# Psychological Safety

2023

What is Psychological Safety?

Self protection

Psychological safety

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

# What is the definition of Psychological Safety?

*“The belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking and that people feel able to speak up with relevant ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes without fear of being punished or humiliated.”*

(Edmondson 2018)

TED Talk: Amy Edmondson on Psychological Safety
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8

# Self Protection

Without psychological safety we fall back to protecting ourselves…

| No-one wants to look | How to avoid the situation |
| --- | --- |
| Ignorant | Don’t ask questions |
| Incompetent | Don’t admit weakness or mistakes |
| Intrusive | Don’t offer ideas |
| Negative | Don’t critique the status quo |

# Self protection – Common Knowledge Effect

In Zig Ziglar's ham story, he describes how the bride in a newly married couple cut off the end of the ham before baking it.

Her husband asked why. The wife responded that her mother always cut off the end of the ham and that was the way it was supposed to be.

Not accepting "the way it was supposed to be," the husband called his mother-in-law and asked why she cut off the end of the ham before baking. The response was that her mother cut off the end of the ham.

# Self protection – Common Knowledge Effect

More curious than ever, the husband called grandma and asked her why she cut off the end of the ham. The answer was that she had a small oven and that was the only way to get the ham to fit.

# Self Protection

# Self Protection

**Without psychological safety things can escalate**

# Self protection

… and go very wrong!

# Self protection - Chernobyl Design

During the design, several corners were cut.

There were several characteristics of the reactor which were known to be problematic.

In the event of a power cut, they didn't think there would be enough time for the diesel generators to take over.

On April 14th, 1986, they decided to test the theory…

# Self protection - Chernobyl April 1986

They tried to bring the power down to 50%

To test the diesel back-up, they had to disable the safety system.

The power station shortly had to be brought up to full power due to another power plant failure.

The safety system wasn’t re-enabled.

# Self protection - Chernobyl April 1986

Later that day they continued with the experiment.

The reactor was in an unsafe state due to the earlier rollback.

The reactor was never supposed to operate at a low-power level.

The core started to overheat due to a positive feedback loop being created.

A series of mistakes then led to the explosion after steam built up in the core.

# Self protection – What went wrong?

Due to the culture in the former Soviet Union, nobody felt that they could question the decisions.

- Nobody questioned the fundamentally unsafe design.

  When the reactor was brought online, nobody questioned the fact that it was unsafe to do so in the time given.

  During the testing process, nobody raised the fact that the staff were ill-prepared.

# Psychological safety

**How can we do better?**

# Psychological safety – Promote Learning

# Psychological Safety - Project Aristotle

Google is so big, it can conduct research on itself.

- Previously, Google created the Oxygen Project to find out what makes a good manager.
- Following Project Oxygen, they created Project Aristotle to find out what makes a high-functioning team.

# Psychological Safety – Project Aristotle

Firstly, they defined ‘team’ as;

*“Teams are highly interdependent - they plan work, solve problems, make decisions, and review progress in service of a specific project. Team members need one another to get work done.”*

https://rework.withgoogle.com/print/guides/5721312655835136/

# Psychological Safety - Project Aristotle

Google analysed 180 teams, measuring the following:

- Executive evaluation of the team
- Team leader evaluation of the team
- Team member evaluation of the team
- Sales performance against quarterly quota

# Psychological Safety - Project Aristotle

The teams were found to be a mixture of ratings, both high and low on effectiveness.

