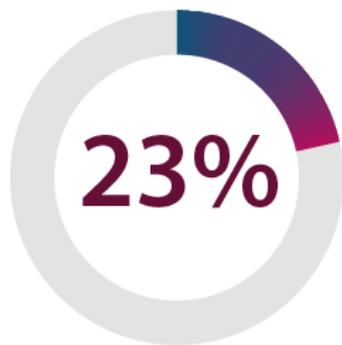


Fear-less Leadership: Psychological Safety & the High-Performing Organization

**Erik L. Carlton, DrPH, MS, CPH, FACHE
WVU School of Public Health**

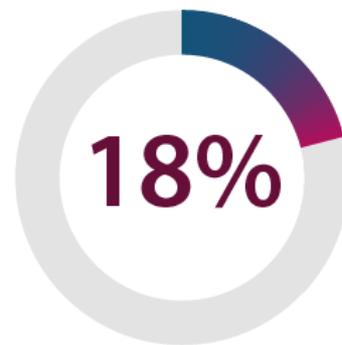




Thriving at work

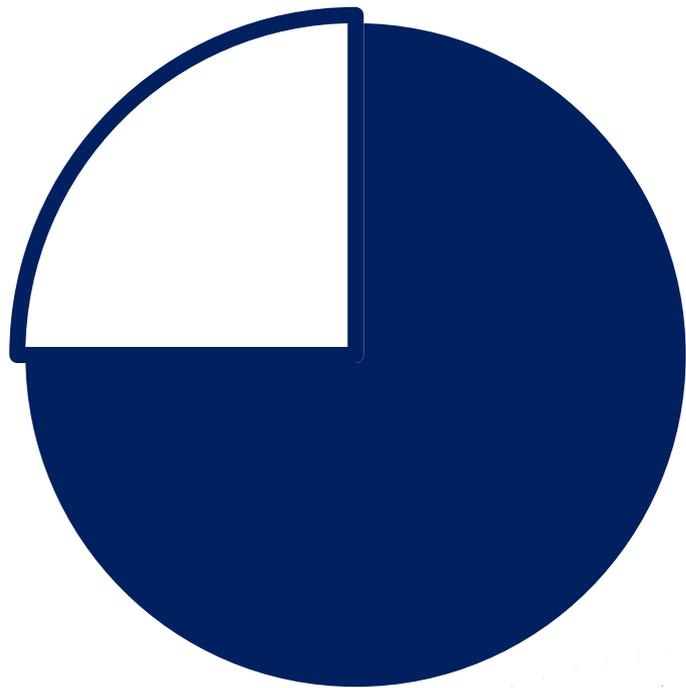


Quiet quitting
(not engaged)



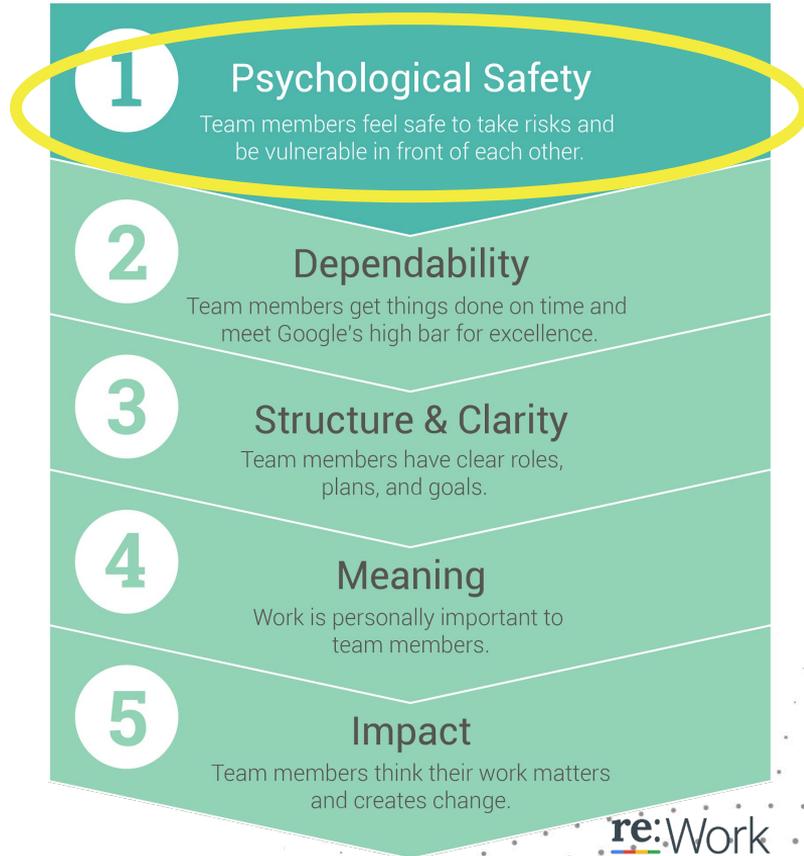
Loudly quitting
(actively disengaged)

Source: Gallup State of the Global Workplace Report 2023



75% of workers who ***voluntarily*** left their job did so because of their ***bosses*** and **not** the position itself

Google's Quest for the Perfect Team



Project Aristotle

- 4-year Study
- 50K+ people surveyed
- 180+ teams
- 100+ variables
 - Team composition, team dynamics, leadership styles, demographics, personality traits, communication patterns, and interpersonal skills...

