVITE ENGAGEMENT
3. RESPOND PRODUCTIVELY
FRAME THE WORK

COGNITIVE FRAMES
Implicit beliefs that shape how people make sense of a situation and influence how they act and respond… = a mindset

(RE-)FRAMING
Words and actions that shape others’ frames (mindsets) about the work in productive ways.
I said, “Early, often, ugly. It’s O.K. It doesn’t have to be perfect because then I can course-correct much, much faster.”

No amount of ugly truth scares me. It’s just information to make a decision.

“Healthcare by its nature is a complex, error prone system”
WHAT LEADERS DO TO BUILD A FEARLESS CULTURE

Frame the Work → Invite Engagement
INVITE ENGAGEMENT: ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

• To broaden the discussion
  – What do others think?
  – What are we missing?
  – What other options could we consider?
  – **Who has a different perspective?**

• To deepen the discussion
  – What leads you to think so?
  – What’s the concern that you have about that?
  – Can you give us an example?
  – Can you explain that further?
  – What do you think might happen if we did X?

*Good questions focus on what matters, invite careful thought, and give people room to respond.*

Jot down one good question of each type to use next week.
WHAT LEADERS DO TO BUILD A FEARLESS CULTURE

Frame the Work → Invite Engagement → Respond Productively
“You have to make honest feedback a positive experience. It has to be that the red is a gem. I had to demonstrate with my behavior that I welcomed it.”

Alan Mulally, to Diane Brady, Business Week. April 12, 2012
A PRODUCTIVE RESPONSE

- **Appreciative** *(thank you for that clear line of sight)*
  +
- **Forward looking** *(how can we help?)*
WHAT LEADERS DO TO BUILD A FEARLESS CULTURE

1. **Framing the work** accurately – ensuring shared understanding of the reality of complexity, uncertainty, novelty, and failure;
2. **Inviting engagement** by asking good questions;
3. **Responding** that welcomes messengers and promotes forward-focused problem-solving.
THE GROWING NEED FOR COLLABORATION

**teams (n.) and team • ing (v.)**

- You cannot be expert on everything
- Most projects require multiple sources of expertise
- Bringing them together is vital
THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF TEAMWORK

Forces Driving Change

- **Globalization** – Rapid, dynamic work in response to change, more boundaries to cross, more virtual communication
- **Scientific knowledge** – More types and greater depth of expertise to cross
- **Complex problems** – Agnostic to sectors, with incomplete or changing requirements

Figure 2. Co-occurrence of factors.

### Into the fray: Adaptive approaches to studying novel teamwork forms

**Michaela J. Kerrissey**
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA

**Patricia Satterstrom**
New York University, USA

**Amy C. Edmondson**
Harvard Business School, USA

**Abstract**

Novel forms of teamwork—created by rapid change and growing diversity among collaborators—are increasingly common, and they present substantial methodological challenges for research. We highlight two aspects of new team forms that challenge conventional methods. Factors pertaining to change (e.g., in membership) create entitativity challenges such as whom to count as team members, while factors pertaining to difference (e.g., in expertise) create concordance challenges such as how to interpret disagreement in groups. We review research methods that are well-suited to each of these specific challenges. We identify the particular challenges of studying teams that exhibit high difference and change simultaneously and call for adaptive methods that enable insight into how they work. Clarity about the dimensions of deviation from ideal team forms, along with shared terminology, will help researchers make and discuss tough methodological choices and assist reviewers in evaluating them.
Joint Problem Solving in Fluid Cross-Boundary Teams

RQ: What factors enable performance when teams working across organizational boundaries with fluid membership pursue process innovation for mutual gain?

