



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
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# Psychological Safety in a Hybrid Work Environment – a new Challenge for Managers

A qualitative analysis of how Swedish managers foster psychological safety in a hybrid work environment

by

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# Abstract

Several studies have shown psychological safety to be one of the leading factors in creating an effective team. Nevertheless, there is very little academic research studying the challenges that appear in a hybrid work environment or which practices in fostering psychological safety may need to be adapted to create an effective team in such a work environment. With the growing trend of the hybrid work environment, this study decided to research what challenges managers have faced in fostering psychological safety, as well as how managers have needed to adapt their prior practices. A qualitative study determined the main challenges and practices needed to foster psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. Different factors have been selected that promote psychological safety based on various researchers. With the help of these factors, challenges and practices were identified.

The data collected showed that managers felt an increasing difficulty fostering psychological safety when moving over to a hybrid model. Challenges such as weakened feedback culture, lowered trust, vulnerability, self-awareness, communication, and collaboration, made it increasingly difficult for managers to create an effective team. Through trial and error, managers found adaptations to existing practices. They noticed that structuring work processes and meetings, using digital tools, workshops, and more informal meetings considerably eased their process of fostering psychological safety.

Nevertheless, hybrid working environment are still considered new and relatively unexplored. The future will tell what researchers will find out regarding psychological safety and which practices will become established thanks to the learning process.

**Key words:** Psychological Safety, Hybrid Work Environment, Team Building & Development, Change Management

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The world is changing fast; new trends arise, and others disappear. The demands and needs of people change with its volatile and rapidly changing environment. COVID-19 has undoubtedly been one of the biggest economic and societal challenges in recent years and has had a considerable impact on the environment and the people living in it. One of these influences has been the acceleration of an existing trend, or need, in the way we work - a hybrid work environment (Crummenerl et al., 2021).

A hybrid work environment means that employees in a company can work both in the office and from home or other locations. The details of this working model and how it is structured vary depending on the arrangements within the company. However, an organizational structure is created in which team members do not work together on-site but only see each other part of the time or solely engage with each other via other communication channels. This new working environment has many advantages for companies and their employees. It gives employees a certain amount of flexibility while also providing companies with a more productive and focused workforce (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021).

However, it also brings new challenges that were previously unknown. For example, a substantial difficulty was identified with communication, collaboration, trust, and creativity (Haas, 2022). Thus, certain practices and processes previously seen as normal can no longer be carried out under the new circumstances and consequently need to be challenged and rethought. Even for the development of an effective team and its structure, this is a challenge (Staggers, Garcia & Nagelhout, 2008).

An effective and productive team needs to be built and fostered through team building. This concept involves creating a sense of belonging, trust, constructive communication, shared goals, and harmony. Creating this environment can be achieved through various types of workshops or practices. The team can then work together successfully, address problems openly, and work towards a common goal (Staggers, Garcia & Nagelhout 2008; Ray, Decker, Mitsch, Rocchetti, 2017).



One topic that comes up repeatedly regarding teams is psychological safety (PS). PS plays a crucial role in how effective a team is and influences the team climate positively or, if not in place negatively. PS is often discussed and analyzed among researchers in psychology and business management. It can be seen as a phenomenon that emerges in groups and describes how comfortable team members feel talking openly about issues, speaking up, raising questions, and taking interpersonal risks without being judged, punished, or humiliated (Edmondson, 1999). It also describes the team climate, which is the extent to which everyone can be themselves without feeling the need to hide (Edmondson, 2019). In a psychologically safe team, people can work together openly and honestly. When making a mistake or challenging the status quo, they spend less time judging whether their status or they as an individual are being criticized. Therefore, PS plays a large part in ensuring that ideas and views are shared and in increasing the commitment and satisfaction of employees (Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020).

As can be seen, PS plays a crucial role in teamwork and team development (Edmondson, 2019). Researchers have studied this issue and explored practices that can create a PS working environment. However, this research is based on the assumption that the team works in the office. With the change in team structure, these practices are now in an environment for which they were not necessarily created and need to be rethought and challenged (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021).

