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Issue V, 22 November 2022

e-ISSN 2707-9481

ISBN 978-601-323-288-1

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<https://doi.org/10.31643/2022.07>

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## Psychological support for the psychological safety of an individual and a group in higher education

**Abstract:** Many studies of psychological safety in education focus on the study of the antecedent events and results associated with psychological safety and its violations, but little attention is paid to the ways and steps of ensuring and developing psychological safety at different levels of the educational organization. Methodology. The purpose of the study is to analyze the problems and directions of psychological support for subjects of an educational organization (university) in the field of ensuring and developing the psychological safety of an individual and a group. A research method is a theoretical analysis of the problems of psychological support for the psychological safety of an individual and a group in higher education. Conclusion. Psychologically safe practice is essential in the field of education. Despite psychological safety, being an intuitive concept, it is quite difficult to apply it on a university scale since this problem and its solution have great resonance, and consequences for all levels and components of the educational system. That all parties feel free to speak up and participate as much as possible is vital to a safe and optimal educational experience.

**Keywords:** psychological support of subjects of an educational organization, university, psychological safety of a person.

**Cite this article as:** Tyumaseva Z.I.; Valeeva G.V.; Ponniah K.; Nurtanto M.; Nogaibayeva A.A.; Arpentieva M.R. (2022). Psychological support for the psychological safety of an individual and a group in higher education. *Challenges of Science*. Issue V, 2022, pp. 54-61. <https://doi.org/10.31643/2022.07>

## **Introduction**

Psychological safety, as "the degree to which people feel comfortable taking... interpersonal risks (for example, trying something new), is known as psychological safety", is a decisive factor in determining the safe, productive, and effective training and education of future specialists in universities (Wanless, 2016, p. 6).

Many studies of psychological safety in education focus on the study of the antecedent events and results associated with psychological safety and its violations, but little attention is paid to the ways and steps of ensuring and developing psychological safety at different levels of the educational organization.

## **Research Methodology**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the problems and directions of psychological support for subjects of an educational organization (university) in the field of ensuring and developing the psychological safety of an individual and a group. The research method is a theoretical analysis of the problems of psychological support for the psychological safety of an individual and a group in higher education.

## **Research Results**

Research has repeatedly found that organizations benefit from a diversity of perspectives, and groups of people with different backgrounds are better able to recognize problems and come up with creative solutions than groups with similar backgrounds. Psychological safety is the state of confidence of the subjects of education that they will not be punished, humiliated, ostracized for their values, ideas, and experiences, behavior patterns, fears and mistakes, successes and achievements (Clark, 2020; Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson, Lei, 2014; Hunt, et al., 2021; Newman, Donohue, Eva, 2017; Wanless, 2016).

This is the general belief of the members of an educational organization or its separate division that other members of the group will not reject, punish and humiliate them for what and how they do, say, think, experience, etc. Psychological safety in education means that people feel comfortable being themselves. They are completely devoted to the educational process and feel fine, even "putting on the line" everything they have and what they have achieved, all of themselves (Khudyakova et al., 2021; Valeeva, Tyumaseva, 2022; Exacusto, 2011). The lack of psychological safety in the university has serious consequences. First, when people are uncomfortable talking about ineffective and unproductive changes and initiatives, the organization is unable to prevent failure. And when education participants are not fully committed to it, the organization loses the opportunity to use the strengths of all its talents. People need to feel comfortable speaking out, asking weird, naive or wise and specific questions, and quietly agreeing or disagreeing with the way things are, in order to be able to make a real difference. Psychological safety does not mean that "everyone is always good", but that people accept conflict and speak up, knowing that the group supports them and they support it (Valeeva, 2021; Valeeva, Tyumaseva, 2020; Petrosyants et al., 2022).