Psychological Safety



“a belief that **one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up** with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that **the team is safe** for interpersonal risk-taking”

-Amy Edmondson

COMFORT!!!

Routines...

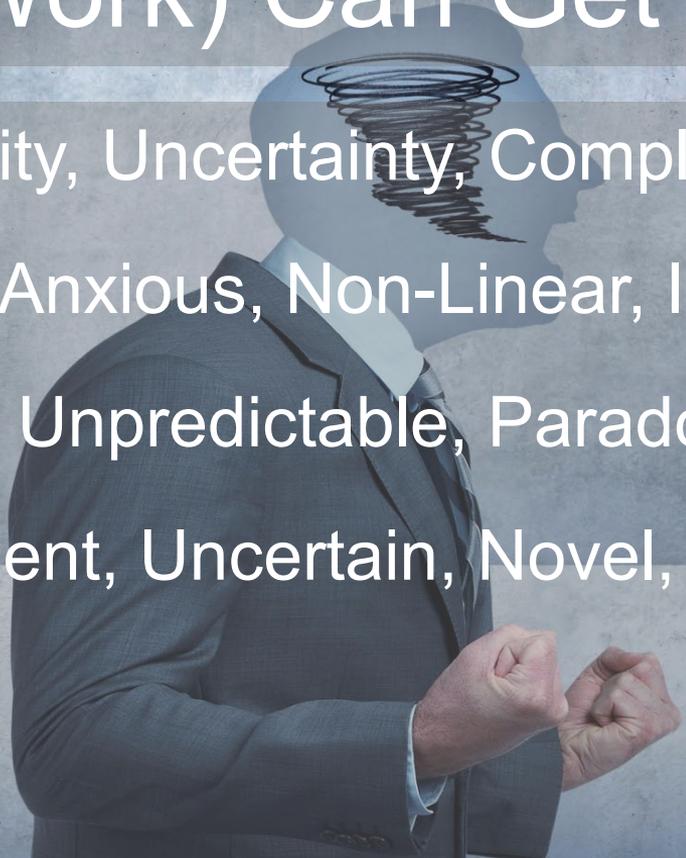
Expectations...

Consistency...

SAFETY!!!

