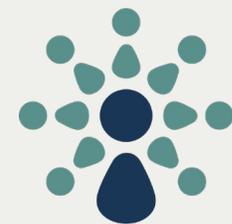


Welcome!

As you arrive, we invite you to respond to this prompt in the chat to get us started:

What's a small win your team had recently in how you handled a mistake or set back

Sector Support Series – February 2026



**People
Centered
Change**

Safety isn't Accidental

Practical, Everyday Approaches That
Build Psychological Safety

Sector Support Series – February 2026



**People
Centered
Change**

Hi, we are **Julia** and **Deb**.



About Julia

Julia supports **people-centered transformation** and **participatory strategy development** for nonprofits and foundations.

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About Deb

Deborah Judge is an **organizational effectiveness practitioner** with over a decade of experience in biotech, pharma, financial services, and nonprofits. She partners with leaders to **strengthen culture, leadership, and how work actually gets done.**

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/deborahjudge>

Today's purpose & intended outcomes

Why are we here, and what do we hope to accomplish?

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to equip nonprofit leaders and teams with tangible tools and approaches that help drive a culture of psychological safety within their organizations.

Intended outcomes

By the end of the session, we will have...

- **Clarified** our understanding of psychological safety and its impact on organizational health and mission impact.
- **Explored** what kinds of factors contribute to and detract from a psychologically safe environment;
- **Learned** a simple framework to help understand psychological safety and identify opportunities to strengthen it within our teams; and
- **Identified** concrete practices that will help foster psychological safety within your organizations.

Why this? Why now?



Nonprofits are operating under **increasing external pressure** and the need to adapt.



Teams are carrying **sustained internal strain** alongside greater pressures on their personal lives.



The **stakes of the work are higher** – even as resources are thinner.

What is psychological safety?

What is psychological safety?

“ Psychological safety is a belief that **one will not be punished or humiliated** for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

- *Amy Edmondson*

Psychological safety IS...

- A journey, not a destination
- Variable from context to context
- Strengthened by structure and process

Psychological safety ISN'T...

- Surface-level “niceness” (alone)
- Freedom from conflict or hard conversations
- Consensus
- The ability to ignore other people’s boundaries
- Permission to slack off
- A guarantee that all your ideas will be implemented

**Why does
psychological
safety
matter?**

**Improved
satisfaction.**

Staff report 74% less stress, and 29% increase in life satisfaction.

Better retention

27% reduced turnover according, helping you better retain talent.

**Increased
productivity.**

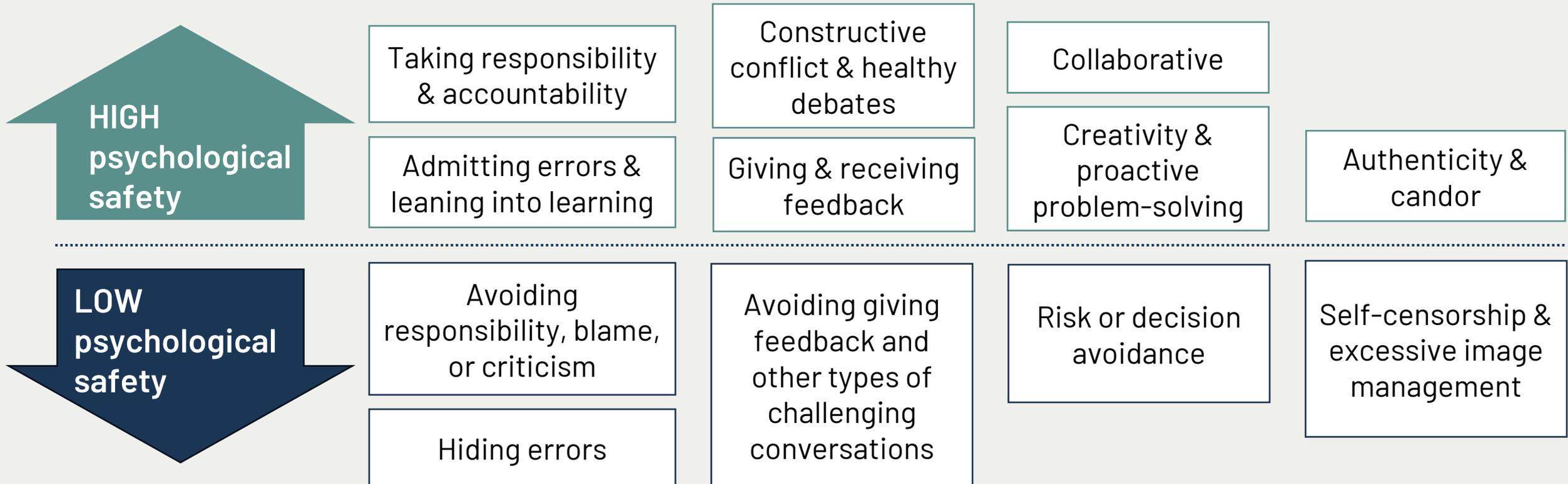
50% boost in productivity from willingness to share ideas & concerns

**Improved
collaboration.**

57% increase in collaboration among employees, enhancing teamwork and innovation.