The Team Goal:
New Process Design for Diabetes Prevention Program Enrollment and Payment

Local chapters of national nonprofit “HealthSource”

Referral

Healthcare Clinics

Reporting

Program delivery to patients

Diagnose and refer patients
Study Overview

**Phase 1: Qualitative**
- Collected interview and archival data to explore how these fluid, boundary-crossing teams made progress
- 14 inter-organizational teams
- Induced theory about team factors enhancing performance

**Phase 2: Quantitative**
- Developed and administered survey
- 299 inter-organizational teams
- Measured and explored relationship of team factors to performance
Overview of Findings

Qualitative

Two reactions to low stability:
(1) Investing in relationship building
(2) Joint problem-solving orientation

Quantitative

Joint problem solving orientation is a measurable construct with a robust, positive relationship to performance.
FOR MORE...
FEAR THAT IS SHARED IS PRODUCTIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Fear at Work</th>
<th>Fear Related to COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subtle/Hidden</td>
<td>Obvious/Explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Alone</td>
<td>A Shared Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned with What Others Think</td>
<td>Concerned with What We Can Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibits Innovation</td>
<td>Promotes Innovation</td>
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To the extent that people you work with have felt more comfortable than usual expressing their concerns and questions, how can you keep that transparency and vulnerability alive in the future?
FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

1. **Framing**: What will I do to clarify the importance of voice? How can I make sure everyone appreciates the level of uncertainty or interdependence we face, so that they recognize the necessity of relating fearlessly to each other?

2. **Inviting**: What can I do to model curiosity about what others see and bring? In what situations can I ask more, and better, questions, rather than just expressing my perspective?

3. **Responding**: What will I do to signal that what I am hearing matters? What will I do to acknowledge the effort it takes when people bring ideas or questions forward? What can I do to destigmatize bad news and intelligent failure?

4. **Purpose**: What can I do to build commitment to the longer-term shared purpose of our group – helping to ensure that everyone understands why our work makes a difference, and for whom, and that it’s worth fighting for?
FAILURE IS INEVITABLE – BUT NOT ALL FAILURE IS GOOD

Preventable Failures

- Where we know how to do it right; we have a playbook, yet deviations occurred…

Complex Failures

- Complex factors (organizational, market, natural) combine in completely new ways to produce failure in familiar contexts

Intelligent Failures

- Undesired results of thoughtful forays into novel territory
WHEN AND HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY MATTERS FOR EXCELLENCE

As uncertainty increases, psychological safety is more and more important to success…
## Problematic vs. Productive Silence

### Problematic Silence

- Withholding voice related to a potentially serious work/performance risk
- Withholding voice related to risks to human safety/dignity
- Withholding voice pointing to a potential improvement or innovation opportunity
- An unasked (thus, unanswered) question restricts your ability to contribute or succeed
- Your silence denies colleagues the opportunity to help you solve a problem.
- Your primary focus in that moment is concern with how you will look if what you say isn’t well received.

### Productive Silence

- Withholding content that is off topic.
- Withholding content due to confidentiality or security concerns
- Withholding personal insults, sarcasm, or other unprofessional remarks
- Staying silent to listen intently to what others are saying, to learn more and figure out how you can contribute
- Your primary focus in that moment is ensuring the quality of the work or furthering the organization’s mission.
TEAMING WITHOUT A BLUEPRINT ➔ “EXECUTION-AS-LEARNING”

It’s agile, collaborative & iterative:

• Your teams face many **UNKNOWNNS**

• Team members must bring in different **EXPERTISE** at different times.

• They lack a fixed set of **DELIVERABLES** or fixed **ROLES**.

• They must do **NEW** things that haven't been done before.

• They must **ACT** – to learn.

• They will sometimes **FAIL** along the way…
“A hallmark of a healthy, creative culture is that its people feel free to share ideas, opinions and criticisms... without that, collaboration is not possible.”

Source: Catmull & Wallace (2014)
Inclusive Leadership

- Unit Medical Directors who:
  - Are accessible
  - Acknowledge their own fallibility
  - Proactively invite input

Inclusive leaders

*lower* the psychological costs of speaking up and

*raise* the psychological costs of silence