PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



Why do people stay silent

when speaking up could help?

Dr. Nicole King-Daniel

The cost of silence!

When people do not feel safe to speak up



Miss risks

Concerns hidden until they become incidents or failures.



Lose ideas

People stop challenging assumptions.



Repeat mistakes

Hesitate to admit mistakes or ask for support.



Make poorer decisions

Inadequate insights

Hidden concerns can become costly problems.

Safety performance
Operational reliability
Innovation and productivity
Employee engagement and retention

Psychological safety is not a soft skill.
It is a leadership responsibility.

The power & hierarchy challenge

COMMON BARRIERS

1. **Fear of upsetting senior leaders**
   Avoid “rocking the boat” or contradicting senior views.
2. **Limited access to decision-makers**
   Information is filtered, delayed or softened as it moves up.
3. **“Good soldier” culture**
   Loyalty means keeping quiet and on getting the job done.
4. **Bias and unequal voice**
   Biases may affect whose contribution is trusted or credited.
5. **Concern about job or career consequences**
   Fear of retaliation, job security or promotion.

An important cultural consideration



Respect and psychological safety

Respect for authority, seniority, and status, as values can coexist with psychological safety.



Authority and open dialogue

Managers can retain authority while remaining open to challenge.



Standards and speaking up

Not every suggestion is accepted, standards disappear, or disrespect tolerated - concerns can be raised without reprisal

Respect and constructive challenge can coexist

Leaders can reduce the power gap

Every response shapes the next conversation.

What Weakens Trust	Practical Steps For Leaders
Distance and inaccessibility	**Start small and be authentic -** Create safe spaces to raise concerns.
Power that silences voices	**Invite challenge and include everyone -** Invite quieter voices, What am I missing?
Defensiveness and fear	**Listen without penalty and celebrate courage –** Thank you for raising this!
Reluctance to admit mistakes	**Model learning and uncertainty –** Be first to admit mistake**.**
Broken commitments	**Be consistent and close the loop –** “Here is what will happen next”
Little evidence of progress	**Recognise contributions and keep measuring –** Pulse surveys and team check-ins

Trust is a culture, not a program…… Build Trust | Break Barriers | Drive Success

Psychological safety is a shared responsibility

MANAGERS

Creates conditions for trust

Makes it safe to speak up.

Listen without defensiveness.

Respond fairly to mistakes.

EMPLOYEES

Contribute constructively to the culture

Raise concerns early.

Challenge ideas respectfully

SENIOR LEADERS

Reinforce the behaviour

Maintain safe reporting channels.

Protect people from retaliation.

“Do my employees feel safe telling me something I may not want to hear?”

“Do our policies make it safe for someone to speak up?”

How do we measure success?

Look for changes in behaviour and outcomes.

Confidence to speak up

Check whose concerns and ideas reach the discussion.

Fair responses

Ask whether people feel heard and treated respectfully.

Effective resolution

Verify that actions solve the issue and prevent recurrence.

SUGGESTED PULSE QUESTION

“I can disagree with my manager without fear of negative consequences.”

Learning with fair accountability

Be mindful of false positives

Every voice counts



SENIOR LEADERS

Protect the voice

Back people who raise concerns.

MANAGERS

Invite the voice

Ask: “What am I missing?”

EMPLOYEES

Use your voice

Raise a concern through a safe channel.

What will you do differently? Who will you make space for?

What needs to be heard?