



An Stiúrtóireacht um Ardchaighdeán  
agus Sábháilteacht Othar  
Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Cliniciúil

National Quality and  
Patient Safety Directorate  
Office of the Chief Clinical Officer

## QPS TalkTime



A community of quality and patient safety improvers

27<sup>th</sup> June, 2023

QPS TalkTime No.11

# Psychologically safe leadership

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Building an Irish Network of Quality improvers



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# NQPSD Resources

## Join the Q Community

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For information on how to apply contact:  
[Mary.lawless@hse.ie](mailto:Mary.lawless@hse.ie) / [Roisin.Egenton@hse.ie](mailto:Roisin.Egenton@hse.ie)

## Access Education and Learning

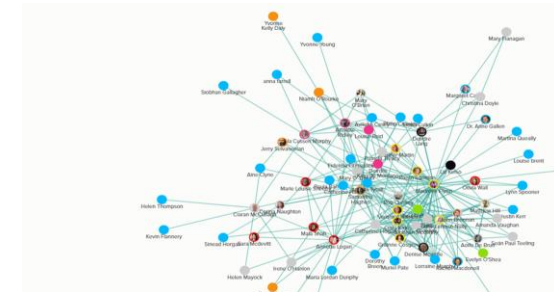
Find out about courses available to you and your Team



## Join the QPS Ireland network map

To help visualise connections between people interested in quality, safety and improvement across Ireland:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/nqpsd/qps-connect/network-map/>

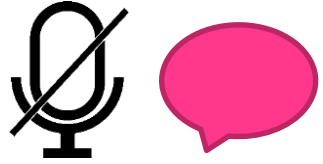


## Listen to our podcast series

Listen to six podcasts based on the Patient Safety Strategy themes.



# How we are running today's session



- You will be muted but the chat is open throughout - please post any questions or comments there and we will address them after the presentation.



- If your tech fails, don't worry – we're recording it so you can watch back on the NQPSD YouTube channel and access the slides at your convenience.



- Audio is available via your PC or dial in:  
+353-153-39982 Ireland Toll  
+353-1526-0058 Ireland Toll 2  
**Access code:** 2734 722 2271



Please feel free to continue the discussion on Twitter: **@QPSTALKTIME**  
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**#QIreland | #patientsafety**



- Please help us to improve our QPS TalkTime Webinars by completing a short feedback form (pop up window before you log out)



- You will receive an email from QPS TalkTime confirming your attendance

- **To get started ... we invite you to**

Share using the chat box

- Your name, work and where you are joining us from ...
- Finish these statements:
  1. Thinking back over your career (and naming no names) what were the characteristics of the leader that you felt safest with and why?
  2. Thinking back over your career (and naming no names) what were the characteristics of the leader that you felt least safe with and why?
  3. For me psychological safety at work means...

# Speakers today



**Anna Burhouse**

Director of Quality Development at Northumbria  
Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

## In conversation with



**Dr John Fitzsimons,**  
Clinical Director, HSE  
National Quality and Patient  
Safety Directorate and  
Consultant Paediatrician,  
Children's Health Ireland at  
Temple Street.



**Dr. Maureen Flynn,**  
Director of Nursing, QPS  
Connect Lead with the  
National Quality and Patient  
Safety Directorate



