

# THE MENTAL MUSINGS

The Psychological Research Newsletter

There are many factors that set great teams apart. In this issue, we explore psychological safety - what it is, why it matters, and how to develop it in your team. Read on to learn more!

## WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

Operations often take place in environments marked by constant change, uncertainty, high pressure, and risk. In such settings, one of the most important responsibilities of leaders is to create a culture where people feel safe to speak up—whether to raise concerns, share mistakes, or suggest improvements. This is known as **psychological safety**, where individuals feel like they can communicate without facing interpersonal risks such as being ashamed or punished.

### With Psychological Safety

- ➔ Admitting mistakes is met with support and/or guidance
- ➔ Asking for help is encouraged
- ➔ Individuals' strengths are recognised and used
- ➔ Ideas and concerns are raised openly
- ➔ Diverse views or backgrounds are respected
- ➔ Teammates support each other



### Without Psychological Safety

- ➔ Mistakes lead to blame or are held against the person
- ➔ Asking for help is seen as weakness
- ➔ Individuals' strengths are often overlooked
- ➔ People stay silent out of fear or avoidance
- ➔ Diverse views or backgrounds lead to exclusion
- ➔ Teammates undermine each other



**Reflection:** Which statements ring true for your team? What areas could be improved on?

## DOES IT REALLY MATTER?



Research has shown that when teams feel psychologically safe, they tend to...

### Perform better

They view mistakes as learning opportunities, not threats to their image. This helps them focus on work instead of worrying about being judged.

### Stay longer

They are more likely to stay in their jobs and feel more attached to the organisation and team.

### Learn and improve

They are encouraged to report errors, ask for help, and seek feedback from peers.

### Maintain wellbeing under stress

In high-pressure roles (e.g. policing), psychological safety can reduce the negative effects of operational stress due to the supportive environment it creates.

### Help others more

They are more likely to support their teammates and provide feedback. This effect was even stronger for team members who fall into a minority group (e.g. race), possibly because acceptance and trust are more meaningful in contexts where exclusion is a risk.

## HOW CAN WE DEVELOP IT?

### As Leaders...

**Model openness:** Be willing to admit your own mistakes and share feedback you've received.

**Empower your team:** Emphasise the value and purpose of their role, involve team members in decision-making where possible, express confidence in their abilities, and set clear expectations.

**Respond to mistakes with a learning mindset:** Avoid blame or embarrassment. Instead, focus on what can be learned and how to avoid the issue in the future.



## As Team Members...

**Disagree respectfully:** Let others speak, even when you disagree. Avoid dismissing ideas or making fun of them.

**Share your knowledge:** Offer help when you see someone struggling, or if they are new to the role.

**Ask for feedback:** Seeking feedback not only helps you improve but signals that it's safe to do so, encouraging others to follow suit.

**Build strong relationships:** Check in with colleagues, show appreciation, and recognise others' efforts.

**Be ready for challenges:** Building your skills, learning from mentors, and staying open to changes in the role can increase your own feelings of psychological safety.



Let's see how some of these tips can be put into practice!

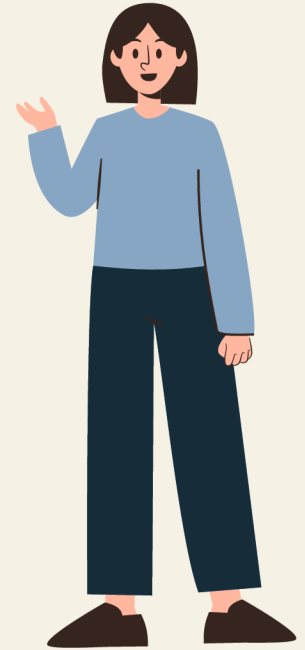
### Farid, Supervisor



"A few days ago, we received a complaint from a member of public about how an officer from my team, Dinesh, behaved during a check. She felt he was rude to her and raised her voice at him.

Later that day, I **spoke privately** with him. Instead of criticising him for not being able to de-escalate the situation, I **shared how I had mishandled similar situations** in the past and **what I learned**. I wanted him to **see it as a learning moment**, not a failure. We then **reviewed** how to approach upset individuals calmly. Since then, he's been more confident and more willing to ask questions after tricky interactions."

## Amanda, Sergeant



"I heard from Dinesh about how upset he was about the incident at the checkpoint and how he felt when he heard about the complaint. I decided to **check in with him** to see if he is coping well. However, hearing from him about how Farid handled it made a big difference. He **didn't embarrass him** or make it a big deal. Dinesh **shared with us about the tips** Farid gave him. Now I know I can ask for guidance without being judged, and I've even **offered support to newer officers** when they seemed unsure."



Based on what we've shared, it is important to note that psychological safety should not be seen as a perk or a luxury to have in a team, it is essential! It is a foundation for effective teamwork, learning and overall staff wellbeing. Whether you're leading a team, working as a team member or just starting out with ICA, the way you interact is crucial to building a safer environment for all!

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