

# Chesapeake Bay Program Learning Series

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## Module 1: Psychological Safety

*Planting trust and  
acceptance allows for  
open communication  
and diverse*



# About the Chesapeake Bay Program Learning Series

*A collection of  
resources focused on  
key factors of  
organizational  
excellence*

The **portfolio** for each learning module:

- Recorded one-hour interactive self-directed presentation
- Worksheets and other tools to allow team engagement on the topic
- Key topical references to provide additional learning resources and deeper investigation



# About the Chesapeake Bay Program Learning Series

*A collection of  
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**Modules focus on ...**

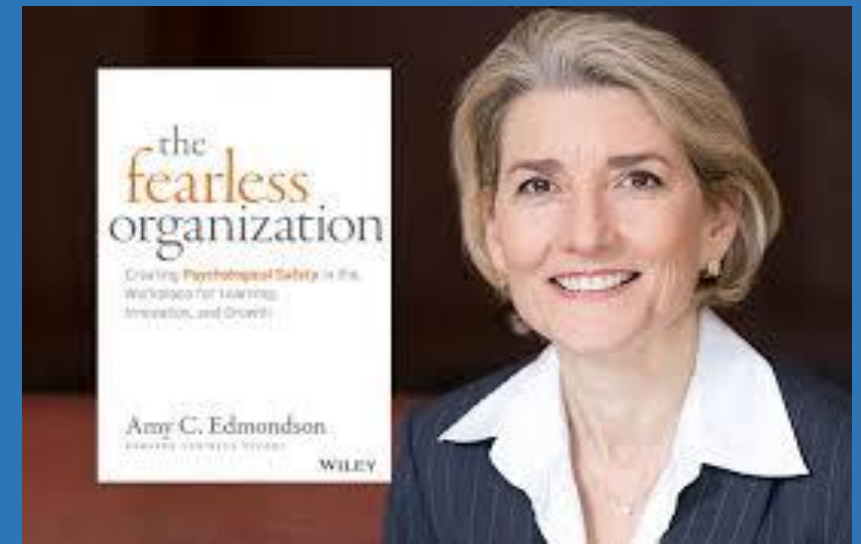
**What is it?**

**Why does it matter?**

**How to cultivate it!**



# Psychological Safety



“A shared belief held by members of a team that it’s ok to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes all without fear of negative consequences”

Dr. Amy Edmonson  
Professor of Leadership and Management  
Harvard Business School



# Values expressed through the practice of psychological safety ...



- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Represent the interests of people
- ✓ Operate with transparency
- ✓ Seek consensus
- ✓ Engage the public
- ✓ Promote environmental justice

## PRINCIPLES

The following principles are an overarching framework by which the Chesapeake Bay Program commits to operate. They encompass the partners' collective, core values and are intended to help guide us in our work as the Partnership develops policy and takes actions to achieve this Agreement's Goals and Outcomes.

### THE PARTNERSHIP WILL:

- **Collaborate** to achieve the Goals and Outcomes of this Agreement.
- **Achieve Goals and Outcomes** in a timely way and at the least possible cost to the public.
- **Represent the interests of people** throughout the watershed fairly and effectively, including a broad diversity of cultures, demographics and ages.
- **Operate with transparency** in program decisions, policies, actions and reporting on progress to strengthen public confidence in our efforts.
- **Use science-based decision-making and seek out innovative technologies and approaches** to support sound management decisions in a changing system.
- **Maintain a coordinated watershed-wide monitoring and research program** to support decision-making and track progress and the effectiveness of management actions.
- **Acknowledge, support and embrace local governments** and other local entities in watershed restoration and protection activities.
- **Anticipate changing conditions**, including long-term trends in sea level, temperature, precipitation, land use and other variables.
- **Adaptively manage** at all levels of the Partnership to foster continuous improvement.
- **Seek consensus** when making decisions.
- **Use place-based approaches**, where appropriate, that produce recognizable benefits to local communities while contributing to larger ecosystem goals.
- **Engage the public** to increase the number and diversity of people who support and carry out the conservation and restoration activities necessary to achieve the Goals and Outcomes of the Agreement.
- **Explore using social science** to better understand and measure how human behavior can drive natural resource use, management and decision-making.
- **Promote environmental justice** through the meaningful involvement and fair treatment of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin or income, in the implementation of this Agreement.