What does psychological safety look like?

What can you observe in a team or organization where psychological safety is high?



Four areas of psychological safety



Willingness to help

How readily team members support each other



Inclusion & diversity

The degree of openness to diverse perspectives



Attitude to risk & failure

Comfort with taking risks & learning from mistakes



Open conversation

The ability to discuss challenges and ideas freely

Psychological safety & identity

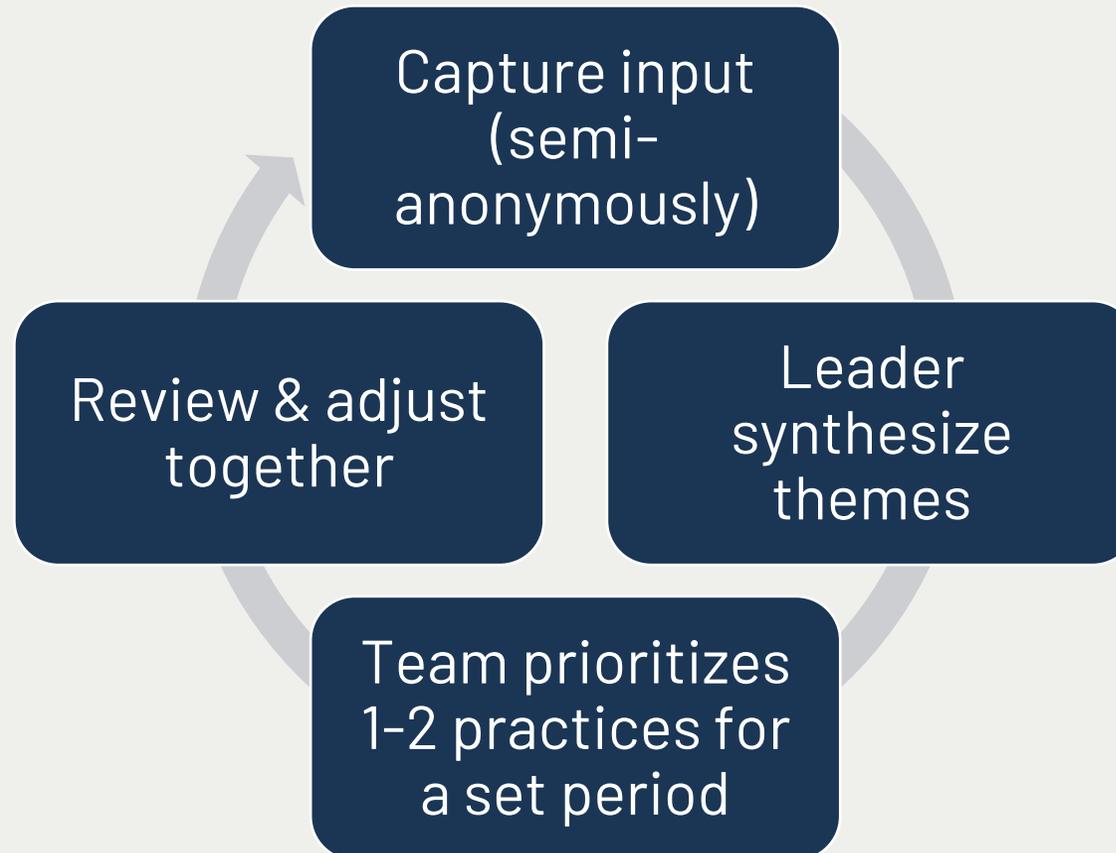
Our *individual* experience of psychological safety is heavily influenced by the different dimensions of our identity and our **lived experiences related to authority, conflict, and risk.**

Inclusive leadership means **designing conditions for different starting points**, not expecting people to adapt to one dominate norm.



Practicing psychological safety

Anonymous input, optional participation, and collective accountability.



Creating the conditions for psychological safety

So now what?

Leadership micro-habits

Leaders have significant influence over creating a culture of psychological safety for their teams based on the behaviors they model and reinforce.



Willingness to help

- Ask “Where do you need support this week”
- Normalize asking for help, not just offering it



Inclusion & diversity

- Ask “What perspectives might not be represented here”?
- Invite dissenting opinions & ideas before decisions are finalized



Attitude to risk & failure

- Share a recent mistake you’ve made and what you’ve learned
- When reviewing failure, ask “What did we learn from this?”