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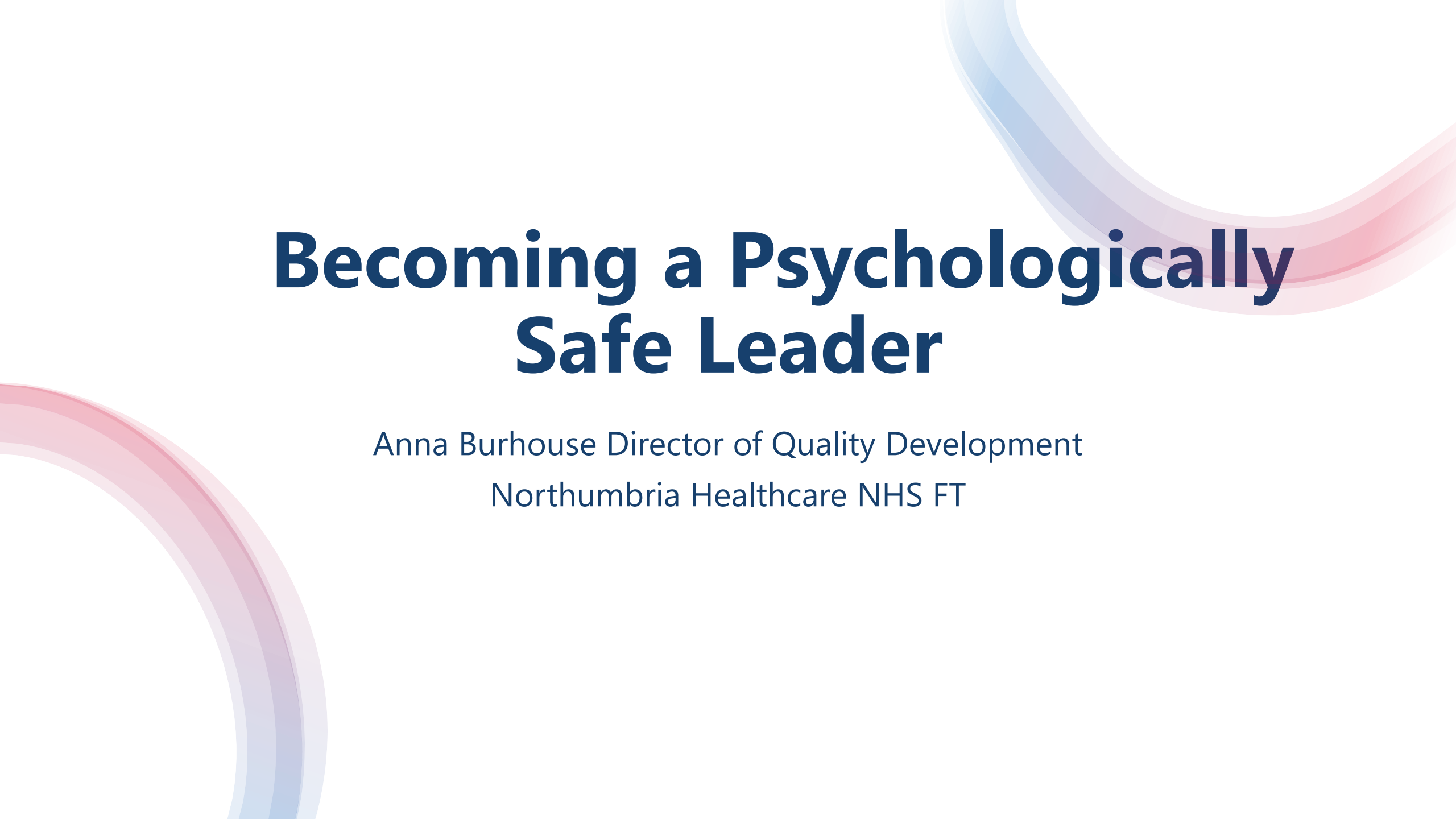


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# Psychologically safe leadership

The background features two large, overlapping, curved lines. One line is a light blue color and the other is a light pink color. They are positioned in the top right and bottom left corners, framing the central text.

# Becoming a Psychologically Safe Leader

Anna Burhouse Director of Quality Development  
Northumbria Healthcare NHS FT

# What are we going to cover today?

A light touch reminder about what psychological safety is and isn't (and sign-posting to more resources)

A discussion about leadership skills that promote psychological safety.

Three specific things you can take away and practice:

- **How to set the stage:** thinking about how to frame the work as a 'humble leader', create shared purpose and shared expectations
- **How to invite inclusive participation and engagement:** setting up inclusive team structures and processes so that people know you want to hear their views and role modelling this through your behaviours
- **How to respond empathically and productively:** de-stigmatising failure, expressing appreciation and recognition, setting boundaries as a compassionate leader

# What does being psychologically safe mean to you?

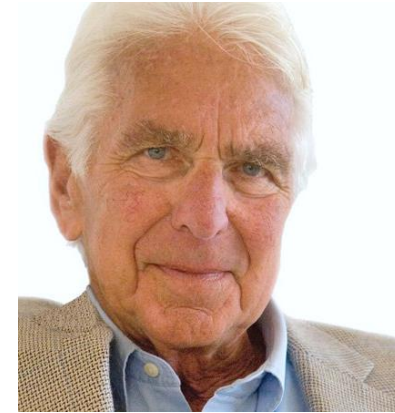
In the chat box please finish the following sentences:

1. Thinking back over your career (and naming no names) what were the characteristics of the leader that you felt safest with and why?
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3. For me psychological safety at work means...