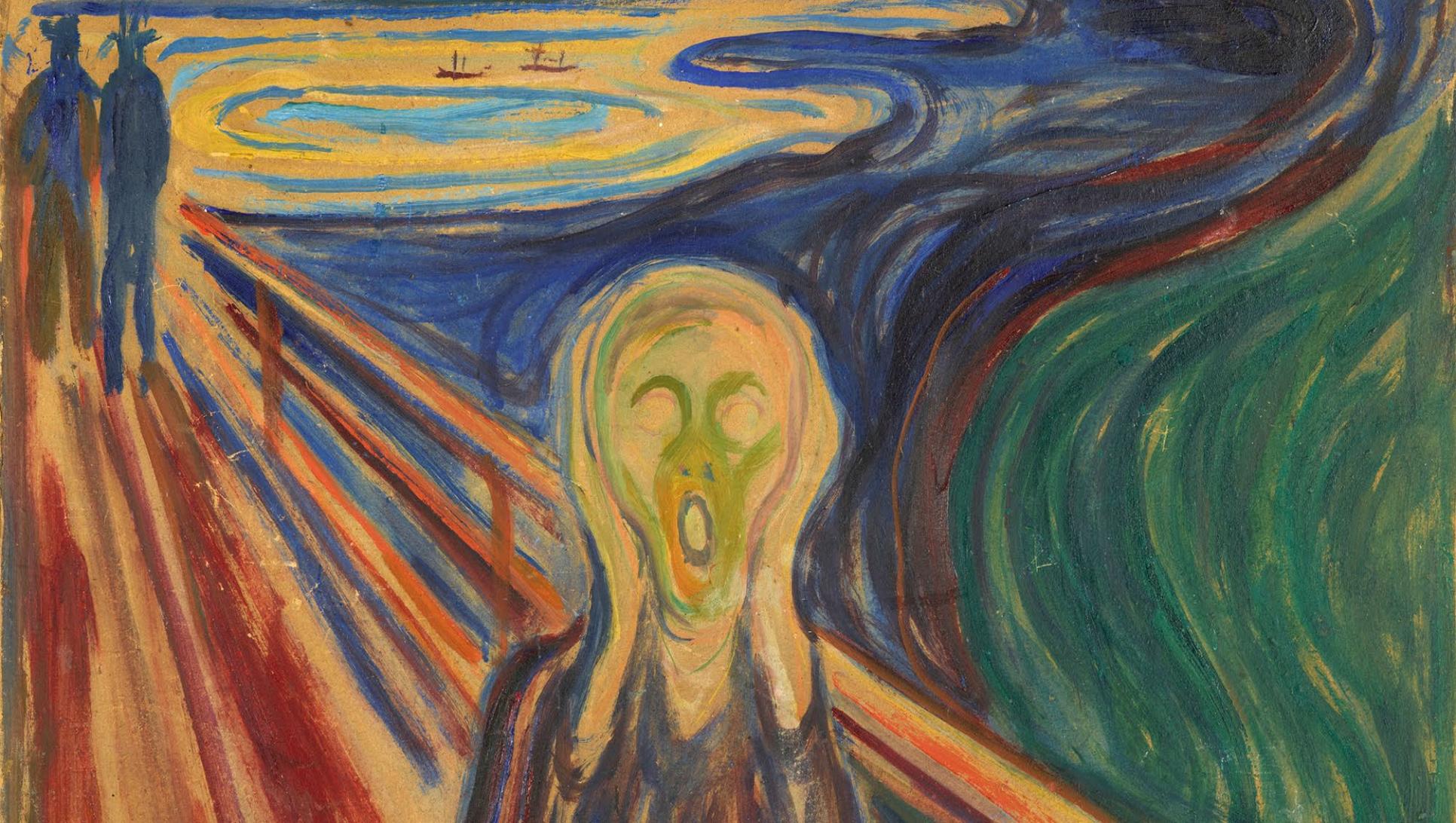


Life (and Work) Can Get Crazy

A man in a dark suit and tie is shown from the waist up, facing right. His head is replaced by a blue silhouette of a head with a black spiral inside, symbolizing mental chaos or stress. The background is a textured, blue-grey wall.

- **VUCA:** Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity
- **BANI:** Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, Incomprehensible
- **RUPT:** Rapid, Unpredictable, Paradoxical, Tangled
- **TUNA:** Turbulent, Uncertain, Novel, Ambiguous





“The only thing we have to
fear is fear itself.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt



What are you afraid of?
What effect does that fear
have on you?

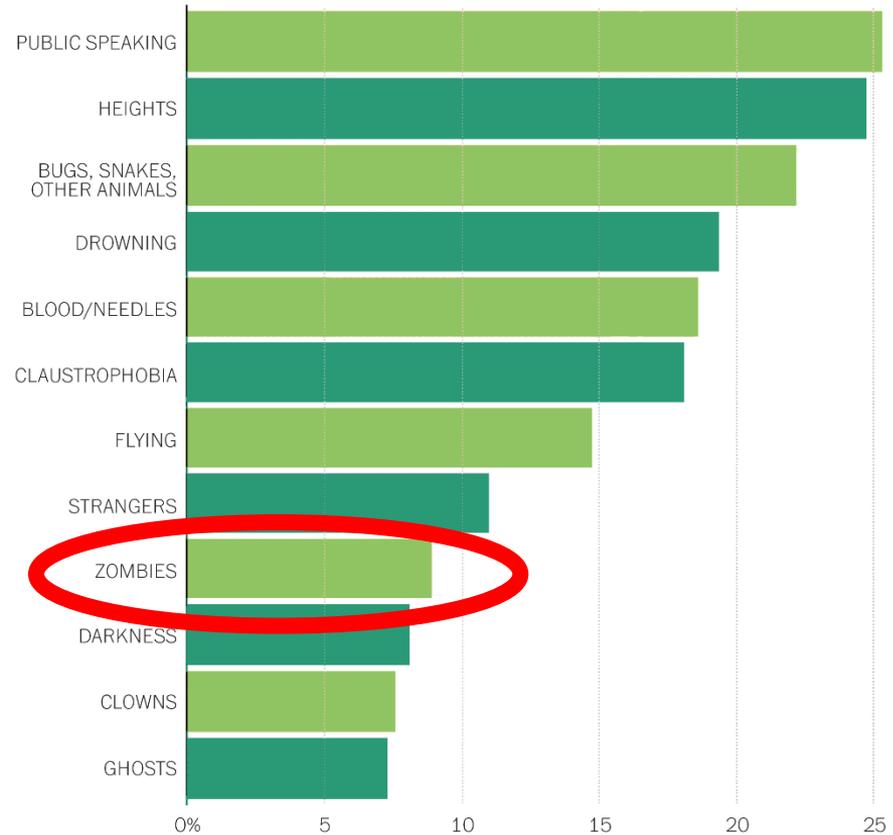






Why Are You So Afraid?

