

Why Is It So Hard to Speak Up at Work?

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Psychological safety is the belief that you can speak up, take risks and put forward ideas, questions or challenges without facing ridicule or retaliation.

[Amy Edmondson](#), a professor at Harvard Business School, has been researching — and has popularized — the idea since it was [first written about](#) by the psychologist William Kahn in 1990.

When employees feel safe, they trust that they can admit mistakes, seek feedback or even fail without dire consequences, Dr. Edmondson said. Not only does this lead to greater [team success](#), but it can be lifesaving in certain settings, [such as when a nurse challenges a doctor at a critical moment](#) in the neonatal intensive care unit. And even in lower-stakes environments, teams with psychological safety have a higher chance of innovation, growth and expansion and better collaboration, trust and inclusion.

[A two-year study](#) at Google found that feeling secure enough to contribute was the most common feature, by far, of high-performing teams. The very nature of innovation requires employees to suggest half-formed ideas, take risks or propose solutions that may not have data to inform them. And that can happen only in an environment in which employees feel secure and safe.

But more often than not, it's women — and especially women of color — who don't feel safe in their workplaces.

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