The team members were then given a survey to complete, covering aspects such as:

- Personality traits
- Skill sets
- Group dynamics
- Emotional intelligence

# Psychological Safety - Project Aristotle

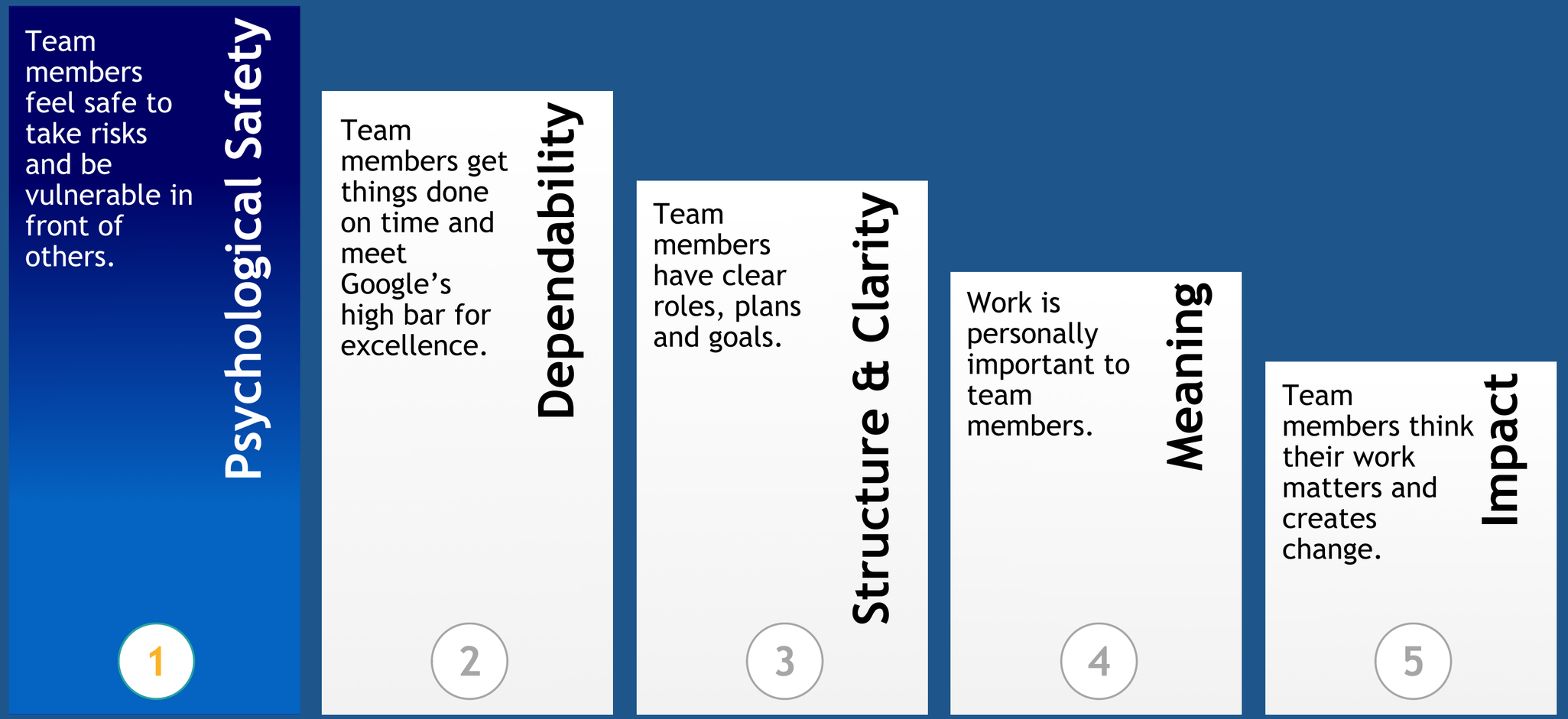
They analysed all the data and found the following weren't the high-priority items;

- Colocation of teammates
- Consensus-driven decision making
- Extroversion of team members
- Individual performance of team members
- Workload size
- Seniority
- Team size
- Length of time at Google

# Psychological Safety - Project Aristotle

**Can you guess the most important aspect of a team?**

# Psychological Safety - Project Aristotle



# Psychological safety – Project Aristotle

Psychological Safety
“If I make a mistake on our team, it is not held against me.”

Dependability
“When my teammates say they’ll do something, they follow through with it.”