# Why is Psychological Safety Important ?



Engagement



Motivation



Team members feel that their contributions matter



Absence of fear, a culture that welcomes diversity, equity and inclusion



Increases creativity



Increases commitment and retention

Hutchison, J. (2020).



# *Barriers to establishing and cultivating psychological safety ...*

*What can get in the way of providing a psychologically safe environment in organizations?*

- Criticism and punitive behaviors
- Interrupting, dismissing ideas, and being dismissive
- Complacent leaders
- Fear of vulnerability and transparency
- Hierarchical structures



# *Nurture, cultivate and grow* our culture of *psychological safety ...*



**Admit Fallibility**



**Make Clear All Voices Matter**



**Actively Invite Input**



**Respond Constructively**

Gallo (2023)





# *Nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*

## **Admit Fallibility**



Admit to fallibility by being vulnerable and demonstrating that it is encouraged to be open about mistakes.



Be humble and accept that no single person has the best ideas.



Tell stories about how you and others have identified areas for personal improvement based on feedback



Emphasize the importance of learning from mistakes.

Gallo (2023)



# *Nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*



Most people feel safer when they hold back and keep their ideas and opinions to themselves



Discuss why we need to hear from all, why their viewpoint matters, and how it will affect the outcomes of the work



***Great Phrases for Leaders and Facilitators:***



"We are looking forward to hearing from everybody on this important topic!"



"We can better understand the sentiment of the group when hear from everyone"

**Make Clear  
That All  
Voices Matter**



# *Nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*

## Actively Invite Input



Assume people won't always share what they are thinking and provide best ideas unless invited



Use open ended questions, solicit responses, round robins, anonymous responses



Listen to diverse points of view



### ***Great Phrases for Leaders and Facilitators:***

"You are a key team member and your perspective is important";  
"What are you seeing?"



"What are your thoughts on this?"; "Where do you stand on this idea?"



# *Nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*

## Respond Constructively



Commit to an authentic desire to hear the best ideas and show gratitude for input.



When team members know they have been heard, they are more likely to commit to a plan of action



Adopt a growth and learning mindset



Replace blame with curiosity



# *Nurture, cultivate and grow* our culture of *psychological safety ...*



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# *Nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*

## **Psychological safety: Leadership Self-assessment**

In her book, *The Fearless Organization*, Harvard professor, Amy Edmondson, shares her pioneering work on psychological safety, which she defines as: “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes”.

Everyone in organisations has a responsibility to make sure they’re helping to creating cultures where people feel they can speak up without fear of reprisal. But, as leaders, we have a special responsibility to model the kinds of behaviours that make this possible.

Edmondson has developed a three-step toolkit to help leaders keep psychological safety front of mind and to hone their practice. This is not always easy; implementing the toolkit involves often complex interpersonal skills that can take time to master.

