



# Unlocking Potential

Fostering Psychological Safety  
with TeamQi



## Introduction

The whole team has gathered in the meeting room; the boss has a new assignment, and everybody has a role to play. After a lively discussion, everybody agrees on how to handle it and is excited to get started. Everybody that is, but Rob.

With a forced smile on his face, he watched the discussion take place. At several moments, ideas sparked in his mind on how to approach the problem differently, but before he mustered the courage to speak up the moment had passed. And now he's cursing himself. He hadn't always been like this, when he had just started out, he'd shared his ideas freely. And they had been received enthusiastically. Until one of them backfired. So now, even though the boss makes a point of encouraging creative solutions at every meeting, he keeps his mouth shut. Preferring to do his work well, but nothing beyond it.

Unbeknownst to Rob, similar thoughts are running through several of his colleagues' minds. But like Rob, they nod and stay quiet - toeing the line, but never venturing a single

step beyond it. In other words, the environment in which Rob and his colleagues are working lacks psychological safety. Psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes (Lewis). As a result, even though performance remains adequate, the chance of creative and innovative ideas being shared is practically nihil.

Today, the awareness of the critical role of psychological safety in the workplace has reached unprecedented levels. While this heightened awareness is undeniably advantageous, it's vital to remember that acknowledging the issue is only the first step. The crucial question that follows is: How do we address this issue effectively? Enter TeamQi— an invaluable tool designed to guide and facilitate the process of implementing transformative change. TeamQi allows individuals in a team to anonymously describe the quality of the interaction they experience within the team. The questions team members answer have been developed over time to identify the extent that team members are experiencing psychological safety.



## Sustainable Performance

The importance of psychological safety for team performance and well-being has been well-established by various studies (Edmondson, 1999, Newman, Donohue and Eva, 2017). The following analysis went a step further by not only looking at immediate performance, but also long-term sustainable performance.

## Analysis

The data used for our analysis was collected from a programme in which teams are given an exercise that they need to solve together. The exercise involves solving a problem, executing the solution, and maximising team learning. The team members must physically work together to execute the strategy they've devised. How they arrive at the solution is up to the team, this can be through experimentation as a team or by going off on their own and working it out on a piece of paper and instructing the rest of the team once they've solved it. After the exercise every team member was asked to fill in the TeamQi, to measure how psychologically safe every person felt within the team. Within this instrument, team psychological safety ranges from 6 to 60.

In our analysis we studied how long it took the teams to successfully solve the exercise and how many team members were able to reproduce the solution afterwards. The first measures performance in terms of results and the second is representative of team learning, thereby making a distinction between the immediate outcome and the sustainable performance through learning.

To investigate the effect of psychological safety on team immediate performance (solving time) and team learning sustainable performance (measured by the portion of people who could correctly reproduce the solution) a regression analysis was performed. Regression analysis is a method for investigating the relationship between two or more variables, specifically how a particular set of variables influences the variable of interest. In this case, we are interested in how team psychological safety influences team performance. For this analysis the data from 19 teams were used, each team consisting of around 10- to 12 people.



## Findings

As expected, psychological safety (PS) was found to have a positive effect on immediate performance. The table below shows the results of the regression analysis. The estimate of the Intercept represents the average solving time when psychological safety is zero. The Team PS Score coefficient represents the change in mean solving time for every unit increase in team psychological safety. Thus, for every increase of psychological safety by 1, the mean solving time went down 1.78 minutes. Which means that on average, it would take a team with the lowest possible psychological safety, more than an hour longer to solve the exercise than a team with the highest possible psychological safety. The final column of the table below displays the level of confidence in the coefficient estimates. This confidence level, known as the p-value must be 0.05 or less. As shown in the table, both p-values are well below this threshold, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the variables.

Team psychological safety also had a positive effect on sustainable performance. As mentioned, sustainable performance is the share of team members that could correctly reproduce the solution, and thus has a range of 0 to 1. As the table below shows, for every unit increase

of psychological safety, mean collective understanding increases by 0.027 or 2.7%. Which means that for a team of 11 members, an increase of 4 in psychological safety score results in one more person understanding the solution.

## Beneath the Surface

The analysis discussed above looked at the relationship between team psychological safety and performance, both sustainable and immediate. To do this, we used the team's average psychological safety score, which captured the collective sentiment of all team members. However, we didn't stop there. We also wanted to explore if diverging perceptions of psychological safety within a team could affect performance.

The answer is, yes it does. Variations in perceptions within a team were measured by the standard deviation of team psychological safety. Interestingly, a higher degree of divergence was found to be correlated with a higher solving time and a lower sustainable performance score. This underscores that even if Rob had been the only one who didn't feel safe enough to take risks, this is not a trivial matter. That indeed, it's vital, not only for his well-being, but also for overall team performance, that every team member feels psychologically safe.

### *Solving Time*

<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Pr (&gt; t )</b>
Intercept	128.26	<2e-16
Team PS Score	-1.78	8.26e-08

### *Solving Time*

<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Pr (&gt; t )</b>
Intercept	-0.57	1.76e-05
Team PS Score	0.027	<2e-16

Table 1: Results regression analysis



## Working with the TeamQi

Working with the TeamQi to improve sustainable team performance is simple. At the end of a team session invite team members to complete the TeamQi giving their perception of the quality of the interaction during that session, or over a fixed period of a few days prior. The results can be shared immediately and discussed. The objective is to look at ways in which the team can interact more effectively to create a stronger and more inclusive quality of psychological safety. Each team member should make commitments on how they can contribute more effectively to developing psychological safety, focusing on the key behaviours of curiosity, appreciation, encouragement, flexibility, resourcefulness and experimentation. At regular intervals, invite team members to complete the TeamQi based on the previous period. Once the quality of interaction desired is established as the norm within the team, the period between assessments can be lengthened.

## Conclusion

Recognizing the absence of psychological safety within a team is an essential step on the path to improvement. However, this initial recognition is merely the beginning of a transformative journey. The real challenge lies in effecting meaningful change within the team—a process that's often easier said than done. This is where TeamQi steps in, serving as the guiding force to navigate the intricacies of this transformation.

This analysis demonstrates that fostering psychological safety within teams, as measured by TeamQi, has a profound impact on both team performance and collective understanding. Investing in TeamQi is investing in a workplace where team members feel safe to voice their ideas and concerns, leading to enhanced performance, innovation, and a collaborative spirit. It's an investment in a future where every Rob can contribute their unique insights. The result is an atmosphere that nurtures enhanced performance, sparks innovation, and fosters a collaborative spirit.