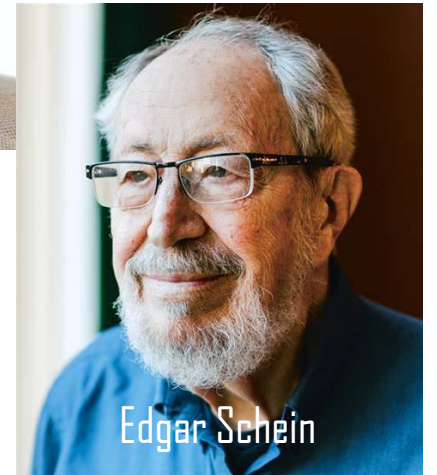
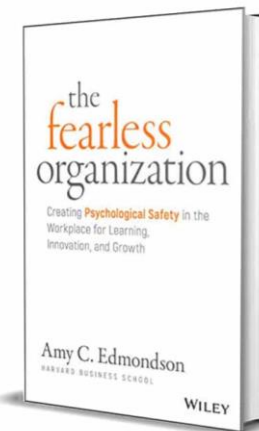


# Background

- Psychological safety is not a new construct.
- However, it is increasingly being recognised as being **fundamental to enabling teams** to work at their best to deliver safe and effective care and outcomes that matter to patients, families and carers.
- Teams who feel they are psychologically safe are more likely to be able to **make and sustain improvements in their practice.**



Warren  
Bennis



Edgar Schein

# The effect of 'Psychological Safety'

Research tells us that when psychological safety is high:

- nurses speak about errors more often.
- people are more committed to the organisation and to patient safety.
- there is a reduction in work-arounds.
- **team-based learning in QI** is more likely to happen.
- engagement and performance is more likely to be high.
- organisations are more able to **learn from failure**.

# VUCA

**When working in volatile, uncertain complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environments anyone's voice might be mission critical.**