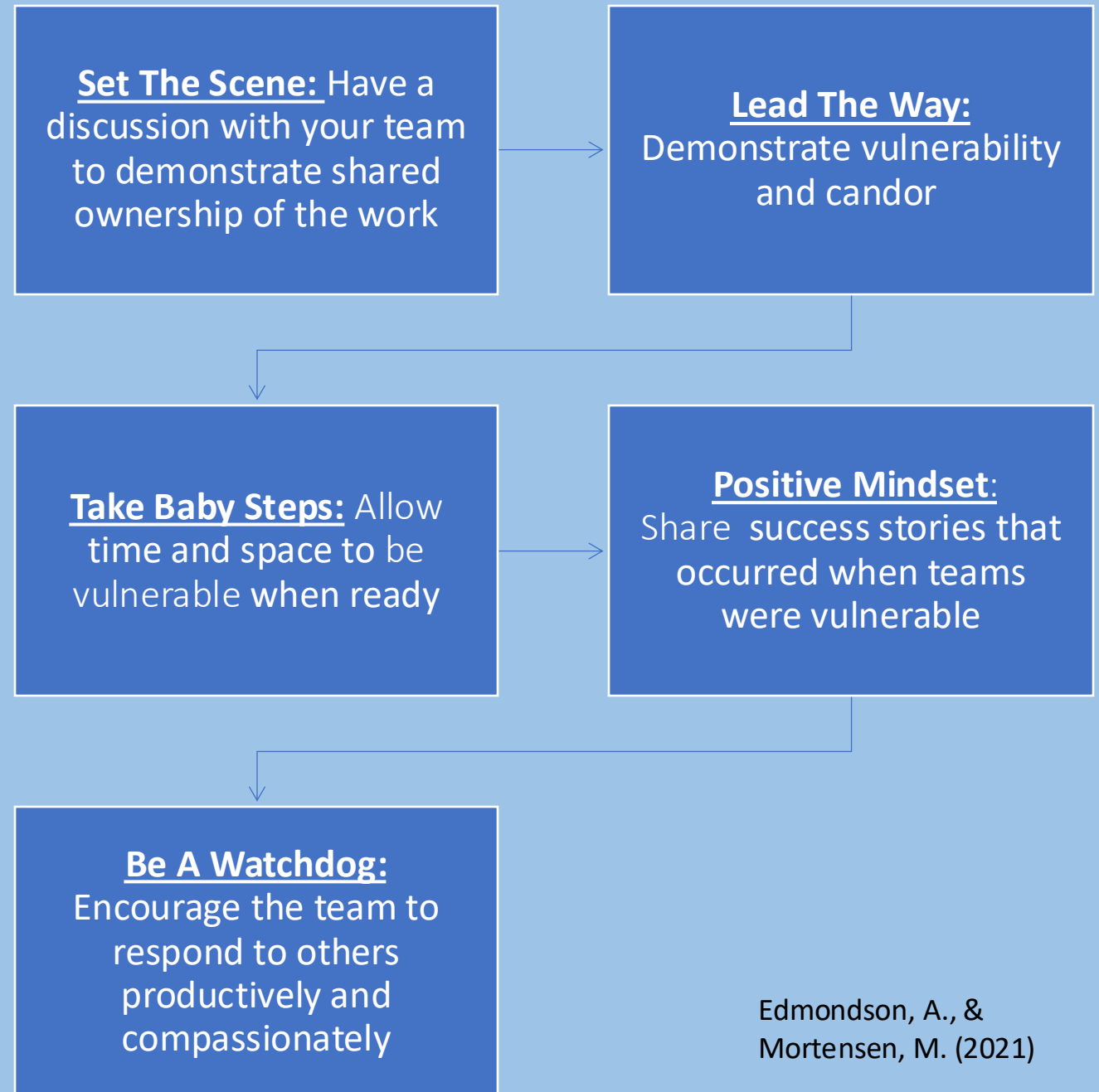
As a starting point, it’s helpful to reflect on how well we’re already doing with the elements of the toolkit, which is why we’ve created a version of Edmondson’s leadership self-assessment.

You can use it to identify areas where you’re already strong and where you might need to focus more. Remember: this is about learning, so even if you still have much to do, building awareness and being mindful of the importance of psychological safety will give you a baseline on which to build.

- Pause the recording, access and complete the Psychological Safety: Leadership Self-assessment
- For the behaviors that you indicated as “Not Enough”, select several that you will be more frequent and intentional with. What specifically will you do?



# *Steps to nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*



Edmondson, A., &  
Mortensen, M. (2021)



# Applying the Steps for leaders to nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...

Please use the worksheet **Steps to Nurture, Cultivate and Grow our Culture of Psychological Safety** to identify a current challenge in leadership or project management for which you could apply the steps to **cultivate Psychological Safety** within your team.

## Steps to Nurture, Cultivate and Grow our Culture of Psychological Safety

Information sourced from the work of [Amy C. Edmondson](#) and [Mark Mortensen](#)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this worksheet is to help teams transform Psychological Safety from theory to practice.

**Preface:** Think of a challenge related to a project or team you are involved with. Describe in the space below:

Considering the identified challenge, apply the 5 steps from Edmondson and Mortensen, to help the team create a more psychologically safe environment.