As such, it is necessary for companies to recognize the need for change and then implement the change if it is required (Porras & Silver, 1991). While some companies have been adapting to the demand for hybrid work environment for a long time, others have been forced by the pandemic to change. This change has already been a big challenge for companies, as many smaller adjustments were needed to follow. These adjustments include implementing practices to create PS (Bloom-Feshbach & Poyet, 2018). Therefore, this paper is relevant as it tries to show why managers need to adapt their practices for PS in a hybrid model in the first place. Furthermore, the paper aims to identify if and what practices had to be adapted to foster and cultivate PS and what these practices look like now.

## 1.2 Problem Formulation

When reviewing existing research on PS, there is mostly a focus on office work. Edmondson (2019) presents an assessment to measure PS and gives insights into what leaders need to be aware of and beneficial practices they can utilize. Nevertheless, the field of research on PS practices in a hybrid work environment is still very unexplored.

It is now a widely accepted assumption that PS is one of the main influences for an effective and successful team (Bloom-Feshbach & Poyet, 2018). It is important for organizations to know how to best foster and cultivate this concept in teams and understand what practices are appropriate. Sweden is a country that has adapted to a hybrid model in recent years and has already gained experience in fostering and cultivating PS. Therefore, Sweden is an appropriate choice for a research to investigate and understand why and to what extent managers have adapted in a hybrid work environment to promote PS and how these practices look in this new work model remains to be answered.

## 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify, discuss, and analyze how managers in Sweden have adapted their practices to foster PS in a work environment of increasing hybridization. Essential factors for PS will also be identified. The paper will then examine how these factors have previously been used in a team and how they are utilized today in a hybrid work environment. Lastly, the paper will analyze which changes were necessary due to the shift in the work environment.

## 1.4 Research Question

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. Why have Swedish managers changed their practices to foster psychological safety in a shift to a hybrid work environment?
2. What are the main adjusted practices used by Swedish managers to foster psychological safety in a hybrid work environment?

## 1.5 Limitations

This sub-chapter presents three main limitations encountered in this paper. The most significant limitation was the time frame. As a result, the desired sample size was not achieved, and simplifications were made in the research design. Due to the time constraints, it also had to be accepted that certain participants in the interviews had only limited time in their calendars. As a result, interviews were conducted within a time frame of 30 to 60 minutes. However, it would have added value to this paper if the participants and their responses could have been explored in more detail.

Secondly, only managers were analyzed for this project, which led to a top-down perspective. This was the intention of the research, as the managers oversee the practices and therefore have valuable knowledge about them. However, it would also have been of great value to include the perspective of the team members to analyze whether the practices mentioned by the managers have the desired effect and how they perceive the PS within the team. The results collected speak about the practices used, but not about whether they are necessary and improve the workplace.

Thirdly, the size of the sample group also limits this research. While it is insightful to get solutions from various managers, it can also lead to differing results between the different companies and industries. For this reason, it is important to recognize that the conditions within the teams are not the same when comparing practices.

## 1.6 Outline

This paper will start with a presentation of the analytical framework. Theories and relevant information will be presented on change management, hybrid work environment, team development, and PS. Definitions of the terms are provided, as well as a link to how these topics are interrelated.

The methodology of this study is presented in Chapter 3. There, the point of view of ontology and epistemology are clarified and explained. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the research approach, the research design, the data collection method, and the sample selection. Lastly, the data analysis, the quality of data, and the ethical considerations will be presented.

Subsequently, the data obtained will be presented and summarized in Chapter 4. Connections between managers' experiences will be analyzed, and then main challenges and practices will be explained and presented.

A discussion will be conducted in Chapter 5, in which connections will be made between the analytical framework and the data collected. The findings will be discussed regarding the research question.

Lastly, in Chapter 6, the overall findings from the research will be summarized and presented to answer the two research questions.

## 2. Analytical Framework

First, the concepts of change management will be reviewed to understand why practices to foster psychological safety (PS) need to have changed in the first place. Change management is considered in this study because not only has there been a change in the work environment from office to hybrid, but existing PS practices have also been challenged. At the same time, it is necessary to understand why change happens and how challenging it can be to implement change in a group. Then the concepts, benefits, and characteristics of a hybrid team will be highlighted. The paper will explore the growing popularity of hybrid teams and how they can be implemented. After that, the topic of team building is presented. Teams influence PS as much as they are affected by it. Therefore, it is important to focus briefly on the concept of a team and its further development to recognize the influence a hybrid work environment has on teams. The last topic to be presented is PS. The paper will discuss the definition of PS, why it is essential, and how to foster it. Lastly, a summary will be given to highlight the interconnections of these topics.

