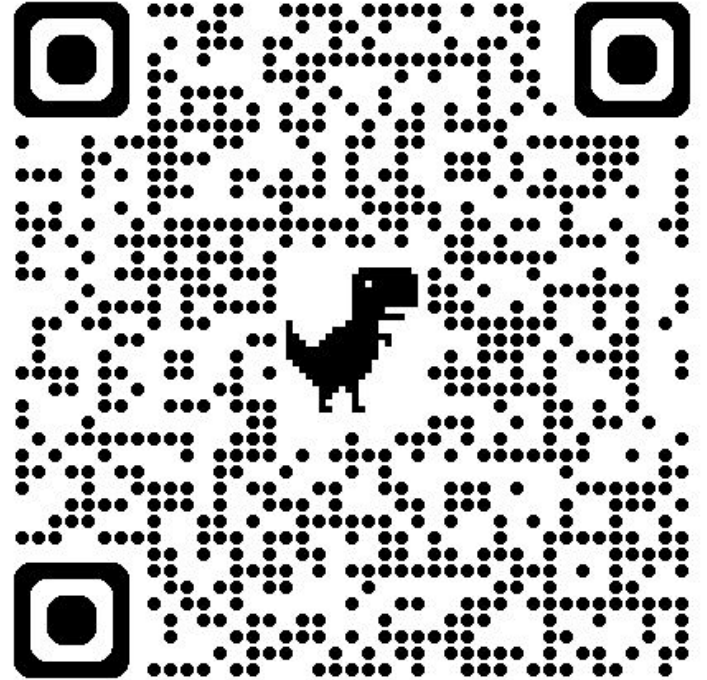


The Risks of Performative Psychological Safety

A personal reflection by
Clara Behrmann



In the valiant pursuit of Psychological Safety
we risk getting seduced by exercises that
give a false sense of trust and intimacy, which
carry a significant risk; undermining the ability
to set healthy boundaries between self and
team.

Five Questions You Didn't Know You Had

(about performative Psychological Safety)

Part I - The Rant.

1. What is *Performative* Psychological Safety?
2. What are the risks?

Part II - The Constructive

3. How can we spot the performative?
4. How can we reduce risk?
5. What do we do when we've effed up?

0. Why am I qualified to talk about this?

Clara Bettina Behrmann

- Worked in Agile-ish teams for 10+ years
- In a team leadership role for 8+ years across 8 different teams.
- I'm a human being who works in teams.

English is not my native language.

Part 1: The Rant

1. What is Performative Psychological Safety?

[Psychological Safety is] a **shared belief** amongst individuals as to whether it is safe to engage in **interpersonal risk-taking** in the **workplace.**

Amy C. Edmondson, Fearless Organisation

At work we all feel free to speak our minds about topics that are relevant for work without fear of repercussions, and can expect colleagues to take our opinions seriously.

Psychological Safety is a key ingredient in
High Performing Teams.

Performative Psychological Safety arises when practices are more concerned with whether they *look* and *feel* psychologically safe than they are with achieving it.

2. What are the risks?

How do we get there **faster**?

The common wisdom is that
Psychological Safety arises from people:

- Being authentic.
- Showing vulnerability.
- Bringing their whole self to work.

Trust Exercises!

To me, psychological safety became about creating a sense of **intimacy** on teams. Surely knowing each other's deepest, darkest secrets was a sign of high psychological safety?

As human beings, we *really* want to be part of the group. So much so, that we often ignore our own needs to fit in with the crowd.

Boundaries

Professional

Personal



Private

The Two Primary Risks

1. Overstepping own boundaries
2. Triggering others by (unintentionally) overstepping their boundaries

In the valiant pursuit of Psychological Safety
we risk getting seduced by exercises that
give a false sense of trust and intimacy, which
carry a significant risk; undermining the ability
to set healthy boundaries between self and
team.

Part 2: The Constructive Bit

3. How do we spot the performative?

Two Things to Look out for:

1. Focus on establishing private trust over professional trust.
2. Designed to elicit a strong emotional reaction.

4. How can we reduce the risk?

Create safe spaces by:

1. Staying professional.
2. Setting healthy boundaries.

5. What to do when we mess it up?

If you've crossed your own boundary:

Self regulate, in whatever way works for you.

If someone else's boundary has been crossed

- Be empathetic.
- Listen
- Know your own limits.
- Ensure they get the help they need.

Conclusion

Revisiting the common wisdom that
Psychological Safety arises from people:

- Being authentic.
- Showing vulnerability.
- Bringing their whole self to work.