Percent of Americans who say they fear...



Source: WashingtonPost.com/WONKBLOG Chapman University Survey on American Fears

Do **YOU** feel safe?



Have you ever been afraid of something, or **someone**, at work?





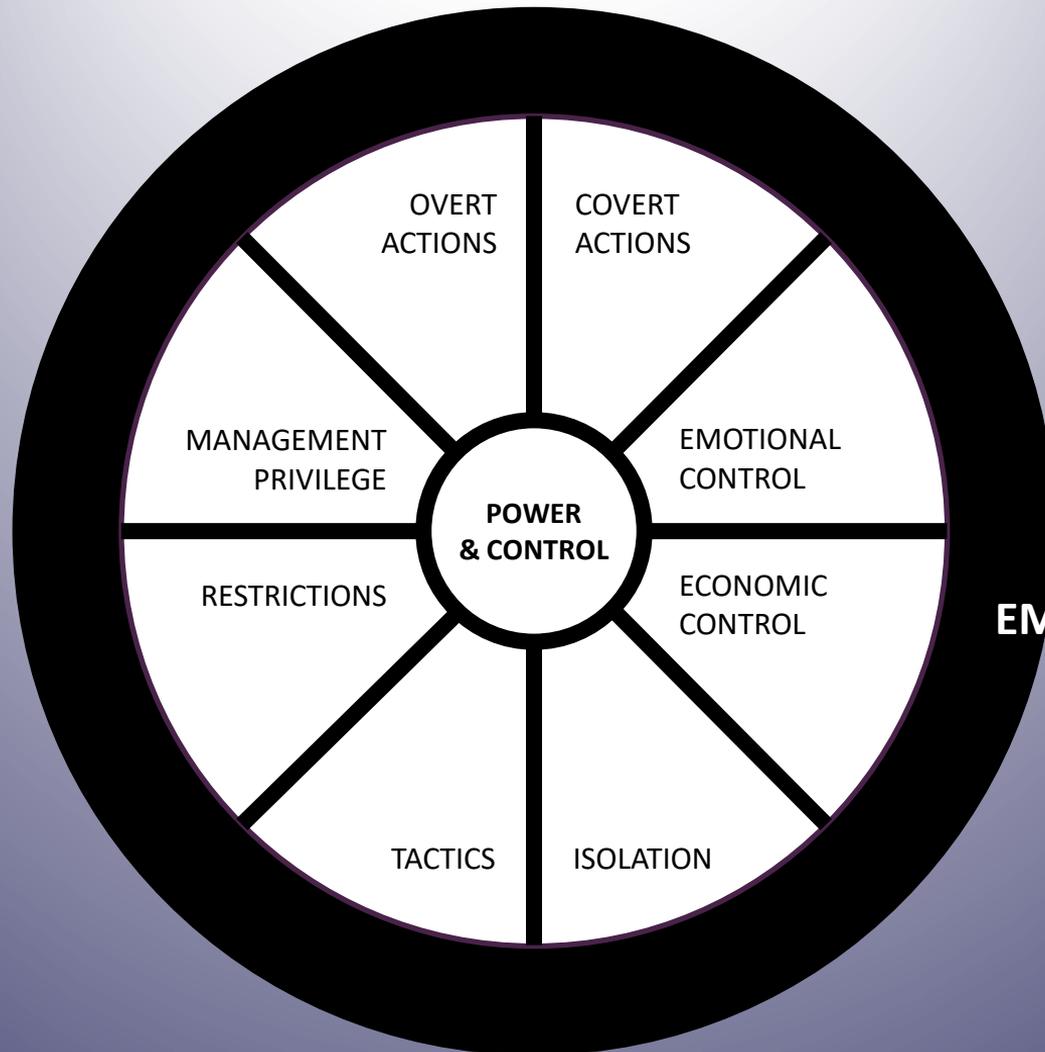
Anger, meanness, and bullying are almost always just projections of **FEAR** onto others

OVERT ACTIONS

Threats
Sexual Harassment
Public Correction
Threaten Job Loss
Fault-Finding
Demeaning
Condescending

MANAGEMENT PRIVILEGE

Playing Favorites
Private Events
Inflated Budgets
Exclusive Perks
Special Allowances
Subjective Guidelines
Pyramiding Hours



COVERT ACTIONS

Intimidation & Coercion
Deny Raise/Promotion
Unfair Job Evaluation
Violate Personal Space
Deny Training
Demotion
Gossip