**The role of the leader in being inclusive and setting the tone for psychological safety is critical.**

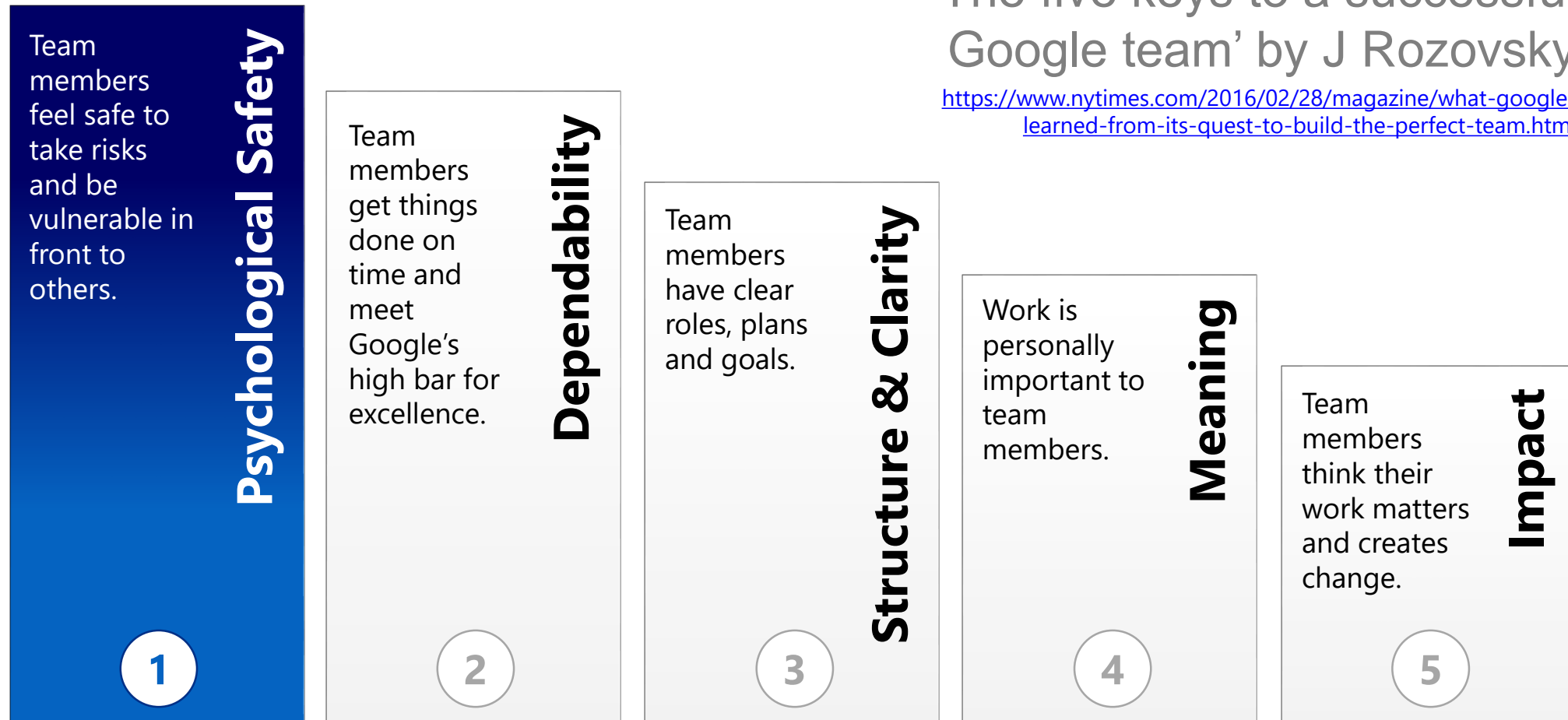


# Project 'Aristotle'

Research carried out by Google


'The five keys to a successful Google team' by J Rozovsky

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html>





**The most important  
element was that...**



**the team  
could take  
risks without  
feeling  
insecure or  
embarrassed**

# How to define 'Psychological Safety'

***"The belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking and that people feel able to speak up with relevant ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes without fear of being punished or humiliated."***

(Edmondson 2018)

TED Talk: Amy Edmondson on Psychological Safety

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8>



# Psychological Safety is not:

- ✗ Being nice
- ✗ Freedom from conflict
- ✗ A guarantee that all your ideas will be applauded
- ✗ Permission to slack off
- ✗ A licence to whine
- ✗ Oversharing
- ✗ The goal...

Strong links to the creation of a 'Just Culture'