For educational organizations serious about success, many innovations are common, creative relationships are important, attracting and retaining professionals and "talents" who can openly and extensively discuss problems, and not hush them up. The traditional culture of "fitting" and "adjusting" a person to an organization is doomed to failures and failures, success requires constant reflection and critical reflection on what is happening, adherence to tradition, and the introduction of new ideas, and new goals. The interpersonal climate should not suppress, "plug", people in the organization should not be ridiculed, intimidated, etc. (Petrosyants et al., 2021; Tyumaseva, Valeeva, 2018; Valeeva, Tyumaseva, 2021). Disagreement to discuss problems, although it speeds up the course of events, blocks creativity: discussion is an integral part of the creative process. People should be able to voice questionable and unfinished ideas ask weird questions and discuss them with others, this creates a culture where a minor oversight or a momentary mistake doesn't matter much and where factual errors are acknowledged and corrected and where the next creative idea can be the next important stage in the development of the organization. The path of psychological safety in the development of an organization is sometimes thorny, but strict adherence to a common path, taking into account typical scenarios for discussing and implementing

innovations, provide a clear path to continuous development and productive, effective change. E. Edmondson calls this a "fearless organization" (Fearless Organization). Creating psychological safety in a university is necessary for successful education and upbringing, development and innovation. In the case of an innovative culture, people should be able to behave, talk, think and feel outside the box, discussions are needed and brainstorming to create a truly innovative culture.

Psychological safety is understanding that it is safe to take interpersonal risks in an educational institution, that such risks are vital for the development of a team spirit ("educational community") and the quality of education, contributes to the willingness of students, teachers and other employees to contribute to the achievement of a common goals. People are not afraid of being rejected for making suggestions and know that when problems are identified or discussed, when issues are discussed or mistakes are corrected, they will be treated fairly and with compassion. They are not only free from fear in general, but free from interpersonal, professional and social threats to their current status, as well as future professional and professional development, including threats of injustice, bullying, etc. Psychological safety is especially important in environments with high risk, such as education, where people work and study in an interprofessional and interdisciplinary environment, where mistakes can lead to serious disruption in the life of an individual, group or organization. However, despite the advantages of psychological safety, guilt and fear relations most often prevail in educational organizations of our time, which damage people's safety, spiritual and moral well-being and development of staff and students, the efficiency and productivity of the organization, leading to unaccounted for aberrations and errors and a decrease in safety.. This culture of guilt and fear is exacerbated in countries where people adhere to strictly hierarchical relationships, where structure and control are paramount, and there is no opportunity for frank conversations at different organizational levels. This is also typical of the managerialization and commercialization of education: where an educational organization is run by an appointed "effective manager" whose merit is only corrupt ties with other "effective managers": countries with a market culture prioritize competitiveness and income from education over the importance of discussing failure, creating and thereby keeping a psychologically dangerous, "toxic" environment (Hunt, et al., 2021).

Psychological safety has an additional resource of supporting student development, many schools and universities have long adopted a recovery-oriented approach, focusing on empowering student students through support structures (families or guardians or fellow students who provide support and "coach" the lagging behind). This helps students recognize and develop their strengths and make informed choices that are significant for their lives and the organization. Despite the obvious advantages of a psychologically safe organizational culture in education, it is difficult to implement in practice and even to demonstrate: starting with the question of what can be "doed" with organizational culture - whether it can be changed or can only be studied and taken into account. Along with the heterogeneity of their own interests and needs, the members of an educational organization reflect the interests and needs of many other interested parties (stakeholders), which can create problems for the implementation of consistent changes, as well as the peculiarities of the national culture, therefore, individualistic and collectivist models of relations existing in society, open or closed, patriarchal and matriarchal orientations, different models of tolerance for uncertainty, etc. affect the possibilities for ensuring and developing the psychological safety of members of educational and other organizations (Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson, Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety plays a central role in identifying and correcting mistakes and oversights, so their discussion can be suppressed at the level of organizational pressure.

Research points to a link between psychological safety and the quality of education, readiness and ability to innovate. A mentally safe organization understands the importance of learning from failure, and that the members of an educational organization play a big role in its success, so they can recognize and communicate when they need help, without fear that this may be seen as a weakness or otherwise affect their reputation, as well as the stability of their educational results and prospects for professional and career development and development. The inability and unwillingness to discuss these issues are associated with the likelihood of stress that can exacerbate the problem and lead to more serious health problems. Psychological safety must be ensured at every level of the organization: it is important to recognize and set it as a principle or ideal, even if it is difficult to implement in practice. It will be felt and expressed differently depending on the context: at the individual, team, and organizational levels. Since the organization of education represents many substructures and subcultures, it is necessary to create a flexible psychological safety program adapted to the needs of different subjects (groups and individuals),

this point is critical for the success of the program across the organization. The behavior of supervisors/leaders is especially important: concepts such as transformational leadership, compassionate and collaborative leadership, inclusive leadership, managerial openness, manager reliability, and behavioral honesty are used here. Also, different substructures may differ in terms of procedural aspects that contribute to or hinder psychological safety: the processes and contents of people's contacts in substructures differ. While not encouraging direct conflicts within and between teams, it is important not allowing unspoken disagreements to accumulate, which can develop into much more serious problems in the future. Thus, leaders must give subordinates the opportunity to discuss problems and manage processes, having the courage to restrain or even prevent changes that undermine psychologically safe relationships. Thus, psychological safety lies in facilitating collaborative and frank discussions, and not "carte blanche" in allowing any changes. In addition, leaders must also be psychologically safe in the performance of their managerial responsibilities and use the resources that support them to manage the workforce.

