# WORKING SCARED Psychological Capacity

Safety Differently March 2023

DR. MARTHA ACOSTA





# SAFETY CAPACITY



How well do our cultures and mindsets promote openness, curiosity, and emotional resiliency?

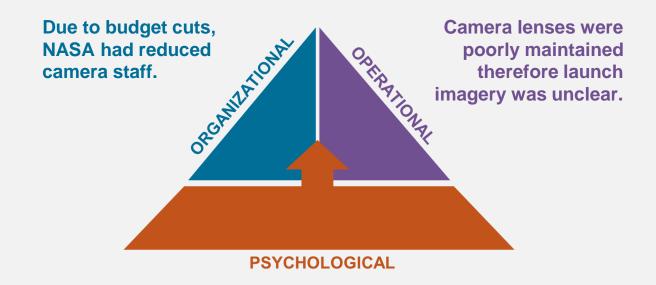
## **PSYCHOLOGICAL**

# SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA

ON THE FIRST DAY POST LAUNCH, HE STUDIED THE LAUNCH VIDEO AND NOTICED A DISTURBING LOSS OF FOAM.



RODNEY ROCHA Chief Structural Engineer, NASA



# SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA

HE ASKED FOR ADDITIONAL PHOTOS TO ASSESS THE RISK AND ASKED FOR ASTRONAUTS TO VISUALLY INSPECT DAMAGE



RODNEY ROCHA Chief Structural Engineer, NASA

Photographic evidence of Imaging requests to the **Department of Defense** foam loss existed for 65 of cancelled to avoid inter-79 missions, but Rocha was agency red tape. told there was not enough data to warrant further Mission investigation. Management The space crew was wanted to avoid never informed of the risk and the concern. expense of a space walk.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL** 

# SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA

IN A MEETING, MISSION
MANAGEMENT
DETERMINED THE FOAM
LOSS POSED "NO SAFETYOF-FLIGHT"



RODNEY ROCHA Chief Structural Engineer, NASA



### **PSYCHOLOGICAL**

Engineers in that meeting disagreed but did not speak up.

Rocha wrote a blistering email dissenting against the opinion. His co-workers urged him not to send it, so he didn't.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**



**Amy Edmondson** 

Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management Harvard Business School "Psychological safety is a shared belief among a group of people that it is safe to take interpersonal risks."

Source: Harvard ManageMentor

# IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

### **Psychological Safety:**

- 1. Is a group dynamic. Individuals do not "have" it
- 2. Is a prerequisite condition for organizational learning and change
- 3. Research shows it is an indicator of high-performing teams
- 4. Is more like fall protection than a security blanket.



# DON'T GET SLOPPY. CARELESSNESS KILLS!



DON'T GET
SLOPPY.
CARELESSNESS
KILLS!

Everyday mistakes are ignored but when someone makes a consequential mistake, they retrained or disciplined.



# DON'T BRING ME PROBLEMS, BRING ME SOLUTIONS.



PROBLEMS,
BRING ME
SOLUTIONS.

Even with an opendoor policy, managers rarely hear about difficult issues or problems.



I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT JACK. HE'S A SELF-STARTER.



I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT JACK. HE'S A SELF-STARTER.

reply the series of themselves are lauded. Asking for help is considered a weakness.



# JUST WATCH, LISTEN AND STAY OUT OF THE WAY.



JUST WATCH, LISTEN AND STAY OUT OF THE WAY. Newcomers must conform to be accepted and new ideas and different perspectives are rarely given much credence.

# **WORKING SCARED**

FEAR OF BLAME

# ATTITUDE TO RISK & FAILURE:

The degree to which the organization has the capacity to make mistakes and take calculated risks

### **CANDID CONVERSATION**

The degree to which difficult and sensitive topics can be discussed openly

FEAR OF CONFLICT

FEAR OF BEING JUDGED OR MAKING OTHERS FEEL STUPID

### **WILLINGNESS TO HELP:**

The degree to which people are willing to help each other

### **INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY:**

The degree to which people can be themselves, and are welcomed for this

FEAR OF REJECTION

Source: https://fearlessorganization.com/

## **VUCA**



### VOLATILITY

Rapid changes, ups and downs, and big swings

### **AMBIGUITY**

Unclear, even contradictory, meaning of signals/events

### **UNCERTAINTY**

Difficult to predict future events or values

**NFORMATIO** 

### **COMPLEXITY**

**ADAPT** 

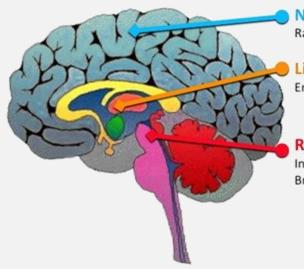
Multiple independent and interacting actors and systems

ENVIRONMEN

Source: US Army War College



# **GETTING IT WRONG**



Neocortex: Trial & Error Rational or Thinking Brain

Limbic Brain: Emotional Intensity Emotional or Feeling Brain

Reptilian Brain: Survival Instinct Instinctual or Dinosaur Brain Studies show that students learn more from tests when they get the answers wrong.