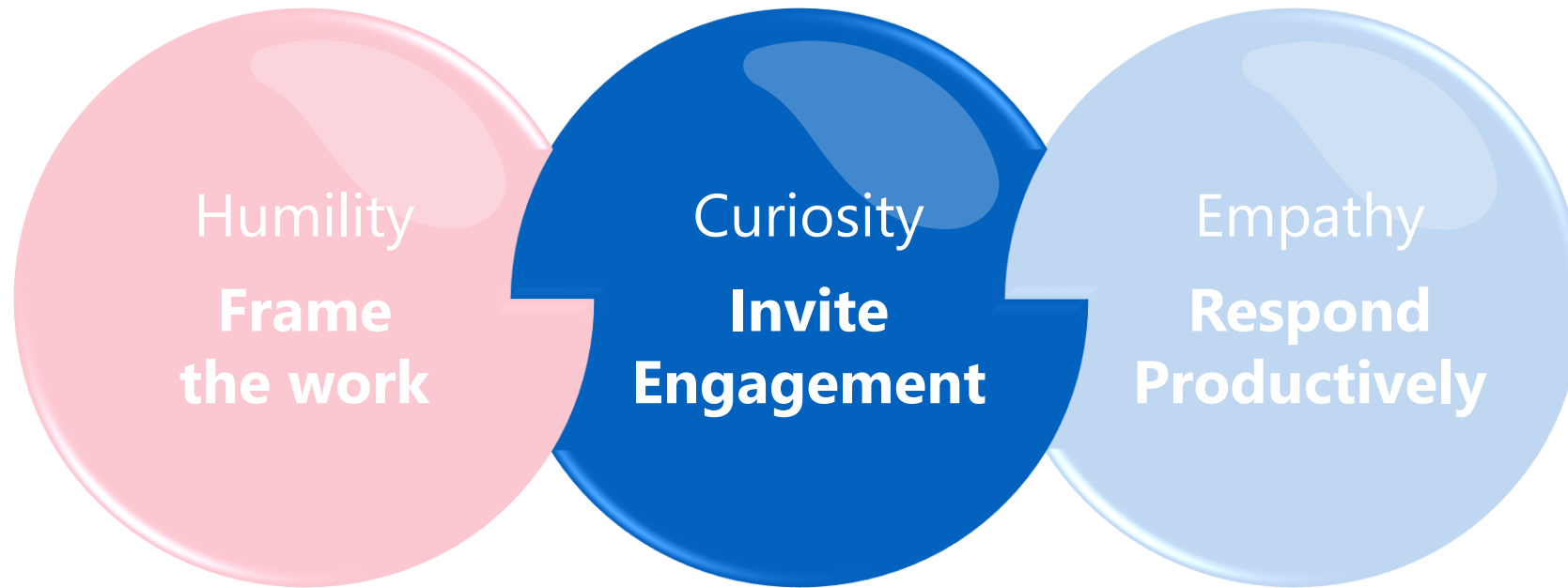


**Creating a culture of psychological safety does not compromise high quality care or a reduction in operational standards or expectations.**

# Psychological Safety and Accountability



# Your leadership style is key to build psychological safety ...



**Humility:** Framing the work builds shared understanding of the complex, uncertain, novel nature of the work, making it clear why everyone's voice matters.

**Curiosity:** Inviting engagement is about asking good questions and seeking diverse perspectives.

**Empathy:** Responding productively means being appreciative, empathic, listening and focusing forward.

# Skill 1. Humility: Frame the Work

---

There is a wonderful opportunity as a leader to learn how to 'frame' work in ways that promote psychological safety right from the start.

- **Framing the work** in healthcare helps to build a shared understanding of the complex, uncertain, novel nature of the work, acknowledging the potential for failures and highlighting why it is so important to speak up. You can also make it clear why **everyone's voice matters**, as no single person can be expected to have all the answers.
- **Encourage experimentation** and make it clear that mistakes will happen as we are human and are **opportunities for learning**. By prioritising learning and supporting the exploration of new ideas, you can promote an innovative mentality that makes it easier to share and discuss ideas.



**This is the complexity we are facing. I'd like to hear everyone's views & ideas.**

# Skill 1. Humility

---



Think about how you can make the work a shared endeavour that matters to you all. How can you create a **shared purpose** that people will want to invest in?



Use space to form an **open dialogue** about what the team's shared expectations of the work are, what do we all mean by this, do we all see it the same way? Try to incorporate **co-design**.



**Role modelling humility** right from the start, be clear that you don't have all the answers and that you welcome other's thoughts.

This is new to me,  
I'd really value  
your help in  
pointing out  
elements I may  
miss.



# Framing Exercise

## Peer Coaching:

Maureen and John have kindly agreed to have a go at 'framing' how to introduce the idea that your team is going to adopt the practice of having safety huddles.

In the chat please tell us how you would frame this if it was your team.

What psychologically safe and compassionate peer coaching would you offer Maureen and John?

- How did it land with you?
- What could they say or do differently?

This time will fly by! It replicates reality as we are often having to frame on the spot and under pressure. Invariably we might not always get our framing perfectly in tune, but how we adapt and flex in response is also key.



When you initially framed the work you said that **everyone's voice matters**, so as you get into **the work you need to make this a reality.**

You can do this by noticing who has spoken in the meeting and drawing in the quieter people in the group by using phrases such as **"Aoife I would love to hear from you..."**,

and by creating 'flat' team structures that give team members the space to **experiment, share ideas, voice their concerns and always ask why.** The best-performing teams have no strict power structure when it comes to ideas and initiatives. Regardless of their role or seniority, **all employees should have an equally valid opinion.** It also helps if those opinions come from a place of diversity, with different backgrounds, genders, ages and experiences across the team.

