Psychological Safety (Amy Edmondson) &

Creating **E**motional **S**ecurity to Ensure **E**motional **S**afety (ES^2)

This article combines thinking on the phrase Psychological Safety (PS) and our own thinking on Emotional Security and Emotional Safety, which we call ES^2.

The reason we decided to write this article was due to a question that was asked by the wonderful Annika Parisotto. Annika is among my most respected work associates, friends, and challengers.

What do I mean by Challenger? Annika says **what she thinks** politely and respectfully and totally naturally and clearly from an inquiring mind. She challenges what she sees as illogical, or she will challenge to gain clarity and better understanding. Yes, all in a professional and friendly way, but she will also tell you what you need to hear. "This" is gold dust in humans.

This is something that I find invaluable and all too often missing in others. Add to that an unrivalled passion and drive for her work, and you have a superbly competent consultant who delivers brilliant results every time.

If you are wondering why I have extolled the challenging qualities of Annika, it is because, ironically, the answer to Annika's question is for people to become **exactly like her**.

How can we do this?

We must not only empower our people to speak out and say what they wish but make it clear that we are insisting on it. Encourage them to do this by leading by example. Every person must know that they can and must challenge anyone's thinking if it is done in a respectful and professional manner.

This freedom to speak out should release innovation, create new relationships, strengthen current relationships, and give the business all the ideas and challenges that we should welcome in today's forward-thinking workplace.

If you were the CEO of the organisation you now work in, you surely would want to know what is going wrong, what could work better, and who is derailing success, albeit unconsciously. You will never be able to get things right until you have a psychologically safe environment where everyone has a voice and welcomes challenges and change.

Great ideas, new thinking, change and more are all born from the free speech and thinking of those around us. If we don't have this in our organisations, then we lose out and badly.

"Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinions in good men is but knowledge in the making."

John Milton

(an English poet and man of letters).

Annika's question to me was:

"How can we encourage people in our teams to be more open when they are from cultures where being oneself is not allowed?"

Mac's thoughts on this excellent question:

When I hear the word culture, I think of two possible types of culture needing to be identified in this question, but luckily, the solution is pretty much the same for both:

1. Culture in terms of a person's origin, the country they were born/raised, the religious culture they were brought up to follow and respect, and,

2. Culture, as in the workplace culture, where experiences and stories within an organisation showed that it did not welcome or tolerate people who were outspoken. Speaking their mind was dangerous and in fact, people leave organisations because of this. (People really do leave people).

A Culture of Origin:

This is where a person has come from a country where their culture is moulded by living in a country where the national or religious cultural experience has taught people it is impolite, inappropriate or just unacceptable to speak out. It may have been a place where freedom of speech is or was not what others enjoy elsewhere in the world.

What that lived experience has taught them is that speaking their mind is not the thing to do, perhaps even disrespectful to talk to an older or senior person as their culture frowns on such behaviour. Their experiences of the castigatory behaviours of those in more powerful positions have formed this mindset. Also, remember that these more powerful positions could be a combination of political, religious, and social influences.

Workplace Culture Categories:

I want to split an organisation's culture into three categories.

1. **Presented Culture** – where the organisation proudly portrays the Culture they say or believe everyone adheres to. Sadly, experience has taught me that the culture that is experienced by the people in an organisation is all too often a world apart from the values which adorn the walls of an organisation and their website. We often call this a "Flag waving" culture, which does not actually exist.

2. **Experienced Culture** – the true *feeling* of the organisation's culture that people experience from working there. Also, the way the culture is often described to new starters! (Often far from the one portrayed). This can be a demotivator for new starters. On the other hand, if the culture really is a great one, then the description to the new starter will be great too. In other words, this is a true representation.

3. **Localised Culture** – this can be totally different between two teams located right beside one another. It is *almost* always created by the team leader or manager and is sometimes caused by the superior of the team leader or manager. Occasionally, it can be created by a team member who holds a place of social dominance through their seniority or purely through their strong personality and approach. This can either be a great place to work or a bad place to work, as once again, this can be good or bad.

Why do people feel like this?

The main reason people feel that they can't or shouldn't speak out at work is that they have learned that doing so is frowned upon. Or that they **believe** that it is frowned upon (Belief creates reality). They may even have learned that it is dangerous for them to do this as they may be treated differently because of it, or dare I suggest, even being mistreated for doing so. Some people they know may have been "managed out" of the organisation.

They have learned this from the behaviours of their superiors or others in the organisation and have probably heard or seen first-hand what happens to people when they speak openly and say what they believe should be said. People quickly learn that it is not worth speaking their mind as they wish to keep their job or not lose the possibility of progression. Sadly, I have experienced this as the top reason and by a long way too.

If this organisational infection is not addressed, many good people will leave such an inhibited working environment for another part of the business, or worse yet, they will leave the organisation completely. In reality, they are leaving that environment and those who allowed it to exist. Yes, people mostly leave their managers or cultures, not their jobs.

We, our organisation and our customers **NEED** these thinkers and these challengers to push us to develop and grow! They are the ones who will ruffle our feathers, yes, but ultimately, these are the people who will make us think outside of that box and differently too.

My key message to senior people within organisations must be… If this rings a bell, then **"Act Now"**! Realise what you are losing **every single day** in terms of innovative thinking, creativity, and strength from different perspectives, brought over hints and tips from previous jobs in other organisations and a happier thriving "community" of people who enjoy their work.

