

Solution  
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# The Time Travelling Leader Deals with Organizational Silence

DEVELOP



# The Situation

## Key Problem

Google – in their research project Aristotle – identified psychological safety as the number one building block of the most successful teams at the company. **Psychological safety is the belief that the environment is safe to take risk.** It is high when employees feel free to express themselves in the team without fear of failure or retribution. But it is like a Jenga-tower: difficult to build, but you can destroy it with one move, even unconsciously. **This is obviously missing in this Tom's case study.**



In an uncertain, fast changing and complex work environment the importance of psychological safety is even higher as these factors highly threaten it.

Managers often notice the negative consequences of missing psychological safety in their team:

- people don't come up with innovative ideas or initiatives
- people don't ask questions publicly even if they are uncertain or incompetent
- people want to defend themselves with the silence

If this is the case not only on team, but on organizational level, **we call it organizational silence.**


Such organizations lack not only innovation, but are places where people hide – their own and others' – mistakes, don't report near misses (narrowly avoided incidents) and even smaller accidents to avoid of being blamed or punished, thus creating a high safety-risk culture.

If you claim that your people never approach you with an idea, initiative or challenging question, consider the lack of psychological safety before blaming them being not innovative. Even if it sounds a bit annoying at the first sight, think of your own behavior and reactions.



# Recommendation for Leaders

Recognise the issue, start with yourself and engage a discussion.

 **Step number one would be recognizing the problem** - that communication is less open, team members become more self-contained and hesitant to address issues.

As a manager, we might feel that we must be the unshakable bastion, the know-it-all person. We might have the misbelief that if we do not demonstrate power and certainty even in uncertain times, people won't trust and respect us. Well, on the contrary. If you want to build safety, you have to acknowledge your limits with clear statements and request for help, contribution or ideas.

Use such sentences:

*"I may miss something. I need to hear your opinion."*

*"I'm new to this role. What are you seeing out there?"*

*"I'm not an expert in this; I need your advice."*

*"I'm sure I don't have all the aspects, what is yours?"*



**The next step would be to become a role model** of honesty and vulnerability; meaning that the leader shall openly address and share his own worries and concerns.

Finally, note that psychological safety is rather reinforced than harmed by fair responses to harmful behavior and violations. You should set clear rules, sanction the violations and start dialogue in a transparent way about what has happened.



# Recommendation for HR

Be a trusted advisor and provide suitable forum to foster dialogue.

HR can notice the lack of safety in a team or at organizational level, and warn or educate managers - including the C-suite - about the importance of this crucial factor. Moreover, they shall evangelise about steps to create such a culture.



Organizational routines must be in place to support the creation and maintenance of safety. Some great examples of such structures are:

- Focused Event Analysis (FDA)
- Best Practise Sharing Meetings
- Focus Groups
- Near Miss Meetings

The important effect is that people come together to openly discuss their opinion or mistakes without blaming, punishing or humiliating anyone. These practices are highly efficient in the Health and Safety field and can prove of great value in other fields of work.



HR department has to be role model for others, where talking about fears is normal, effort is valued and success is celebrated.



# Possible actions with **DEVELOR support**

This unique program approaches **leadership courage as a skill that can be developed**. It forms the attitude and enhances the participants' self-awareness regarding fear. It provides practical tools to demonstrate courage and to help others to take bigger risk in their life.

Courage, however, isn't a one-dimension competence; its complexity is well-described in our **Leadership Courage Octagon® model**. On one hand it helps to visualize the fields where leadership courage can manifest itself. On the other hand it is an excellent and practical tool for self-assessment. By the help of the Leadership Courage Octagon participants understand the fields of actions, where they can demonstrate courage as leaders.

Our program approaches Psychological Safety as an essential condition for a culture of experimentation and learning. Without these two factors, development and - in many cases - survival can hardly be imagined today.

Participants learn how to build Psychological Safety as managers of various teams. We introduce **the Psychological Safety model with the help of a three-step structure from setting the scene to proper managerial reaction to positive cases and violations**.

The participants leave with a a practical and specific tool-kit and techniques and routines that help them build a safe environment in a team in any environment.

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# Possible actions with **DEVELOR** support

Psychological safety plays a critical part in the physical Health & Safety as well. Most safety violations are result of people being afraid to report own mistakes, near misses and errors for the fear of punishment. As well, they don't report unsafe behaviour of others for they feel it would be considered blaming and would result in punishment of their colleagues, friends. This, however, can be perceived very differently in an environment with high psychological safety and no-blame culture.

**In our Leadership for Safety training program the managers discover their role in relation to safety** (HSE) from multiple angles. The highly involving program aims at establishing leadership example, responsibility, creating the right work atmosphere. Instead of deepening the blaming culture it concentrates on problem prevention culture.

Participants get practical methods for partner-like communication and feedback. This can be applied fast for preventing accidents and drawing general improvement conclusions. Real cases used during the training illustrate how various aspects of coinciding safety abnormalities lead to a fatal accident.

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**LEADERSHIP  
FOR SAFETY  
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The **Time Travelling Leader** Tips for Building Trust and Psychological Safety

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