## Skill 2. Curiosity: Invite Inclusive Participation & Engagement



## Skill 2. Curiosity

What are  
you seeing  
that I'm not?  
What  
concerns or  
ideas do you  
have?

When you spot some **'group think' or 'pack mentality'** going on, where no-one seems to want to 'stand out'. *"A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action."*

Asch conformity experiment:  
<https://youtu.be/NyDDyT1lDhA>

Maybe ask questions like "What would someone that fundamentally disagrees with this approach think? Are there any other ideas we should stop for a moment and consider?"

Remember that people fear looking 'stupid' or being embarrassed. Create situations where you welcome 'ideas from left field'.



# Some simple questions...

---

## **Acknowledge your vulnerability!**

## **Offer your time to really listen and ask simple powerful questions!**

I don't know.

What would help?

I need help.

How can I help?

I have failed.

What have you learned?

I have made an error.

What is the learning, what do you need to do?

I am sorry.

What can we do differently?

I have learned.

How can we share this learning?

---

# Some more simple questions

---

## **Curiosity – inviting engagement** **Empathy – Respond productively**

---

Be fully present and listen without distraction.

No “preaching, politicking, prosecuting”.

Hold the neutral space. Are you preoccupied with your own issues if so take a few minutes to focus?

Be aware of your assumptions and check they are not getting in the way of you listening.

Help the person you are working with to test their assumptions.

## **Offer your time to really listen and ask simple powerful questions!**

---

I wonder if you can tell me more?

That is so interesting, how did you come to that view?

Reflect back what you have heard, e.g., and so you said you think? Feel??

What do you think?  
Can I check what I think I have heard?

What might other team members say if they were in the room with us?

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(Schein 1999, Kegan & Lahey 2009, Kline 2015, Evans 2021, Grant 2021)



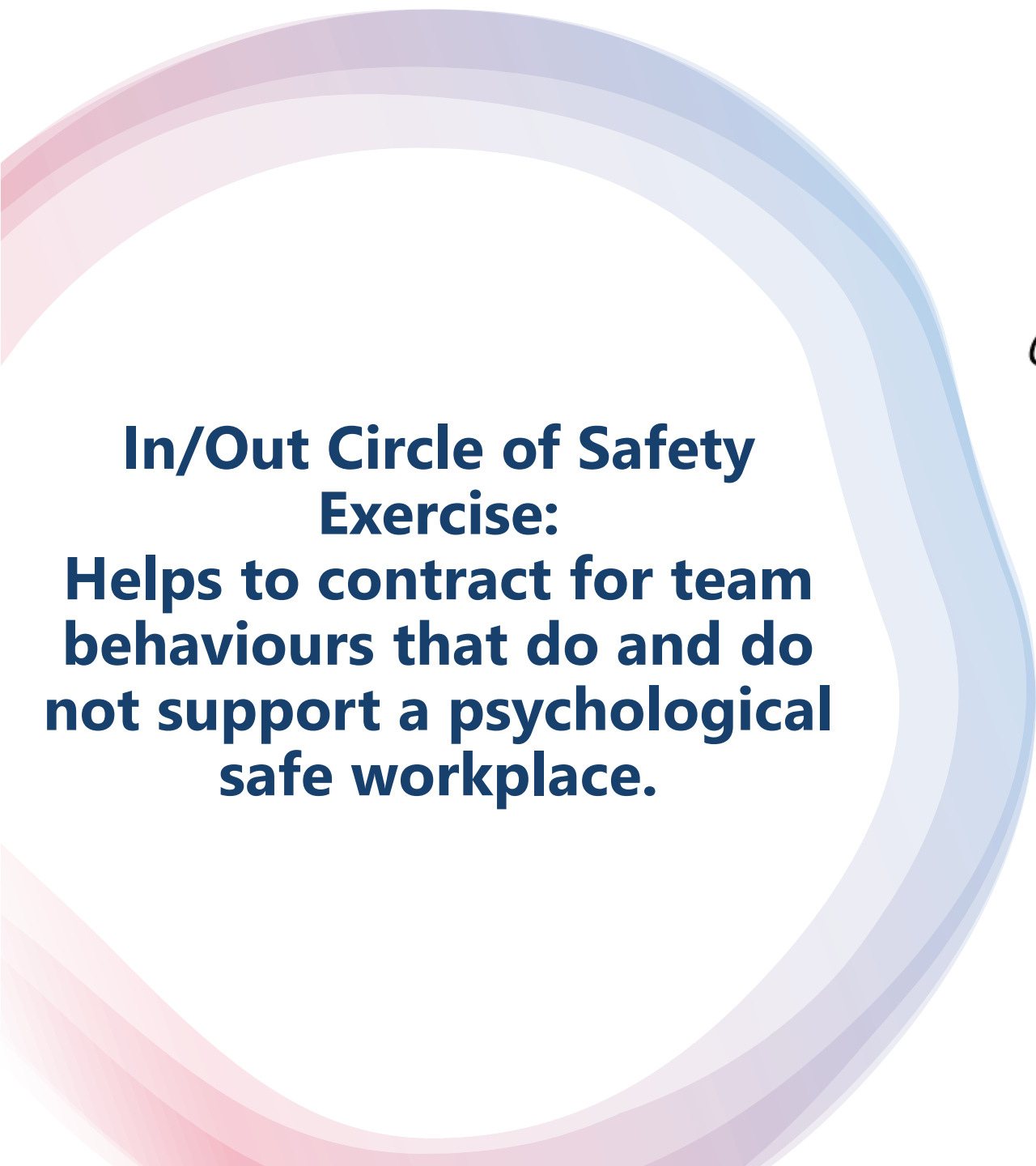
1. **Express appreciation** when people contribute and share their thoughts or ideas, even if they are difficult to hear.