What is a "Blocker"?

A blocker consciously or unconsciously blocks people from saying what they need or want to say. They block innovation and ideas because of how they have historically behaved to such things before. Sometimes, this can be due to the pressure they are under themselves from their own boss, who is demanding KPIs are met, targets are met and other such pressure points. This problem links straight back to Emotional Intelligence and especially our Moccasin Approach® thinking ([Handout](#)).
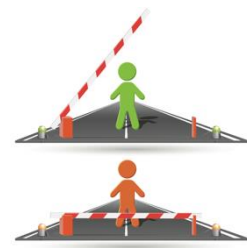
If a person is blocking someone because their behaviour towards others is changing the natural behaviour of those people, then it is usually the blocker's follow-on behaviours from their own emotional impacts on their own normal behaviour. They need to use the Moccasin Approach to remedy this. Just because I am stressed does not mean I can treat others poorly.

Please remember that blockers may be totally unaware of the effect their behaviour is having on the behaviour of others by accidentally stifling their honesty. Don't chastise them; instead, help them understand, coach them and bring them around to the concept of ES^2 see below. Ensure they understand and appreciate the benefits it brings to them, the smooth running of their team, the strengthening of their team and far better for organisational innovation.

Emotional Security - Emotional Safety (ES^2)

Many years ago, we developed the Moccasin Approach® and the Moccasin Manager®. The **key** element of how the Moccasin Approach works is creating Emotional Security for all the people within an organisation. This, in turn, provides their people with an environment of Emotional Safety. They are not just able to say what they want; they are actively encouraged and rewarded for doing so. But they know they are protected by the security.

But what if their manager or a senior leader is a blocker? Well, this is the one possible glitch because for Emotional Security to be effective, it **must** protect **every** person in your organisation; otherwise, some do not experience the Emotional Safety the security was put in place to protect. Every person must sign up to honour the values and psychological safety, and this should be written into the People Strategy document and into each person's work contract. They are not just there to do their job but to do it in the right way.

It must be driven from **the very top**, it must be nurtured and supported, it must be monitored, and it has to be managed just as importantly as other precious and costly resources such as humans in Human Resources.

We have introduced this as an **O**rganisational **C**ulture **E**ngagement **T**eam (OCET) in some organisations, and we hope this will become a more widely found team in the future. As an external consultant, I can talk about ES^2 and psychological safety and even point out evidence, but I can be ignored. However, an internally appointed team must be listened to.

Unconscious or Conscious acceptance:

I have made it sound easy. Just get some ES^2, and you're sorted; job done! But not quite. People, senior leaders/management, and teammates unconsciously or consciously block others. My experience has shown me that some very senior people live in a bubble of belief and assumption that their organisational culture is lived out through its values and underpinning behaviours, but sadly, most often, it is not! People just say it is! People do not tell their managers the full story, and people hide facts and figures; why? Because they are scared to tell the truth! There is clearly no ES^2 for them. Real ES^2 means **knowing** you are safe.

What do I say to such people? Again, **wake up and act NOW**! Take the time to gain trust, truly understand what it is like in the world of others and use our Moccasin Approach and feel what it is like to walk in the other shoes of your people, ask them how it **truly** feels and what their challenges are and then DO something about it.

Back to the question, "How can we encourage people in our teams to be more open when they are from cultures where being oneself is not allowed?"

For me, it is all about the environment that they work in. Critically, this can be a different experience for the team across the floor, so not necessarily an organisational culture issue at all, but one often created by their manager or team leader. Occasionally, this can also be created and driven by a dominant team member.

So, getting our people to feel safe enough to say what they want and to disagree with peers, managers or leaders respectfully is only **ever** achieved by ensuring that "**Emotional Security**" and **Emotional Safety** (ES^2) are firmly in place.

When we originally came up with this phrase some many ago, we went through a lot of discussions, deciding whether to choose "Emotional Safety" or "Emotional Security". What took us to use both is that "security" must be in place for "safety" to become a reality. Security protects our safety. As an organisation, we must ensure (and enforce) the security to allow our people to feel safe. This way, they can say what they feel needs to be said.

ES^2 is **only** achieved when the organisation **ensures** that every person in an organisation believes that they can say what they think. The reason I say **ensures** is that merely saying we must do this **doesn't** mean it will happen. For evidence of this, ask people about their organisation, and I guarantee most will agree that their organisation does **not** health check what it says on the tin; it just assumes it is being done.

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Senior leaders will even defend it, saying well, no one tells me there's anything wrong, to which I say, that's my point! If someone is scared of speaking out, they will hide the truth.

True ES^2 will only ever work completely in an organisation if it is welcomed by the senior leaders and managers, driven by them, and used and respected by everyone. This is a slow drip feed and evidence-based evolution, which will gradually inspire safety in others. This must be worked for, and this must be lived and breathed by everyone, or the consequences felt.

Most importantly, whilst this can create one of the most powerful and empowering environments that any organisation can foster, it is also the most delicate. At the first sign of any form of being held to account for being open and honest, it doesn't melt but shatters in a moment, and it's gone! Thank you for your excellent question, Annika.

"Embrace challenge. It is a great source of learning and understanding"

LaPD Solutions offers EI-based solutions to help your people work together through an organisational culture based on values and **measured** underpinning behaviours.

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