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

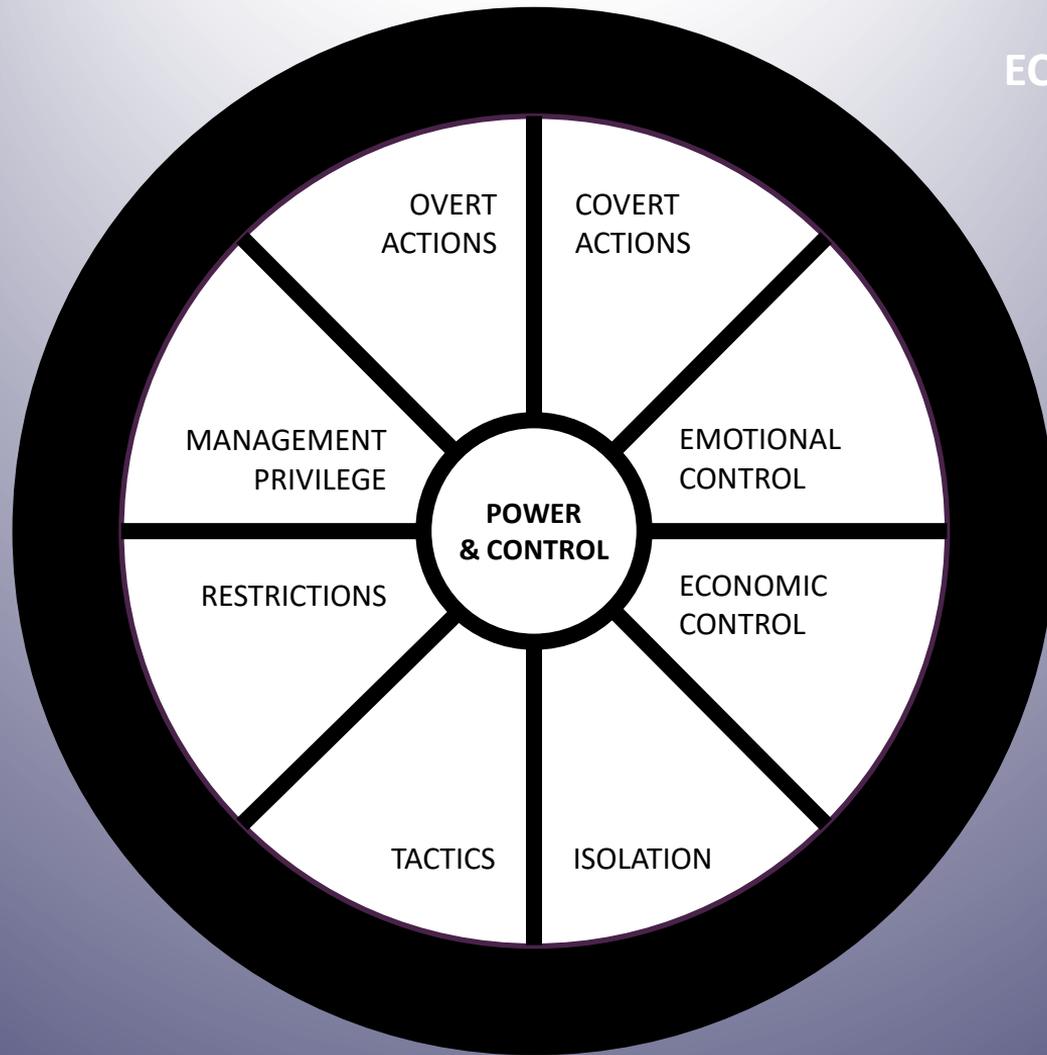
Threaten Job Loss
Deny FMLA/LOAs
Inadequate LOAS
Inappropriate Jokes
Put-Downs
Demeaning Comments

RESTRICTIONS

- Inflexible Hours
- Reject Due Raises
- No Recognition
- Activity Restriction
- Lack of Resources

TACTICS

- Sabotage
- Broken Confidence
- Ignore Complaints
- Shift Blame
- False Promises
- Set-Up Failure
- Walking on Eggshells



ECONOMIC CONTROL

- More Work, Less Pay
- Underpaid Positions
- Reduce Work Time
- Reduce Pay
- Deny Overtime

ISOLATION

- Isolate Physical Office
- Not Part of Team
- Keep Uninformed
- Keep Uninvolved
- Not Asking Feedback
- Not Accepting Views

Do you have a bad boss? (or are you one?)

- My boss never admits when s/he is wrong.
- My boss is unwilling to adapt to my needs as a follower.
- My boss is more insensitive than understanding
- I am forced to sacrifice to help my boss.
- My boss refuses to talk about things that would make him/her look bad.
- My boss withholds benefits or opportunities unless it would benefit him/her.
- It is hard to disagree with my boss because s/he gets angry.
- My boss blames others for his/her mistakes.

Do you have a bad boss? (or are you one?)

- My boss resents being asked questions about decisions.
- My boss builds himself/herself up by putting others down.
- My boss retaliates when others disagree with him/her.
- My boss is jealous of my or others' successes.
- My boss isolates those s/he doesn't like.
- My boss lies to protect him/herself
- My boss has taken credit for some of my or others most important accomplishments.
- My boss uses fear to get others to do things for him/her.
- My boss has yelled, cursed, or threatened me.