### 2.1 Change Management

#### 2.1.1 Concept of Change

The concept of change has existed for some time. It was Heraclitus who said that "*nothing endures but change*" (Kanter et al., 1992, p. 9). For the purpose of this paper, change is defined as "*the result of something becoming different*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022, n.d.), making "*a shift from one to another*" and "*to make radically different*" (Merriam Webster, 2022, n.d.). These definitions are meaningful because they describe change as something that does not just happen in a moment but can also be a process that transforms over time. Change can occur for various reasons, such as individual choices or environmental influences. Using the definitions of change, one can recognize a pattern that either one's own decision has been made and guides the change, or the change occurs with no personal influence and consultation.

Change can, therefore, not only affect individuals, but the whole environment, to which the actors involved then must react. Change is generally a complicated concept that is difficult to grasp and plan. As mentioned earlier, change has always existed, "*but in modern times it is clear that as the world becomes more complex and interconnected, change is occurring more frequently and affecting more parties*" (Armenakis et al., 1993, p.682). Therefore, individuals

and companies must deal with change and prepare themselves to react in the best possible way (Armenakis et al., 1993). After all, as Benjamin Franklin famously observed, *when you are finished changing, you are finished*.

### 2.1.2 Concept of Change Management

The concept of change management has been explored by many researchers from various perspectives and with different approaches. This is due to the reasons mentioned above and the resulting demand from companies to deal with change in greater depth. It is a great challenge for companies to prepare for change and to be able to react to it. However, companies that create suitable structures and deal with change appropriately have a significant advantage over those who do not have this ability (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Not only does this competence help companies recognize the need for change, but also how they communicate and deal with those affected by the change so that it can be successfully internalized in an organization. For many, *"change results in a reaction of resistance due to their need for security, social interaction, self-assurance, status and competence"* (Porras & Silver, 1991, p. 52). Therefore, when change occurs in the organization, it is important to ensure that structures and processes are in place that incorporate these uncertainties and individual factors (Porras & Silver, 1991). Change management deals precisely with this issue. There are different approaches to how change should and can be approached. Nevertheless, the first step is to identify when change is needed. Porras and Silver (1991) explain that organizational change is usually triggered by a change in the influential environment that creates an imbalance. This sets off an internally generated response that results in adjustments in the affected sections to restore this equilibrium.

One of the first researchers to study change management was Kurt Lewin. He argued that there are three steps to change in an organization. These three steps are defined as *unfreezing*, *changing*, and *refreezing*. Lewin claims that for an organization to successfully internalize change permanently, structures must first be unleashed (*unfreezing*) so that they can be transformed (*changing*), and then these changes must be stabilized so that they can be controlled (*refreezing*) (Lewin, 1947).

Kotter (1996) was one of the researchers who further explored this topic and designed a model on how to implement change in a company successfully. With the help of his *8-step model*, organizations, or groups with the help of all involved actors, can change internal structures and processes step by step, which are then internalized sustainably. A sense of urgency must first

be established to achieve this change, and then a powerful guiding coalition must be formed. Afterward, a vision must be created and communicated to encourage others to act. For motivation to remain high and for the team to continue to believe in change, short-term victories should be planned, created, and celebrated. It is then important to consolidate improvements to bring about even more change. Finally, these adjustments and the change must be institutionalized (Kotter, 1996).

Depending on the extent and type of change, more or less time must be invested in the individual steps (Porras & Silver, 1991). However, it is essential to take the time to analyze the whole process so that the change can be carried out successfully (Kotter, 1996). For example, everyone must understand why change is necessary. This may not be clear, or it may be inevitable due to external influences. COVID-19 has forced companies to switch to a new model that has met an existing need for home offices. Therefore, the shift from office to home office, and now to hybrid teams, has made sense for most employees. Thus, this change alone was not necessarily the most prominent hurdle relating to this research, although it was a significant change for many companies (Gratton, 2021b). Nevertheless, due to the complexity of the change in workplace location, as well as the distribution of the team, a chain reaction of changes occurred. Many necessary processes had to be adapted, from the standard meeting structure to the communication channels for the teams (Gratton, 2021a).