Structure and Clarity
“Our team has an effective decision-making process.”

Impact
“I understand how our team’s work contributes to the organization's goals.”

Meaning
“The work I do for our team is meaningful to me.”

# Psychological Safety - Creating a Safe Environment

**Learner safety**: Team members should feel comfortable asking questions, experimenting, learning from each other's mistakes, and looking for new opportunities.

**Collaborator safety**: Team members should participate in open dialogue, have mutual access to each other, and engage in constructive debates.

**Challenger safety**: People should feel comfortable challenging the status quo if they identify changes that need to be made, even if those changes are unpopular or difficult. Team members should be encouraged to speak up and expose problems.

**Inclusion safety**: Team members need to feel valued. Everyone should know that their experience and ideas matter equally, regardless of their title or rank. Members should be comfortable contributing to the group.

# Psychological Safety - Creating a Safe Environment

## How can we achieve it?

- **Lead by example** – Own your mistakes from the top down
- **Frame tasks as a learning experience** – accept feedback, suggestions, and alternative ideas
- **Establish healthy behaviors** – ask for feedback, ideas, and other viewpoints but don’t be defensive
- **Embrace curiosity** – Encourage questions
- **Look after your teammates** – People have bad days, if someone is quiet check up on them

# Psychological safety – Psychological Safety and Accountability

Innovation

Psychological Safety: High / Low

**Comfort Zone**

People enjoy working together, don't feel very challenged, seldom work very hard

**Learning Zone**

Focus on collaboration, learning and improvement

**Apathy Zone**

People tend to fulfil function of their role and not very motivated to work collaboratively, may jockey for position rather than focus on shared goals

**Anxiety Zone**

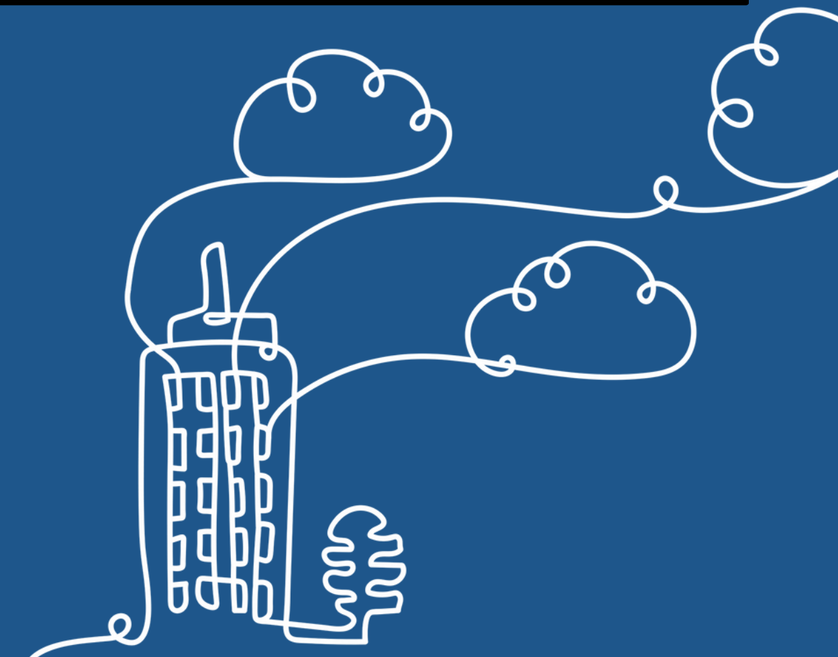
People don't feel safe to offer ideas for fear of ridicule, getting "it" wrong, afraid to ask for help

(Edmondson 2012)