“The only thing we have to
fear is fear itself—nameless,
unreasoning, unjustified
terror which paralyzes...”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt







Image Source: iStock

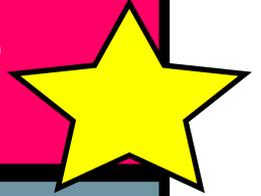
Context	Leader Behavior
Role VUCA	Guidance, Direction, Supportive/Directive Behaviors
Supervisory VUCA	Consistency, Honesty, Competence, Humility
Organizational VUCA	Transparency, Engagement, Involvement
Environmental VUCA	Empathy, Understanding, Flexibility/Accommodations

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
SAFETY**

High

**Comfort
Zone**

**Performance
Zone**



**Boredom
Zone**

**Anxiety
Zone**

Low

Low

High

**PERFORMANCE
STANDARDS**



Mistakes are not held against me

I can bring up problems/issues

My differences are accepted/valued

I can take risks

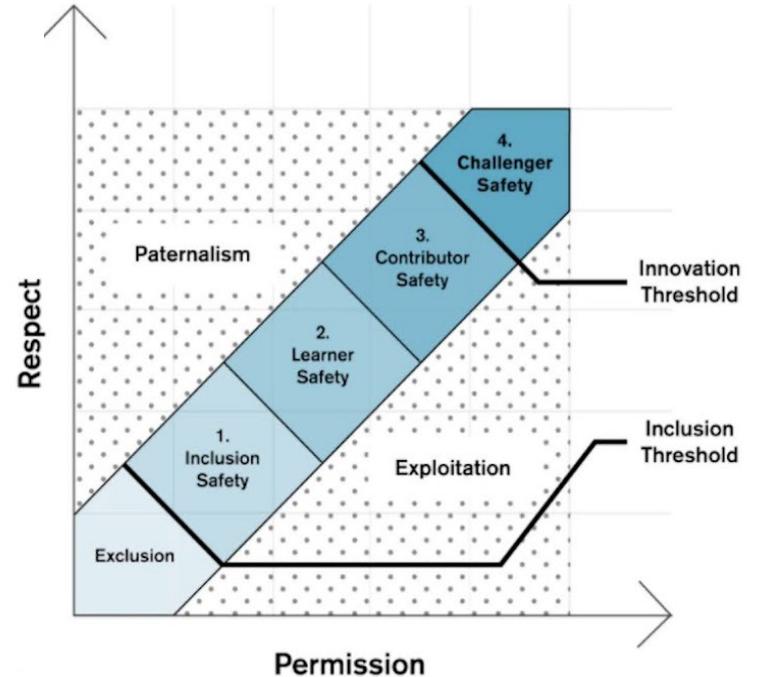
It is easy to ask others for help

My efforts are supported by others

My unique skills/talents are valued

The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety™

Stage	Definition of Respect	Definition of Permission	Social Exchange
1. Inclusion Safety	Respect for the individual's innate need to be included, accepted, and gain a sense of belonging.	Permission for the individual to interact and be their true and authentic self.	Inclusion in exchange for human status & the absence of harm.
2. Learner Safety	Respect for the individual's innate need to learn, grow, and develop mastery.	Permission for the individual to engage in the learning process and make mistakes.	Encouragement in exchange for engagement.
3. Contributor Safety	Respect for the individual's innate need for autonomy, and meaningful contribution.	Permission for the individual to work with appropriate autonomy and independence.	Autonomy with guidance in exchange for performance and results.
4. Challenger Safety	Respect for the individual's innate need to innovate and improve the status quo.	Permission for the individual to make challenges to the status quo in good faith.	Air cover in exchange for candor.



Four levels of psychological safety

A concept by Amy Edmonson.

How 'safe' do you feel when you join a new team?

BiteSize Learning



Challenging

“I can be bold and speak out.”



Contributing

“I can add value and make a difference.”



Learning

“I can ask questions. I'm not expected to have all the answers.”



Included

“I belong here. I feel welcome.”