When change occurs in an organization, there are myriad factors that need to be considered. Porras and Silver (1991) address this issue with a model that gives a more accurate and direct picture of the components involved in change than Kotter (1996). Porras and Silver (1991) present four components, *organizational modalities*, *social factors*, *technological conditions*, and the *physical environment*, all of which need to be considered in the change process. This model does not give a clear step-by-step guide as Kotter (1996) does, but it highlights the many different components of change. First, their model is important because it illustrates the complexity of change well and presents the different components in separate parts. Porras's and Silver's (1991) model also considers a perspective that other researchers have not given much importance to. Their model emphasizes the importance of considering a company's context and individual circumstances. When an internal organizational response is made due to a changing environment, each company will deal with this change differently. The physical environment and the technological capabilities of a company influence the organizational response. This means that unique solutions must be tailored to the individual company, even though the environment has changed in the same way for all companies (Porras & Silver, 1991). For

example, with the current work structure of hybrid teams, the environment changed, which meant that the balance created in an office work environment no longer existed and the existing processes no longer had the desired effects. This means that certain processes had to be adapted with the change to hybrid teams. Therefore, the practices that were used to create PS before the change must be re-analyzed to see if they are still in balance with the environment or if they need to be adjusted. Some practices may still be used in the same way, simply under different platforms or communication channels. Others need to be rethought entirely as to how they can best be implemented.

## 2.2 Hybridization of Work

### 2.2.1 Concept of a Hybrid Work Environment

A hybrid work environment is a flexible work model that allows employees to work partly in the physical workplace and partly remotely, either from home or elsewhere (Gratton, 2021b). Such a compromise gives employees a certain kind of flexibility and the possibility of deciding where they want to work, depending on the task at hand. However, a contract is usually negotiated between the company and employee to determine the hybrid working environment. Depending on the company, there are different preferences for how often workers should be physically on-site. For example, arrangements may be made for everyone to be in the office on a certain day so that the team can meet physically, or a certain ratio may simply be agreed with each other. It may also be that no such measures are deemed necessary (Gratton, 2021a).

### 2.2.2 The Benefits and Concerns of a Hybrid Work Environment

Hybrid work environment are now considered inevitable for future teams. In a survey conducted by Gartner poll, 99% of HR executives believed that prospective employees would seek out hybrid work environment (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). There are several benefits to hybrid work environment for both managers and employees. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced companies to work remotely, managers and employees realized the advantages. Companies find increased productivity due to fewer unscheduled meetings and colleagues no longer stopping by their desks. Thanks to a hybrid model, they no longer need to limit their talent pool to geographical zones because employees can participate remotely and come in only when required (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022). Even more visible costs disappear; fewer employees in the office creates an opportunity for saving money on space rent and other fixed expenses



(Ilir & Arkesteijn, 2018). Additionally employees' mental health has also improved as they find more time with their family, and for everyday tasks, as well as exercises (Chafi, Hultberg & Yams, 2022; Ilir & Arkesteijn, 2018).

Hybrid work environment are a mix of face-to-face and virtual workplaces; as a result, it brings the positive and the negative aspects of both workplace models. While companies have noticed increased productivity among employees, they have detected an increased difficulty with communication, collaboration, and an overall lack of creativity (Haas, 2022). Hybrid work environment have posed similar problems as the face-to-face model regarding misunderstandings, leadership, and poor planning. In addition, the hybrid model has potential downsides with team development, conflict management, decision making, and collaboration. There is also increased fragmentation within teams due to subgroups forming, depending on the frequency individuals are physically in the workplace (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). On the other hand, the virtual model creates difficulties concerning communication and trust (Haas, 2022).

Managers today need to find a balance between virtual work and the face-to-face model. It is a tricky balance that needs to be adapted to each organization (Porrás & Silver, 1991). But with good management and planning, organizations can unlock the hybrid model of increased remote productivity and the creative collaboration the face-to-face model offers (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021).