1. Learn to '**Embrace the messengers**'. When people come forward with bad news or mistakes respond in an appreciative and/or forward looking way that role models a growth mindset. Show your team that failures/bad news/ mistakes will be met with **kindness and support**.

1. Try to **destigmatise failure**, highlighting the reasons why being able to take 'thoughtful and proportionate risks' in healthcare help us to innovate and improve. Try and rock your inner team Samuel Beckett mindset of: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better".

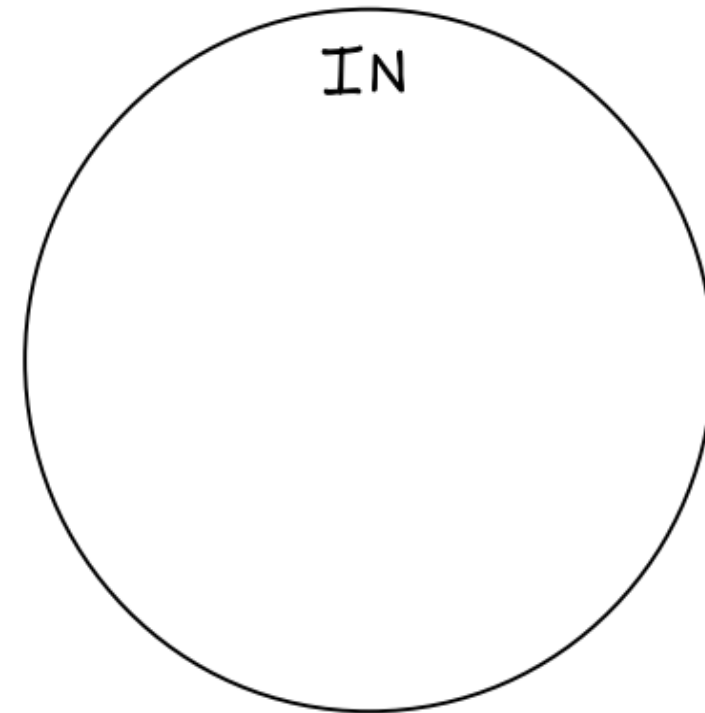
1. Help to **set team boundaries** that create a culture of continuous improvement, as a psychologically safe workplace doesn't condone demeaning remarks or attacks.

