

Three simple black stick figures are scattered around the text. One is at the top right, another is in the middle right with arms raised, and a third is at the bottom left with arms outstretched. Dashed grey arrows show a path from the top figure to the middle one, and from the middle one to the bottom one, suggesting a sequence or flow.

Five Essential Tools

FROM THE

**Psychological
Safety
Playbook**

A stick figure stands to the left of a solid yellow square. A dashed grey arrow starts from the bottom left corner of the square and points towards the top right corner.

**Karolin Helbig
Minette Norman**

Welcome

We are delighted to share five essential tools from *The Psychological Safety Playbook* with you! Fostering psychological safety is vital for today's organizations. Psychological safety is “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.” This is the definition given by Amy C. Edmondson, leadership professor at Harvard Business School.

We are both leadership consultants—one in Germany, one in the U.S.—who met virtually when participating in a certification program based on Amy C. Edmondson's work. Our mission is to bridge the gap between research and practice and to give leaders actionable advice.

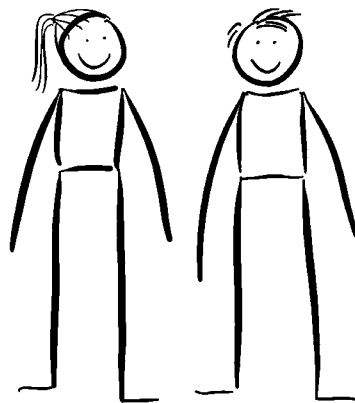
This sampler highlights five simple ways that leaders can foster psychological safety in their teams so that everyone can fully participate and do their best work. Each featured tool includes a brief description as well as helpful resources for further exploration.

We hope this brief overview will inspire you to explore more ways you can make a difference in your own organization by getting your copy of *The Psychological Safety Playbook*, which includes clear explanations about the importance of each tool with detailed instructions for putting each skill into practice. As of February 22, 2023, *The Psychological Safety Playbook* print book, eBook, and audiobook are available for purchase at your favorite online retailer.

Thanks for joining us in our mission to enhance psychological safety at work.

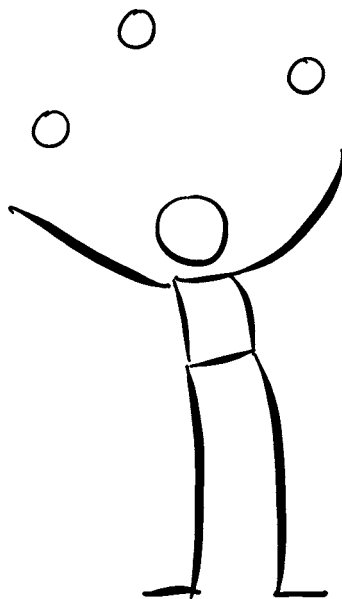
Warmly,

Karolin and Minette



Five Essential Tools from *The Psychological Safety Playbook*

- 1** Welcome Other Viewpoints: "What Am I Missing?"
- 2** Listen to Understand: Develop the Discipline of Not Preparing a Response
- 3** Model Non-defensive Reactions: Hit the Pause Button
- 4** Normalize Failure: "This Is New to Us, So We Will Make Mistakes"
- 5** Upgrade Meetings: Appoint an Inclusion Booster



1 Welcome Other Viewpoints: "What Am I Missing?"

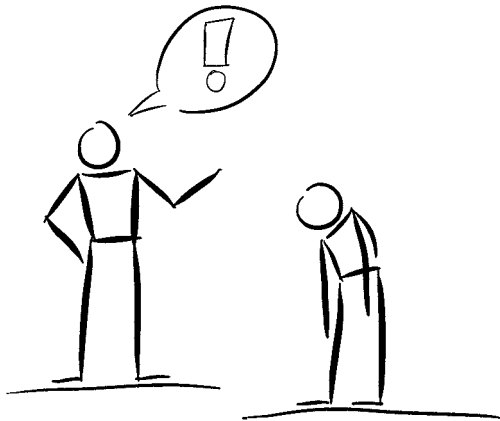
One of the most powerful things you can do as a leader is to ask, "What am I missing?" When you ask this simple question, you signal that you are open to looking at things from different angles and even to being challenged.

A leader who regularly asks for other perspectives sets an important tone by signaling that their team is one in which no one has all the answers and everyone has a valuable perspective to share.