### 2.2.3 The new characteristics of a hybrid work environment

As more and more companies switch to the hybrid model, specific differences in the model have become more apparent. The shift to a hybrid work environment has highlighted four new characteristics that were not present in the previous model (office-based environment). *Boundarylessness*, *multitasking*, *non-work-related interruptions*, and *demand on constant learning* are terms used by Xie, Elangovan, and Hrabluik (2018), whose aim was to map the new landscape of hybrid work environment. *Boundarylessness* refers to the missing distinction between where work ends and personal life begins. Increased productivity benefits all companies, but it should not come at the cost of increased hours for the employees (Xie, Elangovan & Hrabluik, 2018, p. 481).

The world is becoming more and more complex, and companies must adapt. Nowadays, employees are required to work faster than ever before, and thus an increase in *multitasking* has

arisen (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). Research has shown that employees feel that working on one task at a time is no longer enough, and the need to multitask (conducting several activities during the same period) has increased (Xie, Elangovan & Hrabluik, 2018). This issue is even more apparent depending on the working model in use. Virtual and hybrid models have resulted in a higher rate of *multitasking* than an office-based model (Levitin, 2015). These new models have increased certain activities, such as emailing during meetings or after work hours. Nevertheless, there is a difference in individuals to what degree they can multitask (Xie, Elangovan, Hrabluik, 2018). *Multitasking* can provide satisfaction because it creates the perception of getting work done quicker. Neuroscientists openly contest the act of *multitasking* and call it a myth (Levitin, 2015). The human brain cannot perform two things simultaneously, and *multitasking* means that individuals switch quickly between two tasks, thus never achieving complete focus on either job (Levitin, 2015).

Virtual and hybrid work environment increase productivity thanks to fewer work-related interruptions. Shorter coffee breaks, more periodic unscheduled meetings, and less travel time mean more time to work. However, hybrid and virtual workplaces have *non-work-related interruptions* due to personal as well as external factors that newly impact the daily work routine. It is proven that the hybrid model increases productivity. Nevertheless, managers need to be aware of *non-work-related interruptions* to counteract them and prepare employees on how to cope effectively with them (Xie, Elangovan & Hrabluik, 2018).

Recent research suggests that the dramatic increase in the new work model increases employees' need for *constant learning*, which demands a great deal of time for them. Education in new software systems, onboarding at a distance, and even how hybrid work environment can be implemented effectively increase learning requirements (Xie, Elangovan, Hrabluik & 2018). Noticeable is the increase of required learning modules in these new models. Even learning modules that do not affect the employee's ability to perform their job are time-consuming (Hackman & Oldman, 1980).

Therefore, it can be argued that the external influence, the hybrid work environment, has triggered an internal reaction or response to the switch in the form of the four characteristics. This whole process leads to an even greater imbalance between the environment and individual reactions to the practices established in the company. The practices were created for an environment that no longer exists, as it is now not only hybrid but also boundaryless, for example. Therefore, practices, as well as leadership styles, need to be questioned and re-tested.

If they can be adapted, the benefits of hybrid work environment can be maximized and the risks minimized.

## 2.2.4 Leaderships Styles

The pandemic forced companies and teams to adapt to working remotely. Even if the pandemic is yet to be over, the workplace will not look the same afterward (Mitchell, 2021). Managers quickly learned that they could no longer maintain the leadership strategies from the office era. Some managers efficiently adapt to the change, while others get *zoom-ed* out of the market. Luckily for managers who still are struggling with the adaptation, there are best practices to learn from many organizations. Various organizations understood the hybrid model's competitive advantage even before the pandemic (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). The following sub-chapter will cover Alanah Mitchell's (2021) and Alanah Mitchell's and Pam Estes Brewer's (2021) strategies on how to lead effectively in a hybrid model.

One of the managerial fears of moving to a remote or hybrid model was that employees would lack productivity if their managers were not nearby. Managers could no longer micromanage and see the work, which left them worrisome (Mitchell, 2021). Today with a few years of experience and some research later, it is evident that this fear is mostly unnecessary. As mentioned before, hybrid work environment increase employees' productivity (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). Managers should stop focusing on what they can see and start focusing on the results and outcomes produced by employees. Acting as a supporting unit where tasks and deadlines are communicated will help build clear boundaries for employees to move freely and perform (Mitchell, 2021). As an example, Mitchell & Brewer's (2021, p. 3) questions can be used by managers to ask themselves how to better facilitate the employees' need to be productive. The following three questions are presented as an example:

- *"Have policies and best practices for hybrid work been heard?"*
- *"Do members have flexibility and agency to work from the office and remotely?"*
- *"Is leadership modeling hybrid collaboration expectations?"*

A big part of any hybrid team is supporting personal engagement. In hybrid work environment, personal engagement and organizational culture have deteriorated (Gilson, 2015). Trust and work culture can be developed in a hybrid setting. Nevertheless, it needs to be nurtured through regular synchronous connectivity and face-to-face activities (Pinsonneault & Caya, 2005). Leaders need to elaborate and discuss where to invest in personal engagement. Onboarding of

a new employee is an example where team members could meet up in person to boost new engagement and develop organizational culture. Planned brainstorming sessions, trust workshops, and informal meetings benefit personal engagement and organizational development (Mitchell, 2021).

Investing in a well-functioning IT strategy has become clear, especially after the pandemic hit companies worldwide. Organizations that had prepared for natural disasters or any need to move to remote work made sure to have a smooth transition. However, companies that lacked preparation were left vulnerable because the structures for change were not in place. Investing in IT security, phones, wireless headphones, video conferences, multiple screens, and increased digitalization will facilitate their employees to perform regardless of location (Mitchell, 2021).

Suffering from a global pandemic and changing how individuals view their workplace setting will have consequences. Some have adapted quickly to this new hybrid world. In contrast, others have developed burnout and depression (Roose, 2021). Moving forward, managers need to listen to employees, what they need, and how they feel. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups are great tools for gathering data and feedback. Managers can then address what has come up and whether there are any potential changes needed (Mitchell, 2021).

### 2.2.5 Teams in a Hybrid Work Environment

The paper now narrows the scope and focuses on the team. It takes a team to talk about PS, and that team needs to be developed and nurtured. A team is when a group of independent people comes together to work towards a common objective (Edmondson, 2019). However, these individuals need to make an effort to form a group, which is seen as team building. Team building is a widely known concept in management studies and is essential for organizational development (Ciasullo, Cosimato, Gaeta & Palumbo, 2017).

According to Arizeta, Swailes & Senior (2007), four factors must be met to form an effective team:

- Common vision
- Common incentives
- Coordination and communication
- Trust

These four factors must be fulfilled for a team to work and develop effectively. When all employees are in one office, constant communication and collaboration can be established and monitored, and goals and incentives can be created that are understood by all. Trust can be built through constant collaboration and informal conversations during breaks.

Regarding team development, Tuckman's (1965) model can be used to explain the topic. Tuckman created a four-step model that is still used today as a basis for research at the level of team development. The steps in his model are defined as *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing*, and describe the process that each team must go through in order to develop. Each step must be accepted and not suppressed or skipped. For example, if there is conflict in a team (*storming*), it is necessary to exchange ideas and listen to each other, even if it is unpleasant and the employees would like it to be skipped. *Storming* is also important because the team can get to know each other from a completely different perspective, and possible ambiguities or concerns can be resolved. The same applies to forming, norming, and performing (Tuckman, 1965).

Spitz and Sadock (1973) conducted a study based on Tuckman's research with a different sampling group to analyze how teams develop. However, their focus was primarily on the feelings that emerged at each stage. They also omitted or did not observe the *storming* phase. Nevertheless, the three identified stages contain many similarities to Tuckman's other four phases. They argue that for a group to develop, it must go through all stages, which are associated with different emotions. Spitz and Sadock (1973) describe that fear, reticence, dependency, and a mixture of curiosity and confusion emerge in the first stage. In the second stage, people begin to trust each other, and as a result, cohesion, interdependence, and group interaction increase. Finally, the stage of restraint due to fear of separation and positive feelings towards the leader is reached (Spitz & Sadock, 1973).

In order for the team to go through these four phases and for trust to be built, there must be constant and transparent communication. Everyone must be working for the same goal, and PS must be present (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010). In general, PS is seen as one of the leading indicators of an effective and successful team, according to a study conducted by Google in 2014 (Rozovsky, 2015). PS affects how each individual feels comfortable expressing and being themselves. This influences how the team works together to define a shared vision, how they build trust, and how they collaborate and communicate with each other in general. PS thus promotes the important indicators of an effective team and cultivates a climate in which one

can honestly and successfully navigate through the different phases of team development (Bloom-Feshbach & Poyet, 2018).