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Source: The Pluses of Getting It Wrong, by Roediger & Finn, Scientific American

LOW

### **Uncertainty**

HIGH

Failure is an indicator of organizational, operational or cultural weaknesses



ROUTINE, WELL-UNDERSTOOD



VARIABLE, UNCERTAIN, COMPLEX



INNOVATIVE, NOVEL, UNKNOWN

**LOW** 

**Failure Rates** 

HIGH

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Failure is the

discovery

mechanism for

Source: Michael Roberto, Trustee Professor of Management at Bryant University

# FAILURE & ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1. People are **unaware** of the expectation
- People are unable to fulfill the expectation due to capability (lacking the required skills) or capacity (lacking time and resources)
- 3. People are clear on the expectations, have the capability and capacity, and **do not to** perform as expected

WHAT'S BLAMEWORTHY?

Source: U.S. Nuclear Navy

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COMMUNICATION STSYEMS FAILURE



SUPPORT SYSTEMS FAILURE



**INQUIRE:** 

Error prone situation?
Unexpected conditions?
Ambiguity or mixed messages?
Overreliance on expertise?
Lack of resilience in operations or tools/equipment?

Source: U.S. Nuclear Navy

# BLAME IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH SAFETY

### **BLAME CYCLE**

Lack of information, increased biases, poor decisions, more mistakes

Fear of admitting mistakes, asking for help and accepting accountability



Less likely to speak up, ask questions or give advice Blame and recrimination when something goes wrong

### SAFETY CYCLE

Better innovation, decision-making, learning agility and accountability

Recognizing fallibility, asking questions and seeking help



Openly share ideas and information, admit mistakes, calculate risks Curious about problems, open to feedback, learning from failure

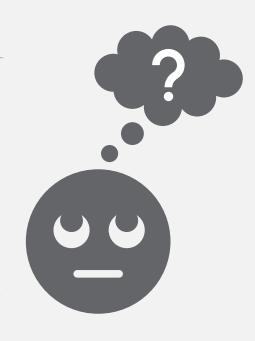
Source: James Reason

Source: Amy Edmondson

I need to stay on top of these guys, or they will get complacent.

No news is good news!

I've got to protect my team and throw myself on the sword.



Source: "Can you Handle Failure?" by Den Dattner and Robert Hogan, HBR

# BLAME IS AN UNCONSCIOUS EGO DEFENSE

I need to stay on top of these guys, or they will get complacent.



No news is good news!



I've got to protect my team and throw myself on the sword.



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Source: "Can you Handle Failure?" by Den Dattner and Robert Hogan, HBR

# MANAGE YOUR BLAME TENDENCY



Trigger

 What behavior or situation really gets to you?



Hook

 What beliefs or judgements do you have about it that hooks you?



**Emotion** 

 What feelings does that belief or judgement about the situation evoke?

Reflect on emotions to uncover the true meaning of the narrative.

**BLAME NARRATIVE** 

**REACT** 

Source: Susan David

# MANAGE YOUR BLAME TENDENCY



Trigger

 What behavior or situation really gets to you?



What

beliefs or

about it

you?

that hooks

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do you have

Hook

Reflect rather than react

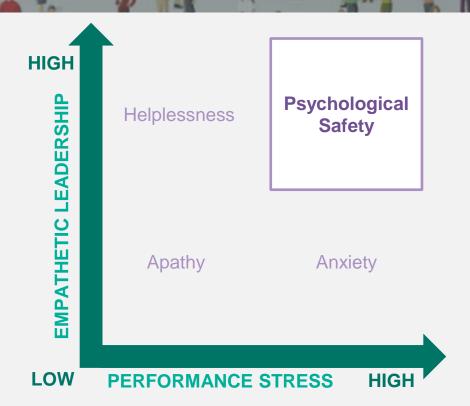


Emotion

 What feelings does that belief or judgement about the situation evoke?