Collaborative relationships are essential to maximize the chances of success. The experience of cooperation contributes to psychological safety and allows you to convince employees of the sincerity of the management's intentions. Collaboration increases the internal motivation of staff and increases participation in these changes, and also contributes to the sustainability of the organization. Joint decision-making and implementation allow members of the organization to feel their powers, including powers in the field of ensuring psychological safety (Newman, Donohue, Eva, 2017; Wanless, 2016).

According to T. Clark, members of the organization must go through a number of safety stages before they can make their unique, valuable contribution to the development of the organization and challenge the status quo. He believes it is possible to single out 4 stages of psychological safety. When a team or organizational climate is characterized by interpersonal trust and an atmosphere of respect, members of the organization feel free to collaborate and feel safe in taking risks, which ultimately allows them to innovate more effectively. A psychologically safe school or workplace starts with a sense of belonging. Members of an educational organization must feel accepted before they can fully contribute to the improvement of its activities (Clark, 2020).

Stage 1 - Safety of Inclusion. The safety of inclusion satisfies the basic human need for connection and belonging. At this stage, the person feels secure in being himself and is accepted for who he is, including his unique qualities and defining characteristics.

Stage 2 - Student Safety: Student safety meets the need for learning and growth. At this stage, a person feels safe to share information in the learning process, asking questions, giving and receiving feedback, experimenting and making mistakes.

Stage 3 - Participant Safety: Participant safety satisfies the need for change. The person feels secure using their skills and abilities to make a meaningful contribution.

Stage 4 - Change Safety. Change safety satisfies the need for improvement. A person feels secure when he speaks and challenges the status quo when he believes that there is a real opportunity to change or improve.

To help members of an educational organization through these stages, take risks, and speak up to end up where they are comfortable, leaders must nurture and encourage a sense of psychological safety among their members.

One of the main misconceptions among managers is that psychological safety will be present in any more or less healthy work environment, as will the freedom of workers and students from violence and protection from injury. However, in reality, a psychologically safe educational environment is rare. It is natural for many people to "keep their ideas to themselves", "hope for a chance", avoid "stupid" questions, and avoid disagreeing with management, even when they have concerns. Therefore, the free exchange of ideas, concerns and questions is difficult, special attention and efforts are needed for formation and development; new behaviors and innovation are needed (Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson, Lei, 2014).

However, the results of this work come quickly, in the form of faster and better solutions to problems: strategic problems that have existed for a long time can be resolved relatively quickly by ensuring dialogue between stakeholders. Here it is necessary 1) to focus as a goal on the quality of education (and not psychological safety itself) and that it depends on dialogue, the integration of ideas and experience of many people, which requires a willingness to discuss emerging problems in a timely manner frankly, to consolidate and broadcast new models to other units interactions in regularly scheduled classes

and in the process of exchanging experiences outside of classes; 2) train both individuals and teams to practice perspective analysis and exploration skills that facilitate the frank exchange of ideas and concerns, best when individuals and teams practice them while doing "real work" together (in generative dialogues—conversations in which multiple viewpoints are brought together to make new decisions about how to move forward - about complex topics structured and organized so that the team can evaluate their effectiveness and productivity as they move); 3) include fixing the results in the form of texts, carefully analyze how you can and should act in order to create the right atmosphere for navigating complex topics or solutions. By imagining and writing down specific descriptions, people are better able to learn new skills and practices; 4) normalization of anxieties and vulnerability associated with education and work through the practice of small acts of vulnerability. Understanding that openness (and thus vulnerability) does no harm allows you to continue to increase the amount of interpersonal risk that people are willing / able to take. If participants withhold important, but sensitive or unpleasant information, the dialogue will not work, so they can be "warmed up" to interpersonal risk by suggesting that they start with safe, but also ineffective tasks.