However, a hybrid work environment brings different preconditions, which means that the balance between the new environment and the formerly established processes no longer matches. After all, even though the practices are still important for an effective team, they can no longer necessarily be carried out as naturally as before. For example, constant communication, both formal and informal, can no longer be guaranteed. The brief exchange in the office about questions or ideas no longer takes place regularly, nor do the informal conversations during breaks. It has been shown that distanced communication in the team reduces participation, the level of trust, and the sense of reciprocal accountability. These are all essential elements for team building and factors that can affect and are affected by PS (Sedrine, Bouderbala, Nasraoui, 2020). Therefore, it can be assumed that a hybrid work environment strains the team structure and the processes for team development need to be rethought.

## 2.3 Psychological Safety

### 2.3.1 The Concept of Psychological Safety

Due to the growing complexity and uncertainty in today's world, team innovation and development are highly discussed topics (Klaic, Burtscher & Jonas, 2020). Since the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the published research on team building and psychological safety (PS) has been growing (Scopus, Analyze search results, 2022). This is an indicator that managers today are becoming more aware of the need for effective and innovative teams. One such player that is showing interest in this topic is Google. In the early 2010s, Google wanted to know what makes the team effective. Over a two-year-long study and conducting several hundred interviews, Google established five critical attributes for any highly effective team. They concluded that PS was the number one leading attribute for any effective team; "*Psychological safety was far and away from the most important of the five dynamics we found - it is the underpinning of the other four*" (Rozovsky, 2015, p.1). Out of fear of being perceived as less competent or simply in a negative way, individuals are hesitant to engage in risk-taking behavior. Hence, a work environment where individuals feel safe to take interpersonal risks will perform more innovative and effective (Rozovsky, 2015).

Edmondson, Dusenberry, Robinson, and Kahn are well-established researchers on PS. They argue that implementing PS in the workplace increases team learning, effectiveness, and

innovation (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, Bohmer & Pisano, 2001; Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020). Edmondson uses healthcare teams to highlight the need for PS. A team without PS may fail to give a patient the correct dose of medicine due to a doctor miscalculating, and no team member dares to correct it. A team with a safe environment for interpersonal risk-taking will not think twice before correcting a superior because that is the normality of their team. It would be more peculiar not to speak up (Edmondson, 2019). As such, PS could be perceived as a competitive advantage for any industry (Edmondson, 1999).

### 2.3.2 Beginning

In 1965, Schein and Bennis published an article that would act as a seed for future generations and inspire researchers such as Kahn and Edmondson. Schein and Bennis's research focused on individual change; they explained that for individuals to be able to change (in an organization), they need to feel safe (Schein & Bennis, 1965; Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020). The term received little to no further research until the mid-90s when Khan and Edmondson published their respective first work. Kahn's research continued with Schein and Bennis's view that PS is on the individual level. Kahn argued that PS occurs when individuals are comfortable with interpersonal risk-taking in the workforce, and when PS exists, it increases individual engagement. Edmondson argued that PS occurs on a team level. Her article published in 1999, became a cornerstone of future research on PS (Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020).

### 2.3.3 Different Perspectives on Psychological Safety

Teams utilizing PS have been shown to increase learning, effectiveness, and innovation and, in doing so, outperform teams without PS (Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, Bohmer & Pisano, 2001; Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020). Even though most researchers agree that PS increases team performance, their respective views on PS differ.

Like Schein and Bennis, Kahn (1990) was more interested in studying how individuals change and what factors encourage learning in a team setting. He performed an extensive study collecting data from 186 different teams to determine what factors increase personal engagement among individuals. Results showed that individuals within a team with PS would have increased engagement (the individual's engagement to change) (Kahn, 1990). Teams without PS experience significantly lower personal engagement due to individuals' fear of being judged. The data collected revealed four key success factors in fostering PS. The 1)

*interpersonal relationship* is fostered on trust and support, 2) *group and intergroup dynamics* with clear roles and unacknowledged characters, 3) a *management style and process* that is supportive and clear, and 4) known *organizational norms* that dictate the role performance (Kahn, 1990, p.10). Kahn defines PS as "*feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career*" (Kahn, 1990, p.10).