## Skill 3. Empathy: Respond productively



**In/Out Circle of Safety  
Exercise:**  
**Helps to contract for team  
behaviours that do and do  
not support a psychological  
safe workplace.**

OUT



IN

OUT



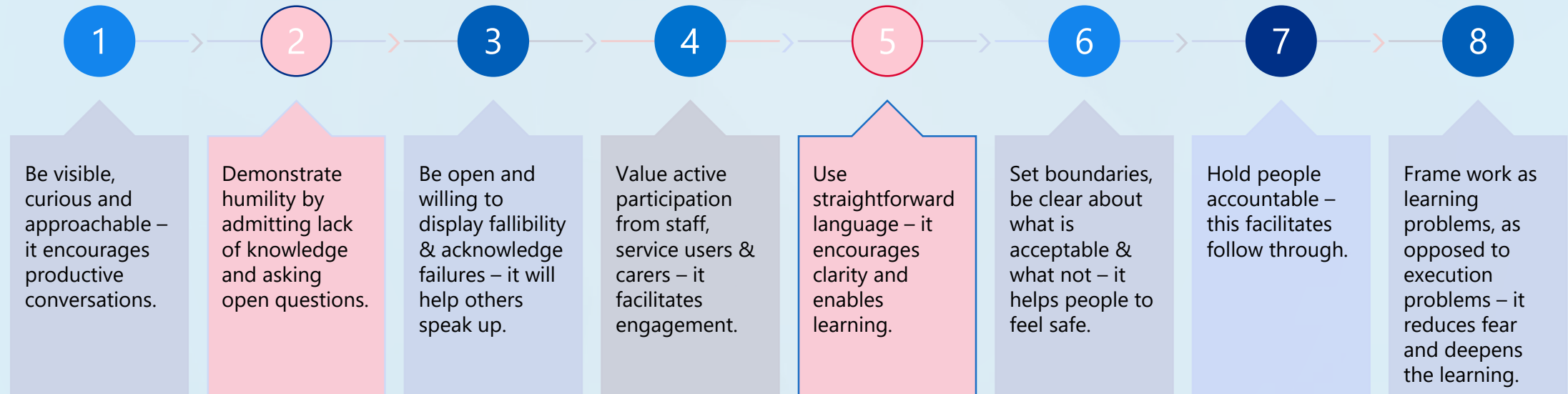
# A tool to takeaway to help you assess your team's level of psychological safety

## Edmondson's 7 questions

How safe is it to take a risk on this team?

1. If you make a mistake in your team, is it held against you?
2. Are you able to bring up problems and tough issues?
3. Do people on the team sometimes reject others for being different?
4. Is it safe to take a risk?
5. Is it difficult to ask other team members for help?
6. Do people on the team deliberately act to undermine your efforts?
7. Are your unique skills and talents valued and utilised?

# What leaders can do to create a psychologically safe environment in which individuals and teams can flourish



# To summarise, psychologically safe work environments are a necessity for improvement as they ...

- **Encourage speaking up** without concern about how others react to you.
- **Enable clarity of thought** by trying to minimise the fear that can impede thinking.
- **Support productive conflict** which enables more timely conversations to surface differences to enable effective decision-making and action.
- **Mitigate failure** leading to earlier reporting of errors and more timely learning.
- **Promote innovation** and **encourage novel ideas**.
- **Reduce learning anxiety** which encourages learning behaviours and, where needed, changes in practice.
- **Reduce survival anxiety** and motivate people to focus on the achievement of performance goals and removing obstacles to pursuing these goals.
- **Increase accountability** and enable people to be candid and take interpersonal risks.



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# Psychologically safe leadership

# Dates for your diary....

**QPS TalkTime**



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**QPS TalkTime Autumn / Winter Series 2023**

## **World Patient Safety Day Special**

12th September 2023



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Scan me!



# Quality and Patient Safety Matters #AllThingsQuality Bumper Edition



**World  
Patient Safety  
Day** 17 September 2023

HSE theme:  
**Elevate the patient  
voice and safety  
through health literacy**

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**Reminder:** Short questions (pop up) as you sign off, please help us to improve our QPS TalkTime Webinars by sharing your feedback

We really appreciate your time, thank you.

*Thank  
you*

**Contact:** [Kris.Kavanagh@hse.ie](mailto:Kris.Kavanagh@hse.ie) to be included on our mailing list to receive QPS TalkTime invitations