Low — Accountability & Motivation — High

# Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

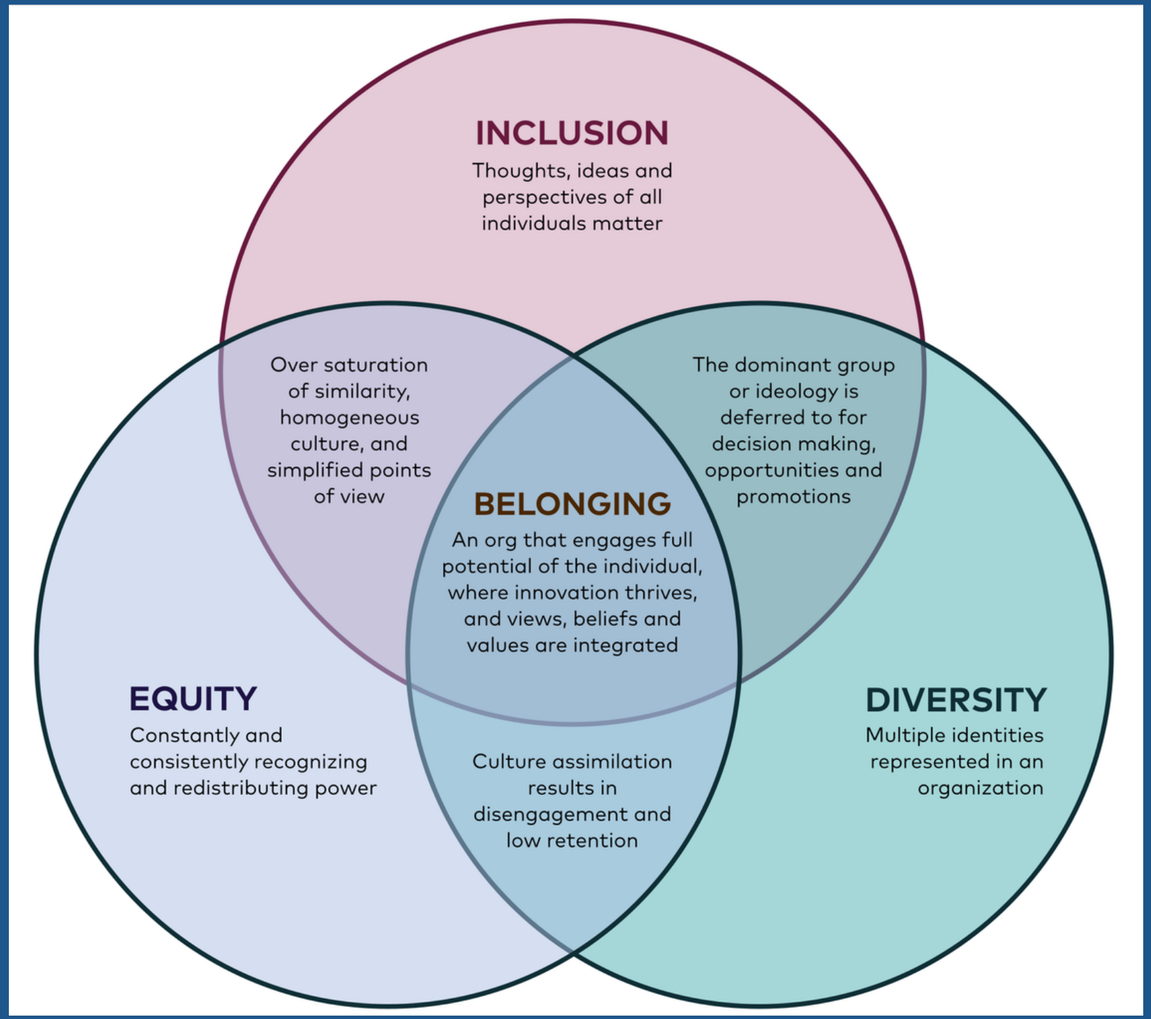
**How does this all fit into the company's EDI strategy?**



# Equity, Diversity & Inclusion - Belonging

To create a culture where everyone feels they belong we need the following:

- Inclusion – Everyone is welcome
- Equity – Everyone has what they need to work at their best
- Diversity – Multiple viewpoints



# Equity, Diversity & Inclusion - Inclusion

Diversity & Equity can largely be targeted using rigorous processes.