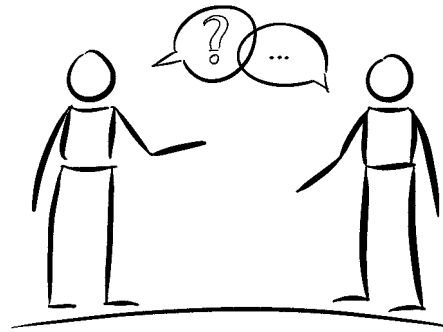
Resources for further exploration

Steffan Surdek, "[Why Understanding Other Perspectives Is a Key Leadership Skill](#)," *Forbes*, November 17, 2016.

David W. Johnson, "[The Importance of Taking the Perspective of Others](#)," *Psychology Today*, June 5, 2019.



Knowing it all reinforces hierarchy.



Asking "What am I missing?" invites participation.

2 Listen to Understand: Develop the Discipline of Not Preparing a Response

Make it a priority to truly understand the person you are speaking with. Don't think about how they are wrong and how you want to respond. Instead, listen with the sole intent of fully understanding their idea or point of view.

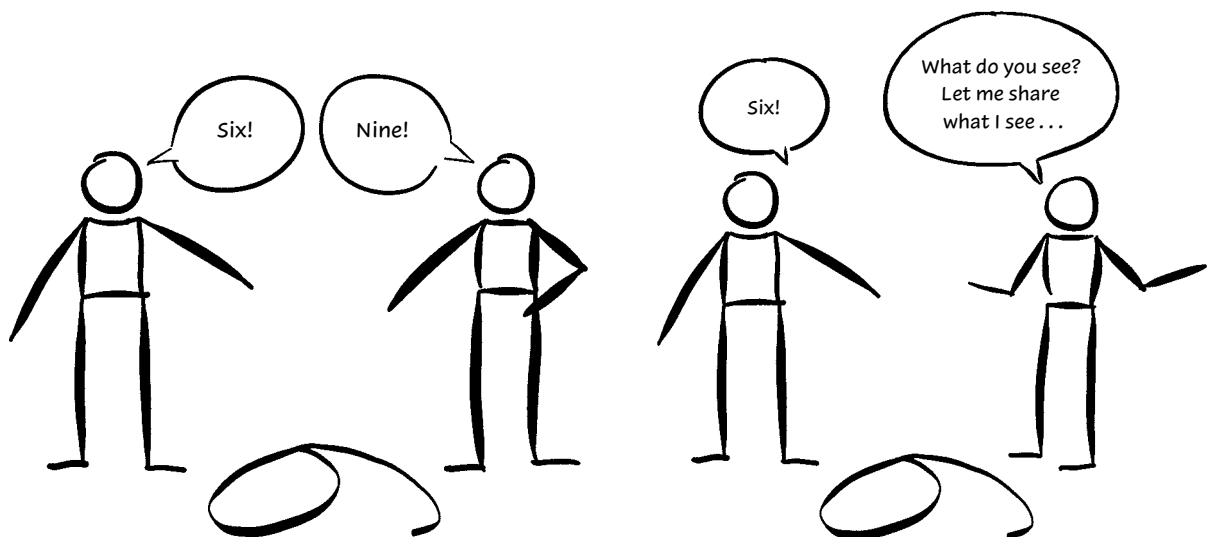
Don't worry—the mere act of understanding someone else's perspective doesn't require you to give up your own. Understanding is not agreeing! It's about letting go of your need to be right and to engage in a battle of arguments. It's about permitting yourself to fully understand the other person. With this level of understanding, we can have more productive conversations and deepen our connections.

Resources for further exploration

Kate Murphy, *You're Not Listening: What You're Missing and Why It Matters* (New York: Celadon Books, 2020).

Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, "[What Great Listeners Actually Do](#)," Zenger Folkman website, 2019.

Adam Bryant and Kevin Sharer, "[Are You Really Listening?](#)" *Harvard Business Review*, March–April 2021.



3 Model Non-defensive Reactions: Hit the Pause Button

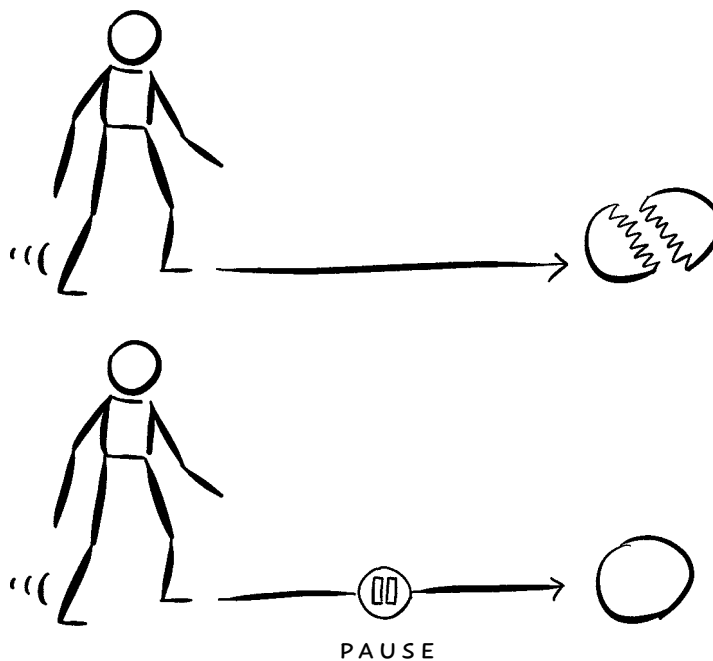
It is common to get defensive in a professional setting. When we have a defensive reaction at work, our brains often react as they would if we were in physical danger. The fight-flight-freeze response takes over, and we react in ways that can have a negative impact on psychological safety.