### Step 1: Set the Scene

According to Mortensen and Edmondson, the first step in establishing a psychologically safe environment is to have leaders facilitate "a discussion with [the] team to help them recognize not only their challenges, but yours [leaders] as well". Both the leaders and the members need to be as "clear and transparent about the needs of the work and of the team and jointly own the responsibility for succeeding".

### Step 2: Lead the Way

The second step according to Mortensen and Edmondson is to "Lead the Way": "When it comes to psychological safety, there are far too many stories of managers who demand candor...without demonstrating it themselves.... The best way to show you're serious is to expose your own vulnerability... If you're not willing to be candid with your employees, why should you expect them to be candid with you?"

### Step 3: Take Baby Steps

The third step according to Mortensen and Edmondson is to "Take Baby Steps": "Don't expect your employees to share their most personal and risky challenges right away. It takes time to build trust". "Start by making small disclosures yourself, and then make sure to welcome others' disclosures to help your employees build confidence that sharing is not penalized."

### Step 4: Share Positive Examples

Step 4 is to "share positive examples" of Psychological Safety. Leaders are encouraged to share their "conviction that increased transparency is happening and is helping the team design new arrangements that serve both individual needs and organizational goals".

Caution! This next step requires "tact and skill" according to Edmondson and Mortensen. "The goal here isn't to share information that was disclosed to you privately" or to create "pressure

Edmondson, A., &  
Mortensen, M. (2021)





# *How do teams and organizations demonstrate that Psychological Safety is a **priority?***

Cultural norms where teams celebrate supportive, open dialogue leading to new ideas and surprising outcomes!

Team members hold each other accountable for behaviors that do not support safe dialogue

Inviting feedback

Collaboration!

Consensus

Transparency

Represent the interests of people

Engage the public

Promote environmental justice



# *Follow-up Actions to nurture, cultivate and grow our culture of psychological safety ...*



Consider how you can routinely model the behaviors discussed in this learning module



Complete the self-assessment available at <https://fearlessorganizationscan.com/engage/free-personal-psychological-safety-survey>



Discuss with your team specific actions to undertake that could improve psychological safety



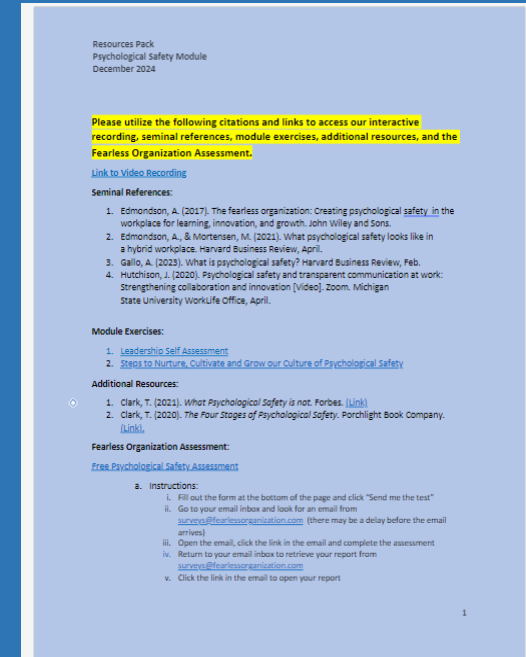
More learning resources available in the Learning Series Module 1 Resource Pack



# *GLT 6 Learning Series*

## *Psychological Safety Resource Pack*

- Pre-recorded 30-minute presentation
- Leadership Self-Assessment
- Steps to Nurture Psychological Safety Worksheet
- References to seminal works
- Additional Resources
- Fearless Organization Assessment



# *Psychological Safety References*

- Edmondson, A. (2017). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Edmondson, A., & Mortensen, M. (2021). What psychological safety looks like in a hybrid workplace. *Harvard Business Review*, April.
- Gallo, A. (2023). What is psychological safety? *Harvard Business Review*, Feb.
- Hutchison, J. (2020). *Psychological safety and transparent communication at work: Strengthening collaboration and innovation* [Video]. Zoom. Michigan State University WorkLife Office, April.



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