Open conversation

- Implement brief check-ins at the start of meetings to gauge where folks are at
- Ask for recent learnings, not just updates

Team exercise

Building clarity on values and behaviors

As nonprofits we often have defined values that are important to us – but it isn't always clear how those values translate to how we engage with each other inside the organization. One way you can help to build psychological safety is by **getting clear about how your values as an organization translate into specific, observable behaviors**—and how you hold yourselves accountable.



As a group—this could be a team or a whole organization—list out your values. If you don't have them already, **build shared definitions** of what each of these words mean to you.



For each defined term, **brainstorm specific behaviors** that demonstrate that value in action. Nothing abstract – behaviors or practices that you can observe.

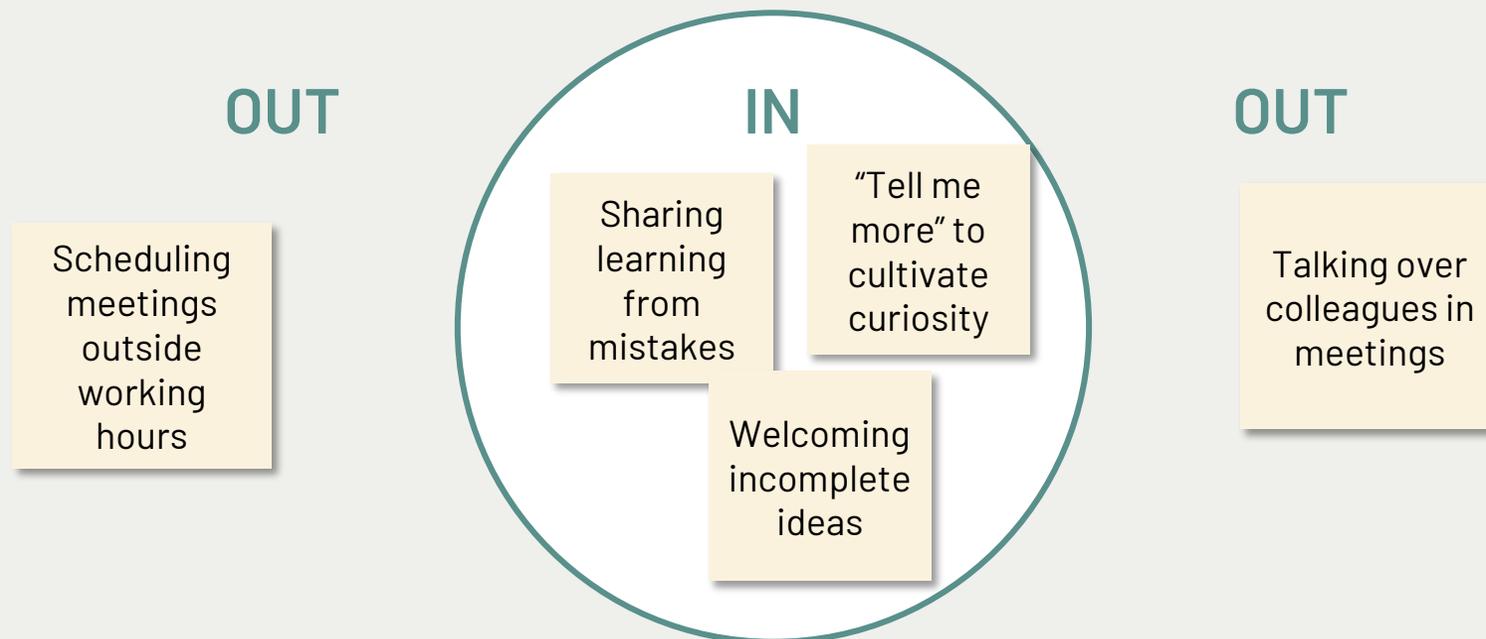


Discuss and agree on shared expectations for **how you will hold yourselves accountable** to growing these new habits. How will you support each other?

Team exercise

Building awareness of exclusionary versus inclusive behaviors

Because inclusion is so rooted in identity, it may **not always be obvious which behaviors are inclusive versus exclusive** on teams where there is a lot of identity-based diversity. An exercise like this can help build awareness in a way that strengthens safety on your team.



Team exercise

Growing your team's feedback muscle

Feedback can feel daunting – we don't want to hurt each other's feelings. But the ability to **give and receive growth-oriented feedback is critical to a high-performing team** and essential to psychological safety. Using this format is one low-risk way to start to build that muscle among team members.

"I like..."

*Affirming what's
working*

...I wish..."

*Where you see
potential for
improvement*

...I wonder..."

*Questions, risks,
possibilities*

...next let's..."