Psychological Safety



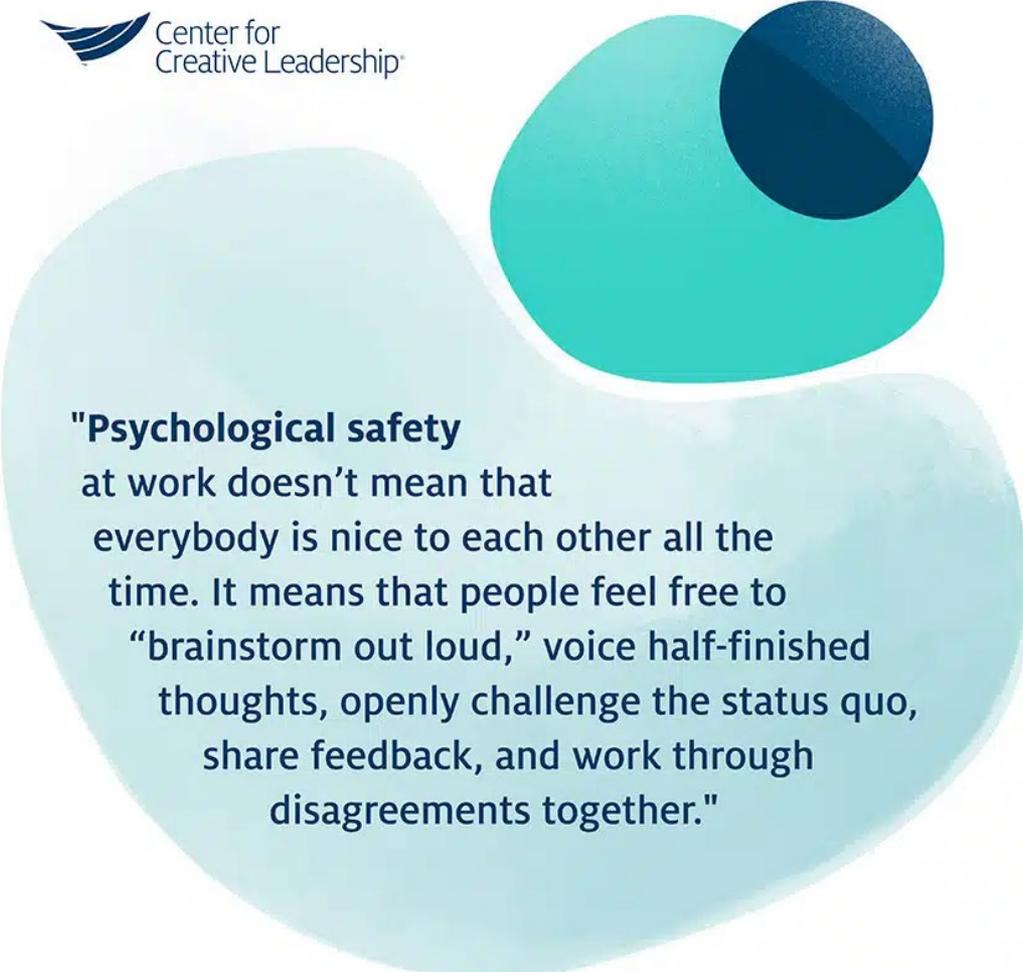
*Safe to
Learn!*

*Safe to
Collaborate!*

*Safe to
Challenge!*

*Safe to be
Authentic!*

*Safe to
Engage*



"Psychological safety
at work doesn't mean that
everybody is nice to each other all the
time. It means that people feel free to
"brainstorm out loud," voice half-finished
thoughts, openly challenge the status quo,
share feedback, and work through
disagreements together."

WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY LOOK LIKE?



Unafraid to ask questions.



Encouraged to bring their authentic selves to work.



Feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback.



Familiar with their colleagues outside of work.



Openly share constructive criticism and concerns.



Comfortable knowing they can fail.



Have no trouble asking for assistance.



Feel valued and are encouraged to contribute.



Feel safe reporting discrimination.



Have mutual respect for their colleagues and leaders.

TRUST

Will **YOU** give others the benefit of the doubt when you take a risk?



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Will **OTHERS** give you the benefit of the doubt when you take a risk?



Why Psychological Safety Matters...