Question and reframe the narrative





# **EMPATHY**

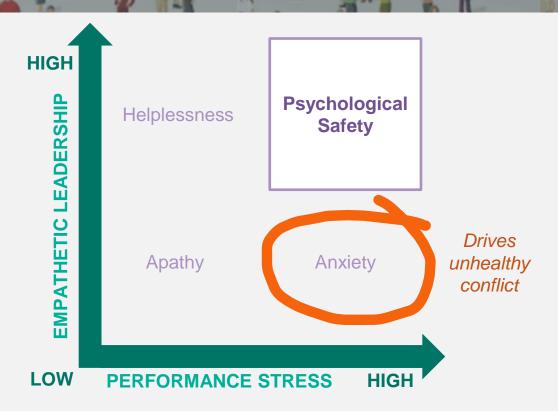
**COGNITIVE EMPATHY:** the ability to understand another person's **PERSPECTIVE** (curiosity)

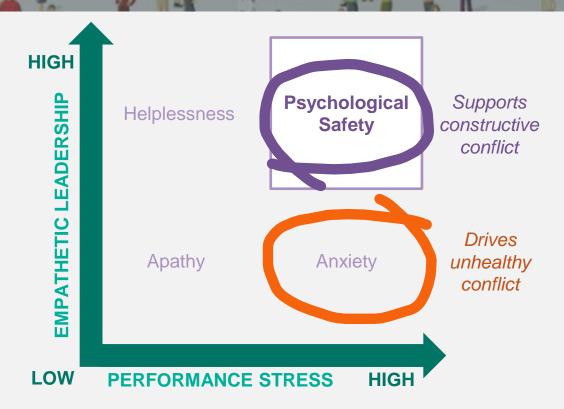
**EMOTIONAL EMPATHY:** the ability to feel what someone else **FEELS** (vulnerability)

**EMPATHETIC CONCERN:** the ability to sense what someone else **NEEDS** from you (compassion)

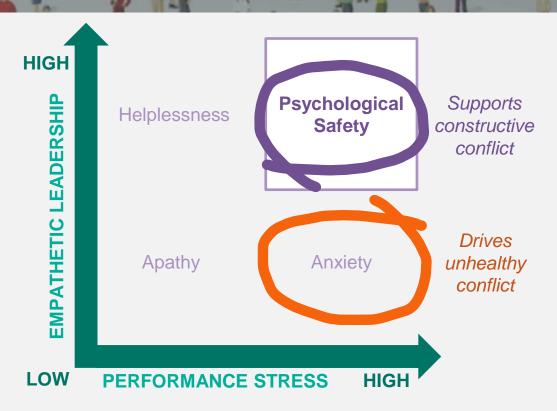


Source: Daniel Goleman









How do we encourage constructive conflict?

How do we handle potentially destructive conflict?

# **EMOTIONALLY-CHARGED CONVERSATIONS**

- 1. Shift your mindset from seeing the conversation as a hurdle to seeing it as a resource.
- 2. Recognize the emotions and manage them first... don't ignore them.
- 3. Get to the point... but do it with compassion.
- 4. Remove blame and shame from change.



You need to talk to a team member about a marked change in behavior, which you suspect may be substance abuse.

1. Shift your mindset from seeing the conversation as a hurdle to seeing it as a resource



2. Recognize the emotions and manage them first... don't ignore them.





4. Remove blame and shame from change.

## CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

More than half of psychological experiments with significant statistical effects are not reproducible... and two thirds of medical studies are ultimately refuted.

Source: Estimating the reproducibility of psychological science, Science

Source: Why scientific studies are so often wrong: the streetlight effect, Discover



Professor, Educational Neuroscience University of Maryland

In a study of lab researchers, getting "wrong" or unexpected results in an experiment, often resulted in activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the brain's "Delete Key."

Source: Why Being Wrong Feels So Right (And What You Can Do About It), HBR



# BIASES OF PATTERN RECOGNITION

Overreliance
Overconfidence
False analogies
Illusion of control
Normalization of risk



# BIASES OF EMOTIONAL TAGGING

Group Think
Confirmation Bias
Self-Interest Bias
Loss Aversion
Halo Effect

Source: Why Good Leaders Make Bad Decisions, HBR

## DO YOU ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL?

A busy office drinks several 5 Gallon jugs of water per week. One employee is upset and feels taken advantage of because he is replacing the heavy jugs many times a week. He proposes that whoever finishes a jug be the person who replaces it.



## CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS

- 1. Identify your assumptions
- 2. Consider if the assumption is false
- 3. Consider the opposite assumption
- 4. Gather insights

## **DEVELOP COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

- 1. Brainstorm multiple alternatives
- 2. Assign devil's advocates
- 3. Consider different contexts
- 4. Consider unintended consequences
- 5. Avoid either/or solutions and look for both/and solutions



## TWO ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM

#### **DYNAMIC**



**MANN GULCH FIRE, 1949** 

#### **SYSTEMIC**

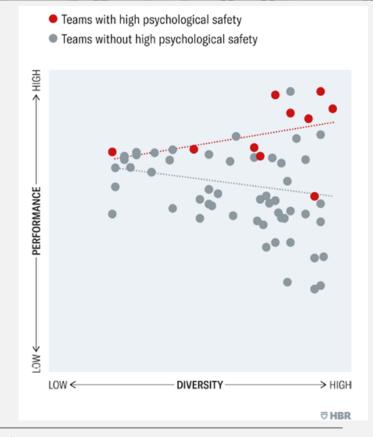


**PULSE OXIMETERS, 2020** 

## BENEFIT FROM DIVERSITY

A study of 62 development teams at six large pharmaceutical firms, found that teams that were both diverse AND psychologically safe outperformed comparably diverse teams that lacked psychological safety.

Bresman, Henrik, and Amy C. Edmondson. "Exploring the Relationship between Team Diversity, Psychological Safety and Team Performance: Evidence from Pharmaceutical Drug Development." Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 22-055, February 2022.



# **40%** of people surveyed say the feel isolated at work

High belonging is correlated to: 56% increase in job performance 50% drop in employee turnover 75% reduction in sick days

Source: BetterUp research 2018

## SAFETY CULTURE CHANGE IN THE GULF OF MEXICO



**Robin Ely** 

Diane Doerge Wilson Professor of Business Administration Harvard Business School

#### FEARFUL / DEFENSIVE

"The guy that was in charge was the one who could basically outperform and out-shout and out-intimidate all the others. . . . If you didn't posture yourself in a position of power, then you set yourself up for ridicule."

- Deck operator

#### **PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE**

"When we need to get to the root cause of a problem or to troubleshoot something, we talk freely to each other rather than worrying about what he thinks of me."

- Mechanic

Source: Harvard Business School Case study

#### **SAFETY RESULTS**

#### Decline in accident rate by 84%

1995: 13.1 recordable injuries per

million person-hours worked

2004: 2.1

#### Increase in:

Level of productivity (number of barrels),

Efficiency (cost per barrel), and

Reliability (production "up" time)

Reduction in pollution to <.1% of allowable levels



Source: Harvard Business School Case study

# PRIORITIZING THE PROTECTION OF EGO

### PRORITZING THE WELL-BEING OF ALL

My role gives me status and power and acceptance. I can't get out of my lane.

No matter my status, my perspective and ideas are of value.

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If I have any concerns about safety, risk, new hazards or weak controls, I need to communicate it.



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I got to hit my numbers no matter what if I want to move up in my job

No matter my status, my perspective and ideas are of value.

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If I have any concerns about safety, risk, new hazards or weak controls, I need to communicate it.

We are tracking things to continuously improve, so it's important to report accurately and completely.

#### PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



Linda Hill

Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School

#### **ROLES**

Who can I be?
What power do I have?
What's my relationship to
others?

#### COMMUNICATION

What is ok to talk about?
Who can and should we communicate with?
What media do we use?

## PROCESS & PROCEDURE

How do we do work?
What are the boundaries,
e.g., variability, adaptability,
etc.?

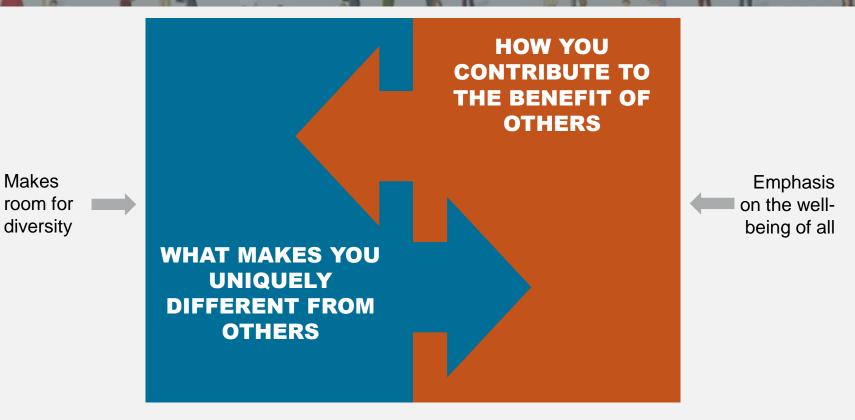
#### **MEASUREMENT**

How do we define success and failure? What do we pay attention to?