Pausing before responding is the most positive and powerful thing we can do. After noticing what we're feeling and pausing to reflect, we can react in a constructive way. For example, when feeling challenged, ask a curious follow-up question rather than lashing out at someone.

Resources for further exploration

Kimberly Holland, [“Amygdala Hijack: When Emotion Takes Over,”](#) Healthline, September 17, 2021.

James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet, *Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020).



4 Normalize Failure: “This Is New to Us, So We Will Make Mistakes”

There is no innovation and no success without failure along the way. That’s why we need to destigmatize failure. Failure is not something unacceptable that needs to be avoided; it’s a necessary by-product of innovation.

As a leader, make it explicit that the goal is not to prevent or cast blame for failure, but to learn from it. When your team tries something new, emphasize that you expect failure along the way. Say, “This is new; we won’t get it right the first time,” or “Let’s share and learn from our failures.” Team members will feel invited to take risks, try new things, and share their learnings. Innovation accelerates.

Resources for further exploration

Paul Jun, “[The Benefits of Learning as a Team](#),” *Entrepreneur*, July 29, 2015.

Atlassian, “[How to Run a Blameless Postmortem](#).”



5 Upgrade Meetings: Appoint an Inclusion Booster

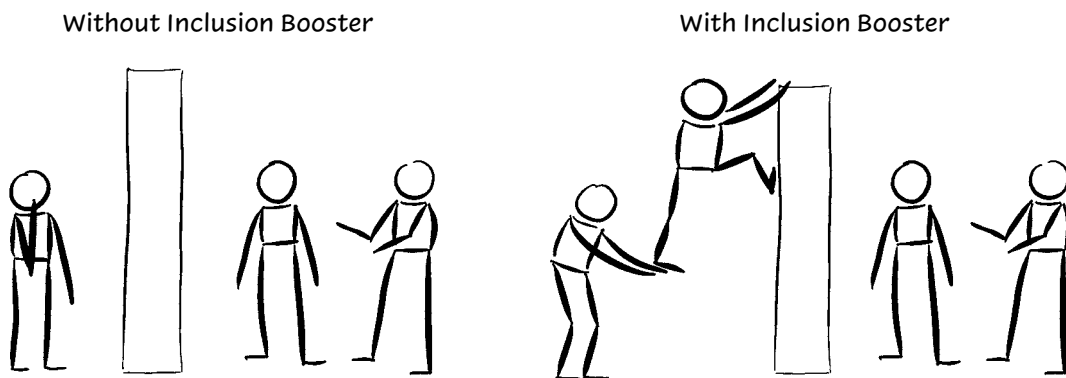
In many professional meetings, only a small percentage of participants regularly feel comfortable contributing, which means that teams are missing out on valuable and diverse viewpoints.

One of the most important changes we can make to our meetings is to appoint someone to play the role of Inclusion Booster. The Inclusion Booster's job is to foster inclusion by making it safe for all voices and dissenting ideas to be heard. The Inclusion Booster establishes ground rules, minimizes interruptions, ensures equal speaking time, seeks divergent or opposing points of view, and finds ways to engage the less dominant people in the meeting.

Resources for further exploration

Mark Smutny, "[How to Design Meeting Agendas That Rooted in Inclusion,](#)" Civic Reinventions (blog), October 9, 2021.

Liberating Structures, liberatingstructures.com.



Continuing Your Psychological Safety Journey

We want to start a movement and invite you to join us. Let's make the world of work better for everyone by fostering psychological safety everywhere. When you get your copy of *The Psychological Safety Playbook*, help us spread the word. Share the book with a colleague, with a friend, or with anyone who might be interested.

You can also invite us to speak at your event for an inspiring keynote or an engaging fireside chat or have us lead workshops to dive more deeply into psychological safety and to experience the power that emerges from it with time and attention.

Connect with us

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