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“Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace” by Amy Edmondson

Premise

In her book, The Fearless Organization, Amy Edmondson offers practical guidance for teams and organizations who are serious about success in the modern economy. With so much riding on innovation, creativity, and spark, it is essential to attract and retain quality talent—but what good does this talent do if no one is able to speak their mind? This Soundview Live webinar explores the culture of psychological safety, and provides a blueprint for bringing it to life. The road is sometimes bumpy, but succinct and informative scenario-based explanations provide a clear path forward to constant learning and healthy innovation.

About the Speaker: Amy C. Edmondson is the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School. Her work explores teaming - the dynamic forms of collaboration needed in environments characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity. She has also studied the role of psychological safety in teamwork and innovation. Before her academic career, she was Director of Research at Pecos River Learning Centers, where she worked with founder and CEO Larry Wilson to design change programs in large companies. In the early 1980s, she worked as Chief Engineer for architect/inventor Buckminster Fuller, and innovation in the built environment remains an area of enduring interest and passion.

Summary

- Content rating: 5 (a new idea / approach)
- Style rating: 0 (average presentation)

Notes

- Reason we need psychological safety (voices are welcome and expected)
    - All people do “impression management” - no one wants to look ignorant (don’t ask questions), incompetent (don’t admit a weakness or mistake), intrusive (don’t offer ideas), negative (don’t critique the status quo)
    - In general, the higher status you had, the more psychological safety. But in groups of the highest people we all revert to “impression management”
- There are real benefits to psychological safety
    - In medical setting, higher psychological safety lead to 18% reduction in bad accidents and deaths

- Leadership behaviors explain the difference between safe and not safe environment
    - Not just at top level, but all levels, as psychological safety lives in groups (not individuals, not organizations)
    - We need to train all levels of manager to be happy with disagreement
    - Psychological safety enables learning behaviors
        - "But fear is a motivator!": Yes, but wrong kind as it impairs analytical thinking
        - "But what about performance standards?": Need both performance standards and psychological safety
        - Argument is that we need to be in the "learning zone", that there is no trade-off between these concerns. In fact, cannot achieve high performance without both psychological safety and standards

Axis	Low Psychological Safety	High Psychological Safety
High Standards	Anxiety zone (afraid to speak)	Learning zone
Low Standards	Apathy zone	Comfort zone (mailing it in)

- Model to help organization change to increase psychological safety:
    - Set the stage - creates rational for speaking up
    - Invite engagement - acknowledge your own fallibility
    - Respond appreciatively
- Set the stage is about (re-)framing the work as a learning problem, not an execution problem
    - Aim is to overcome the instincts that get in the way of work
    - Different framing needed for different environments
    - All environments are seeing increased VUCA
    - Proficiency → customization → creativity are different levels of (increased) uncertainty as there is increased failure rates (therefore learning)
    - Innovation. IDEO: "Fail this often and sooner". Pixar: "All of our movies are bad at first"
        - Help override instinct hesitate to take risk and fear of failure
    - Entrepreneur. "Early, often, ugly" and "If you are good at course correction being wrong is less costly than you think"
        - Help override "tendency to agree with the boss"
        - "Here's our protocol we'd like you to follow it. And deviate any time your clinical judgement tells you. And tell us what you did and why"
        - Help override "Don't tell what us what to do" and "complacency"
    - Proficiency. Toyota. "Tells us about you problems so we can work on them together"
        - "We know you are a good manager."
        - Help override boasting and the need to hide problems
- Invite engagement
    - Say "I need your help; I might miss something"
    - Broaden the discussion - What do others think, What are we missing, What options do we have, Who has a different perspective
    - Deepen the discussion - What leads us to think so
    - "Which one of you has a different opinion?"
- Respond appreciatively
    - Don't respond harshly, negatively
    - Offer thanks, and an offer of help - Make honest feedback a positive experience.
    - Model curiosity