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Source: Adapted from Being the Boss

### LEADERSHIP PURPOSE



Source: From Purpose to Impact, HBR







**Carol Dweck** 

Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University

#### **FIXED MINDSET**

Holding the belief that talents are innate gifts

"I'm not getting the outcome I want, what's wrong with me?"

"If you hire the **right person** for the job they will be successful."

#### **GROWTH MINDSET**

Holding the belief that talents can be developed

"I'm not getting the outcome I want, what did I do wrong?"

"If you keep **developing people** they will successfully do their jobs."

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## IT'S ALL ABOUT CONTEXT

Fifth grade students were given a task to learn that intentionally confused them at first. It was the girls who were derailed by the confusion and unable to learn the material.

Notably, the highest IQ girls struggled the most.



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Source: Why do women fail? By Carol Dweck and Rachel Simmons

### IT'S ALL ABOUT CONTEXT

Fifth grade students were given a task to learn that intentionally confused them at first. It was the girls who were derailed by the confusion and unable to learn the material.

Notably, the highest IQ girls struggled the most.

Parents give boys more process praise.

Teachers call out boys eight times more often than girls.

When a conflict arises, boys debate to reach a solution.

Girls are given fewer messages to try harder or again.

Girls are less likely to be told they are brave than boys.

Girls are prone to hiding negative feelings to preserve relationships.

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Source: Why do women fail? By Carol Dweck and Rachel Simmons

#### LIMITING NARRATIVES

- 1. POLARIZATION: "There's a right way and a wrong way!"
- 2. PARTICULARIZING: "The only thing that matters is getting the job done right the first time."
- MAGNIFYING: "One mistake shows that the whole job was sloppy."
- **4. GENERALIZATION:** "Contractors are just about getting paid. They will always take short-cuts if you let them."
- 5. PERSONALIZATION: "It's because they have no confidence in me!"
- **6.** SHOULDS: "I should have known, and they should have spoken up!"

Source: Thoughts & Feelings, Taking Control Of Your Moods & Your Life, by Matthew McKay, PhD, and Martha Davis, PhD

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## FIXED VERSUS GROWTH LANGUAGE



CHARLES WARREN
Product Designer,
Twitter, IDEO, Google,
Salesforce

What should I do?

How might we...?



**JIM WILTENS**Teacher, author, speaker



That will never work.

What would it take for that to work?

CATHIE BLACK
Fmr Chairman and President
Hearst Magazines

Source: Use Language to Shape a Creative Culture by Tom Kelley and David Kelley; HBR January 2, 2014

## START | STOP | CONTINUE







### FIND THE HELPERS

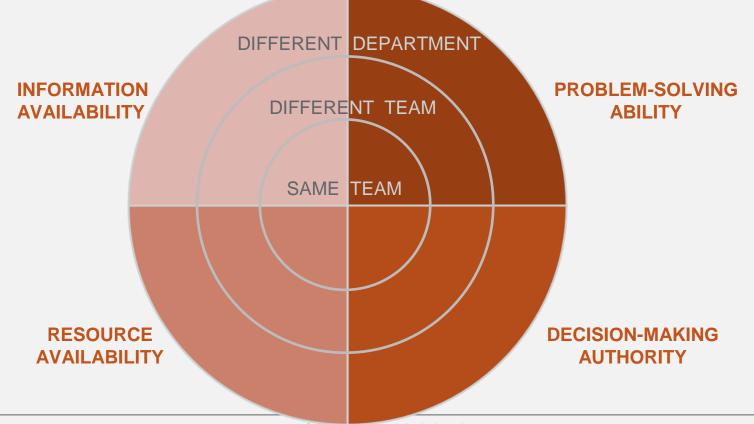


AT&T's Bell Labs studied why some people in the group were more successful at coming up with novel ideas than others.

They found that those with the most patents tended to have lunch or breakfast with **Harry Nyquist**.

Source: The Idea Factory, by Jon Gertner

## **NETWORKS OF HELPING**



#### CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

#### ROLES

- Embrace multiple identities
- Empower learning over status
- Look for relationships

#### COMMUNICATION

- Empathize and inquire
- Encourage debate
- Give diverse views a voice
- Talk about what you don't know

## PROCESS & PROCEDURE

- Include collaboration and experimentation
- Make disruption a regular practice

#### **MEASUREMENT**

- Incentivize learning
- Don't get seduced by outcomes

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 Basis for inquiry not blame