In modern education, developing abilities related to psychological safety and understanding perspectives is becoming an increasingly important part of achieving excellence.

The concept of psychological safety as "the general belief that a team/group is safe for interpersonal risk" (Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson, Lei, 2014). A. Edmondson and J. Polzer believes that setting norms is critical to the success and participation of people in creating a psychologically safe environment. Psychological safety is a defense against the disruptive behavior that drives so many people away from situations in which they seek self and development opportunities. Psychological safety increases involvement and facilitates interaction, promotes an inclusive culture and prosperity for all, a rich exchange of views of all as part of a single system; inspires creativity and self-expression ideas; improves well-being, mental health and well-being, helps to avoid stressors that interfere with them; creates "brand ambassadors" by inspiring members of the organization to constantly brag about it and their affiliation; reduces staff and trainee turnover, interviews, hiring and training of team members are reduced, the sustainability of the organization is increased; improving the quality of education and the productivity of the organization.

Managers who are not able to create and maintain a psychologically safe atmosphere in the team can cause irreparable destruction and damage the organization, up to its collapse.

Creating a psychologically safe working environment in an educational organization begins with coaching aimed at changing the behavior of people in the organization, changing cultural norms requires the gradual training of everyone in the company through experiential learning.

The work here includes working with leaders and programs for all members of the organization. The manager and other leaders must constantly model inclusive behavior, allowing them to develop new team norms. It is important to ask people to share their thoughts and experiences (active listening and curiosity), especially in ambiguous and multi-level situations. It is important for leaders to learn from employees and students as much as they learn from them. It is important to encourage respect, negative impacts cannot be ignored: when someone undermines, shames or otherwise prevents others from speaking out. Educate people about how these behaviors can hinder creativity and innovation, including sharing concerns, ideas and questions. It is also important to lead by example: from senior management, all the way to team leaders and managers, so that a set of models of psychologically safe behavior should become the norm for the entire organization; companies (requesting feedback, acknowledging mistakes and apologies, being open to differing opinions, being tactful and accessible, asking for help).

It is important to accept vulnerability, it is a sign of inner strength, ability and willingness to improve and a way to encourage open and honest feedback. This shows that responsibility for mistakes is valued by the organization. It is also important to encourage open conversation (with a growth mindset), including the use of corporate events or virtual "hangouts" so that organization members can relax and be themselves, get to know each other as human beings, and develop an open mind. There is also a need for empowerment from a privileged place: to empower underrepresented colleagues by highlighting their accomplishments and supporting an "employee resource group", demonstrating real interest and appreciation that helps build and develop trust, interest in employee and student issues outside the organization.

It is possible to have an "anxiety party" (D. Burka), which normalizes vulnerability and insafety: employees exchange their anxieties during the training. These parties are not designed to solve problems, but they provide an example for people to share information and build trust (Burka, 2016).

One of the most difficult tasks of an "inclusive" leader, human resources and / or educational support staff is to increase the dialogic exchange of views in the organization, while reducing conflict or "social friction". When this does not happen and it becomes psychologically extremely dangerous to talk about what a person really thinks and feels, then the lack of psychological safety triggers, in addition to censorship in the organization, self-censorship processes, as a result, a person or group of people stops training/education and blocks cooperation and creativity. When leaders cultivate psychological safety, teams and organizations go through four successive stages. First, people feel included and accepted; then they feel safe to learn, contribute, and finally challenge the status quo. In this process, leaders can and should set the tone and model the ideal behavior, the path: if they overcome fear, establish responsibility based on real results, create a supportive environment that allows people to be vulnerable as they learn and grow, then the results will exceed their expectations.