Notes During Session

Fearlessness

Nurse: notice medications too high. Doctor said bad things last time. Does it any way Engineer: notices Executive: new, everyone else excited about merger, don’t want to spoil the party

Fearlessness - young man putting up hand

Interpersonal risk

No one wants to look Ignorant incompetent Intrusive Negative- don’t critique to status quo

Impression management are second nature Human instinct get in the way Eg fear of failure

Create climate of psychological safety Ok Voice welcome / expected

Status in medical hierarchy Higher status means higher safety

Status induced safety

It matters High flat safety pattern - 18 % improvement in death rates and bad accident

What explains difference Leadership behaviors made a difference

Not just in the lower organization But happens at the top level as well Senior management do it as well

Need to train managers to be happy when their is disagreement, not when everyone is reporting “good” results.

Fear is good, right? No! Fear impairs analytical thinking etc Especially interpersonal fear Can’t do best when afraid, especially knowledge work

Safety not about nice - research It’s about candor Feel free share ideas, opinions, etc Complex creative interdependent

Safety lives at group level - research Not organizations It’s work groups within Middle managers, project leaders, branch leaders matter

Safety enables learning behaviors. Eg reporting

What about performance standards? Some see this as “the opposite”

Low to high safety (able to bring themselves - take off the breaks) Low to high performance

Performance - safety Low - low - apathy Low - high - comfort zone (mail it in) High - low - anxiety zone (afraid to speak up) High - high - learning zone

No trade off between performance and safety Can’t achieve high performance without safety

Google study Project Aristotle

Safety was the factor

Safety was the most important Underpinning of other 4 Dependability, structure and clarity, meaning, impact

Avoidable business failures

Wells Fargo 2015 “shiny strategy” - cross selling - sell at least 8 products to every client Cracks - whatever it takes to sell, etc Pressure boils Branch employees open accounts, lie saying you have to have both, fake customers Scandal/ headlines

Recipe for failure: stretch goals + closed ears Open ears - really listening not managers won’t take no for answer

VW Illusion of success But based on deceit - won’t able to produce the engineer Some problems

How build it - what do all leaders need to do

Behaviors and structures

Stage: VUCA - volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous

Set the stage by reframing the work

Profiency → customization → creativity Increased uncertainty Increased failure rates (therefore learning)

What are the human instincts that get in the way to allow people to do the work

Frame implicit belief Reframing - the work Shared sense understand Overcome natural instincts

Some leaders this do this often and deliberative

Innovation

IDEO “Fail this often and sooner” Help override instinct hesitate to take risk and fear of failure

“All of our movies are bad at first”

Entrepreneurs

“Early, often, ugly” Override “tendency to wait until it is perfect before reveal” “If you are good at course correction being wrong is less costly than you think”

Sloan “All in agreement … Give us time to develop disagreement “ - r Override “tendency to agree with the boss”

Medical Brent James “Here’s our protocol we’d like you to follow it And deviate any time your clinical judgement tells you And tell us what you did and why”

Frame - protocol easy

Override Don’t tell what us what to do and complacency

Routine production Toyota Think differently about work

“Tells us about you problems so we can work on them together” We know you are a good manager.

Override boast, to hide problems

Set the stage - invite engagement - Respond appreciatively

Invite engagement Ask people overtly to contribute “I may miss something, I need to hear from you” Reduce cost of speaking up, and raise the cost to remain silent Ask good questions - focus on what really matters. Give people room to respond

Broaden the discussion What do others think What are we missing What options Who has a different perspective

Deepen the discussion What leads us to think so

Set the stage - invite engagement - Respond appreciatively

Respond appreciatively Don’t respond harshly, negatively

Mulally at Ford “Green” reports Fields reported a problem Mulally applauded

Thanks, and an offer of help

Make honest feedback a positive experience.

Webinar, psychologicalsafety, leadership, teams, Learning, Video

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