Inclusion by its very nature means everyone is welcome and has a voice.

The only way to create a truly inclusive environment is through Psychological Safety

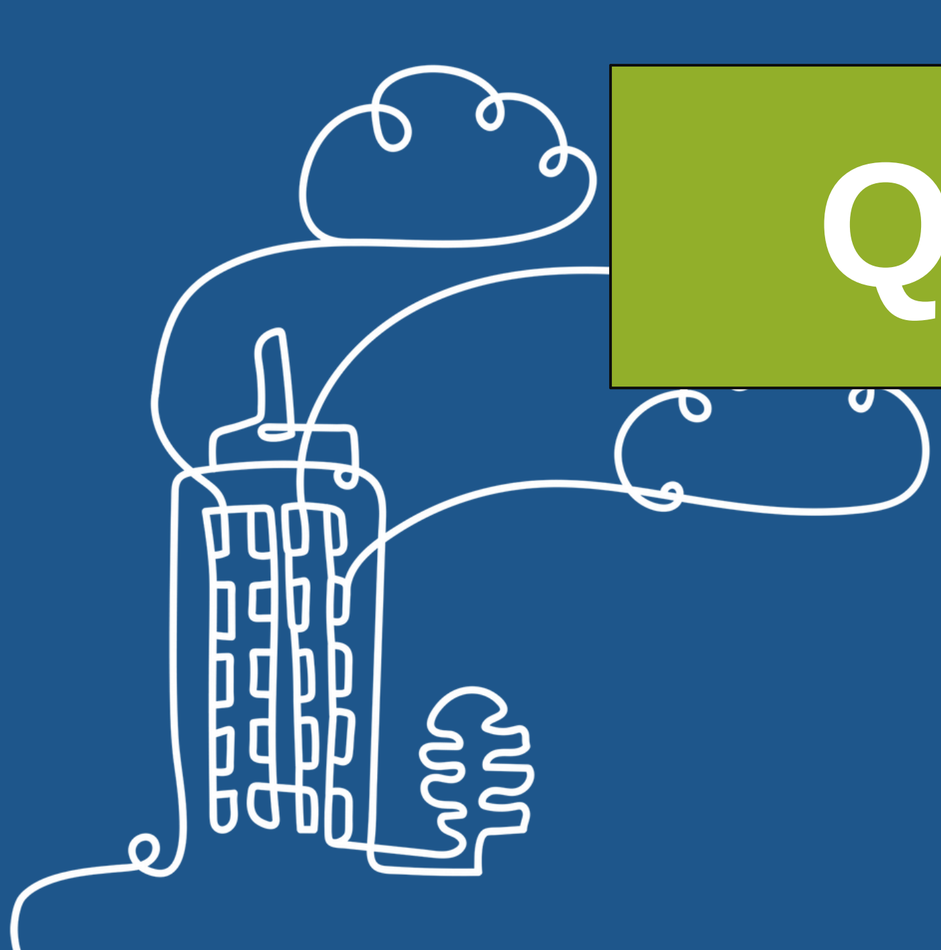
# Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Why bother?

**Companies with a strong sense of belonging are more profitable.**

McKinsey & Co. examined over 1,000 companies across 12 countries

- Top gender-diverse companies are 21% more likely to be profitable than the bottom gender-diverse companies.
- Top ethnically diverse companies are 33% more likely to be profitable than the bottom ethnically diverse companies.
- The least diverse companies were 29% more likely to underperform in terms of profitability.
- The biggest difference was those with diversity in the upper management directly responsible for generating revenue.

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/business-ethnic-gender-diversity-performance-levels-better-study-workplace-office-mckinsey-a8166601.html



# Questions?

# Thank you for being you