When developing safety programs for all members of an organization, it is productive and effective to map existing initiatives: this shows what has already been done and reduces the risk of duplication of work. This maximizes investment in psychological safety. The organization's active students and teachers should be asked to participate in such mapping and create a safe environment. You can also contact intermediaries, which include various informal and formal organizations, including trade unions, charitable organizations or other local charitable initiatives, virtual (network) and real support groups, conduct focus groups or interviews with them. The idea of the psychological safety of relations in the organization includes an assessment of barriers and opportunities. In this assessment, it is important to listen to individuals and groups who may be cautious about their experiences ("weak voices" are just as important as "strong voices"), and to get feedback from those who do not usually speak openly. Encouraging employees to speak up is the first step, we need organizational methods that support what happens after speaking up: it is very important to encourage members of the organization who have dared to speak up, as well as to make decisions and change resulting from the information received: inclusive leadership is essential part of psychological safety. In addition, special studies, surveys and observations are needed to identify, among other things, people who lack a sense of psychological safety or are not ready to participate in the study: they need special support. It is also important to evaluate the long-term and immediate consequences of safety actions, such as the consequences of reporting misses. In addition, it is important to evaluate the impact of safety efforts on the final results, such as the quality of education, its improvement. Implementing cultural change and improving psychological safety will take a significant amount of time, both in terms of cultural shift, both in terms of working with existing professionals and students, and in terms of induction of new staff and admission of new students.

It is rather difficult to take specific steps to improve psychological safety in an organization for a number of reasons: 1) the complex nature of the phenomenon requires a multifaceted approach to changes aimed at its achievement and development; 2) cultural initiatives in the field of psychological safety require a cultural shift, participation and commitment to change in this area of the majority of professionals and students; 3) it is difficult to measure psychological safety and its impact on the final results; 4) it is difficult to determine what steps, in what order and in what time frame, who needs to take to ensure and improve psychological safety. The path of each organization will be unique, however, it is important to highlight the main components of the program to improve psychological safety. Firstly, it is important to build an atmosphere of psychological safety in an organization that is human-oriented, ready, and able to listen to people and change (learn from mistakes, etc.) (Edmondson, 2018; Edmondson, Lei, 2014). Purposeful/targeted interventions of the academic support services of education, concretizing this atmosphere, provide an additional result:

1. Organization of a group of influential people in the organization that make up a strategic plan for psychologically safe practices: principles and cross-cutting themes to achieve these results.

2. Support for and commitment to psychologically safe practices by the organization: informing and strengthening the commitment of the organization according to the strategic plan.

3. Messaging with the leaders of the organization to model psychological safety and focus on the following aspects:

(a) Discussion of the importance of error reporting and the benefits of focusing on improving quality.

(b) Discuss the collective responsibility (including rewards) of staff for speaking up on educational issues, including measures to improve the quality of education.

(c) Discussing experiences of professional and educational failure and lessons learned from those experiences: making failure psychologically acceptable as part of academic and professional development.

(d) Discuss past difficulties in interacting with older and higher-profile colleagues, etc., lessons learned and the importance of speaking up and sharing decision-making within and between groups and group representatives.

4. Creation of a code of psychologically safe behavior, a declaration of standards on how people should behave with each other, psychological safety values, including open and frank discussions, balanced with compassion and justice, aimed at improving the quality of education.

5. Holding forums and structured discussions for different groups to discuss problems and opportunities in the practice of quality education.

6. Providing (re)training and training for psychologically safe behavior. Creation and selection of educational methodologies and approaches will allow teams to practice psychologically safe practices in educational and non-educational situations, including modeling high-pressure situations such as aggressive and violent educational subjects.

It is important to take into account the bottlenecks, this is especially important for the involvement of different groups of actors and the provision of assistance. Psychological safety is especially important when coercive measures have to be used to protect the subject from harming themselves or others. The trauma and distress that leads to coercive action can be minimized and healed by open and compassionate interaction against a backdrop of extended reflection and debriefing after the crisis has passed. Summing up provides an opportunity to increase the reflexivity of staff and students of universities, give them the opportunity to contribute to education (for example, discuss future ways and alternatives of education), improve the quality of education. Targeted interventions are divided into structured discussions, devoted to the discussion of existing problems or areas for improvement, and decision-making, requiring group discussion and the choice of a course of action. In general, we are talking about 1) the importance of empowering students by informing them at every stage of learning and involving them in decision-making, providing students with a choice; 2) respect and encouragement of the contributions of all members of an organization aimed at supporting the individual development of each student as an individual and partner, student and professional; 3) in difficult situations, joint discussions focus on individual development and team development, and not on conflict and confrontation, the goal is consensus (the best possible solution for everyone and everyone), and not someone's victory, rightness, etc.

## **Conclusions**

Psychologically safe practice is essential in the field of education. Despite psychological safety, being an intuitive concept, it is quite difficult to apply it on a university scale, since this problem and its solution have great resonance, and consequences for all levels and components of the educational system. That all parties feel free to speak up and participate as much as possible is vital to a safe and optimal educational experience.

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