*What we'll
actually do*

Team exercise

Building awareness of exclusionary versus inclusive behaviors

1

Take a few minutes on your own, considering the professional spaces where you've felt safe. What were some of the practices and behaviors exhibited by those around you that **contributed to your feelings of safety?**

2

Still on your own, reflect on teams where you didn't feel safe – where you felt **silenced, like you couldn't speak up or ask questions or try something new**. What were the behaviors or practices that contributed to that feeling for you? Jot those down too.

3

Now as a group, **compare your lists**. Take turns sharing what behaviors and practices were "in" and "out" for you.

4

Finally, **discuss what you see**. Where did you have similar experiences? Where were there differences? What does that tell you?

Tools & resources

Additional support to apply these ideas to your team or organization.

Facilitation guide

Building clarity on values and behaviors

Purpose: Build shared cultural expectations within your team by translating your values into observable behaviors.

When to use it:

- Forming a new team or after significant team growth
- Team reset after tension or conflict
- When our values feel vague, inconsistent, or disconnected from our day-to-day work

Facilitation guide

Timing: At least an hour

Framing: Our values only matter if they really shape our behavior and we can see them in action. This exercise is about building a shared vision for what those behaviors do and don't look like.

1. **Name your values** – either your values as an organization or specific values you've developed as a team.
2. **For each value, ask:**
 - What does it look like when this value is **present**? What specific behaviors and practices capture the spirit of this value?
 - When this value is **missing**, what behaviors do we see?
3. **Take notes as you go**, grouping similar behaviors.
4. **Keep language specific and behavioral** (“interrupting”) versus abstract (“being respectful”).
5. **Close with ownership**, asking: “Which one or two of these behaviors will we start by prioritizing as a team?”

Facilitation guide

Circle of Safety

Purpose: Build shared awareness of the behaviors and practices that either encourage, or discourage, speaking up.

When to use it:

- Leadership teams
- After growth, restructuring, or new leadership
- When you as a leader think that everything is fine but are seeing signals that this may not be the case

Facilitation guide

Timing: At least an hour

Framing: We are all different people with different life experiences – which means that there are different things that either promote or get in the way of safety.

1. **Set guardrails**, by being clear that this isn't about naming specific individuals, but looking at patterns and challenging our own assumptions.
2. **Create two circles, one inside each other.** The inner circle includes behaviors and practices that make it feel safe to speak up, the outer circle is for behaviors and practices that make it feel less safe.
3. **Prompt individual reflection** by asking folks to think about what kinds of experiences make them feel more or less safe. Have them consider different contexts (e.g., team meetings, 1:1s) as well as topics (e.g., mistakes, workload, strategy, conflict). Have them capture their ideas on post-it notes
4. **Post the ideas** to one of the two circles.
5. **Reflect as a group** – focusing on patterns, not outliers. What shows up most in the outer circle? What conditions are in the inner circle? What does this mean for our team?

Facilitation guide

I like, I wish, I wonder...

Purpose: A low-risk way to share feedback, concerns, and ideas for improvement; or to debrief a shared project or experience.

When to use it:

- After the completion of projects, meetings, or discussions
- As part of team-building activities
- When feedback feels necessary but also risky or charged

Facilitation guide

Timing: At least an hour

Framing: This structure is a way for us to collectively reflect and offer each other feedback in a way that is future- and learning-focused.

1. **Define each prompt.**
 - **"I like"** - What went well or felt supportive.
 - **"I wish"** - What you wish had been different (no fixing yet).
 - **"I wonder"** - Questions or curiosities to explore.
 - **Next steps** - One concrete action to try next time.
2. **Choose the sharing format,** using anonymous formats like post-it notes in teams with lower psychological safety and voluntary sharing for high-safety teams.
3. **Synthesize, don't debate.** Look for themes as you go, and try to avoid defending or explaining.
4. **Close the loop** by identifying one to two next steps along with who is the owner of those actions.

Psychological safety resources



[Fearless Organizations](#)

Dive deeper into Amy's book to learn more about her research and approach.



[Psychological Safety Playbook](#)

This book and website provides concrete actions for leader to advance psychological safety.



[Psychsafety.com](#)

This site offers a rich set of free resources, as well as paid.



[Psychological safety behaviors](#)

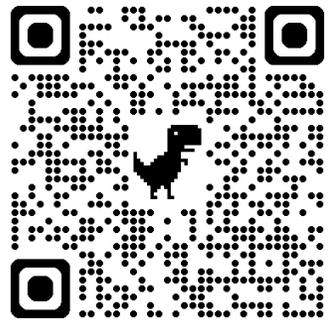
Robust list of behaviors that help to create psychological safety.

Continuing the conversation



Share feedback

I would love your feedback on this workshop and future topics you'd find valuable – use this QR code to get started!



Get pro bono support

If you want a thought partner to apply what you learned today at your own organization, use this link to sign up for pro-bono office hours!