



Psychological safety: Leadership Self-assessment

In her book, *The Fearless Organization*, Harvard professor, Amy Edmondson, shares her pioneering work on psychological safety, which she defines as: “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes”.

Everyone in organisations has a responsibility to make sure they’re helping to creating cultures where people feel they can speak up without fear of reprisal. But, as leaders, we have a special responsibility to model the kinds of behaviours that make this possible.

Edmondson has developed a three-step toolkit to help leaders keep psychological safety front of mind and to hone their practice. This is not always easy; implementing the toolkit involves often complex interpersonal skills that can take time to master.

As a starting point, it’s helpful to reflect on how well we’re already doing with the elements of the toolkit, which is why we’ve created a version of Edmondson’s leadership self-assessment.

You can use it to identify areas where you’re already strong and where you might need to focus more. Remember: this is about learning, so even if you still have much to do, building awareness and being mindful of the importance of psychological safety will give you a baseline on which to build.

For more background, take another look at our nutshell, [*Being fearless: developing psychological safety at work*](#). Consider the following questions and the extent to which they reflect your current practice.

	ALMOST ALWAYS	NOT ENOUGH
1. Setting the stage: framing the work		
I’m clear about the nature of the work we’re doing as a team.		
I share my understanding of how complex this work is, how much uncertainty we face, and how collaboratively we’ll need to work to get it done.		
Given the nature of the work, I emphasise that small failures are the currency for improvement.		
I clearly articulate why our work matters, how it makes a difference and to whom.		
I often talk about what’s at stake.		

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2. Inviting participation		
I make sure people realise I don't have all the answers		
I always emphasise that all of us can always learn more, that we need to be humble and curious about what's going to happen next.		
I ask good question rather than rhetorical ones.		
I ask questions of others rather than always expressing my own opinion.		
I use a mix of questions that go broad as well as deep.		
I create structures to help elicit ideas and concerns.		
I make sure these structures are well-designed to ensure a safe environment for open dialogue.		
3. Responding productively		
I listen thoughtfully and carefully, signalling that what I'm hearing matters.		
I acknowledge and thank the speaker for bringing the question or idea to me.		
I take steps to destigmatise failure.		
When someone comes to me with bad news, I make sure it's a positive experience. I offer help and support to guide what happens next.		
I create clear boundaries about acceptable behaviours.		
I respond to clear violations appropriately and in ways that influence future behaviour		

How did you do?

Give yourself credit where you're already doing well.

Reflect where you need to do more work and make a plan for how you might develop your practice in these areas.