Enhances employee
engagement



Promotes an inclusive
workplace culture



Encourages creativity
and new ideas



Improved employee
well-being

Creating Psychological Safety



INVEST IN BUILDING
INDIVIDUAL
RELATIONSHIPS AND
DEVELOPING TEAMS



INVITE INPUT &
FEEDBACK



AVOID CRITICISM &
CONTEMPT



DON'T LEAD WITH
YOUR THOUGHTS
AND OPINIONS,
ESPECIALLY AS A
LEADER



LEARN TO
APOLOGIZE FOR
MISTAKES



WELCOME FAILURE &
LEARNING



ACTIVELY MANAGE
INTERPERSONAL
CONFLICT



ACCENTUATE
POSITIVE
EXPERIENCES



BE ENGAGED AND
PRESENT BUT NOT
OVERWHELMING



EXPECT OTHERS TO
GIVE EACH OTHER
SAFETY

5 WAYS TO HELP CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



1. MAKE
it an explicit
priority.



2. FACILITATE
everyone
speaking up.



3. ESTABLISH
norms for how
failure is handled.



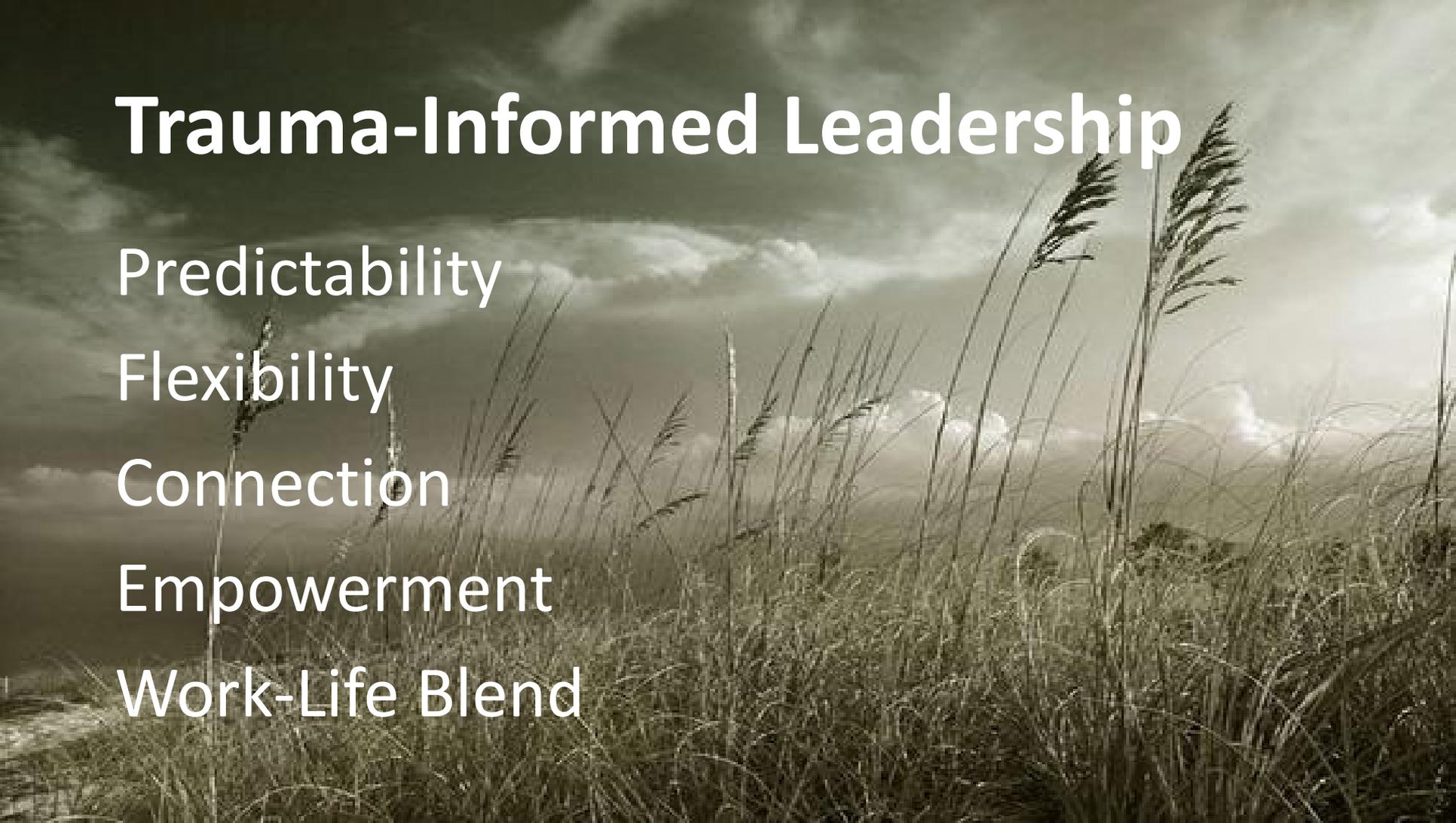
4. CREATE
space for new ideas
(even wild ones).



5. EMBRACE
productive
conflict.



Trauma-Informed Leadership

A black and white photograph of tall grasses blowing in the wind against a cloudy sky. The grasses are in the foreground, and the sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and resilient.

Predictability

Flexibility

Connection

Empowerment

Work-Life Blend

To Be or Not to Be...

Psychological Safety is *NOT*...

- Low Standards or Expectations
- Being Nice
- Conflict Free
- Just Repackaged Trust

Psychological Safety *IS*...

- High Expectation & High Reward
- Being Present
- Productive Conflict
- Genuine, Deep Engagement

To Be or Not to Be...

Fear-less Leadership is *NOT*...

- Warm Fuzzies
- Laissez-Faire
- Diluted & Disengaged
- Inauthentic
- Selfish

Fear-less Leadership *IS*...

- Empathic
- Active
- Engaged & Empowering
- Genuine
- Selfless

Fear-less Leadership...

A Culture of Listening

A Culture of Candor

A Culture of Learning

A Culture of Inclusion

A Culture of Inquiry



Q&A