Dusenberry and Robinson (2020) studied how to build PS through training and, with some inspiration from the previous researcher, gave some insight on PS. However, they discovered that lecture-based training had little to no effect on improving PS. They found that the duration of the working relationship in the team had a more significant influence, although the most important factor for improving PS was the team context. Team members need to talk to each other about their work, talk about PS, and even perform PS-building activities. Their goal was to study how training can increase PS, but little attention was given to defining PS. They based their understanding of PS on a definition from Edmondson (1999), saying: "*a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves*" (Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020, p. 208).

Amy Edmondson is arguably the leading professor on PS (Dusenberry & Robinson, 2020). Studying healthcare teams, she accidentally discovered that teams with a higher interpersonal safe environment performed better than others (Edmondson, 2019). She defines PS as a shared belief by team members; it is a collective confidence that taking risks is socially accepted and will not be punished. Without the entire team's commitment, there cannot exist a safe environment for interpersonal risk-taking. Hence, according to Edmondson, PS cannot exist on an individual level. Edmondson gives the following definition of PS; "*A shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking*" (Edmondson, 1999, p.350).

### 2.3.4 What Psychological Safety is Not

#### *Fear*

In history, many leaders have ruled with fear, and even today, some managers believe that acting in fear will make individuals listen more and work harder. However, this has been long proven to be false (Edmondson, 1999). This may work for a short time in jobs where the tasks rarely change, but in roles where the worker must change and continuously learn, the performance lowers when the individual feels threatened (Edmondson, 2019).



### *Being Nice*

Companies have complained in the past that they have a cultural issue with being too nice. Colleagues agree in the meeting and then do not fulfill their part of the agreement. Due to this issue, other companies have stayed away from fostering a PS environment for fear of unproductive teams. Nevertheless, PS is not simply being nice. A PS environment encourages challenging the status quo, speaking up, and taking a healthy conflict (Edmondson, 1999).

### *Lowering Performance Standards*

PS and performance standards are two necessary yet different factors within any organization. PS does not endorse an *anything-goes* culture. Goals are established and need to be met. PS endorses the need for clear boundaries which clarify employee expectations. Creating clarity with open communication clarifies for employees which goals need to be met to reach expected standards. PS and performance standards work together, allowing the organization to move forward through collaboration, high goals, and standards (Edmondson, 2019).

### *Individual Trust*

Edmondson explains in her work that trust and PS are similar and have much in common, but they are not interchangeable concepts. Trust exists in the mind of individuals and occurs when two individuals or parties have faith in the respective other (Edmondson, 2019). Therefore, it may be argued that PS and trust are intertwined and mutually reinforcing, although not precisely the same. The key difference is that PS focuses on a group norm, while trust often refers to an individual level. Hence, for this paper, it must be explained that when trust is mentioned in the context of PS, it refers to group trust and not on an individual basis between two individuals.

## 2.3.5 Edmondson's View on Building PS

Edmondson proposes three stages to build PS: “*setting the stage*”, “*inviting participation*”, and “*responding productively*” (Edmondson, 2019, pp.155-158). By implementing those steps, a structure for PS can be built.

### *Setting the Stage*

PS is not software; a manager cannot easily install it, and the team has access to it. PS takes time because it is a process that needs to be fostered (Tiwari & Lenka, 2015). Hence, through clear communication, managers need to prepare the foundation of the team. At this stage,

managers must clarify what is expected from the team members. Setting clear boundaries is a practice where managers clarify to what extent members can innovate and be creative and to what degree they can push the limits (Edmondson, 2019). A healthcare manager Edmondson observed during her studies set the stage for how the employees should speak regarding mistakes. The manager created "*words to work by*" (Edmondson, 2019, p.155), which are words that have the same meaning but with a less hostile or negative tone. Instead of errors, there were accidents or failures. Instead of "*investigating a potential error*" (Edmondson, 2019, p.155), they studied an accident. These changes may appear small, but they set the stage for how members should think and act (Edmondson, 2019). Additionally, managers should create an environment for other aspects of collaboration, such as planning agendas for meetings, making sure everyone has a voice, encouraging employees to be vulnerable and trusting their colleagues to create good collaborations. These are all topics deeply connected to fostering a PS environment and should be known by the team members. (Edmondson, 1999). If this stage is skipped, employees may be reluctant to admit a mistake due to fear of how members will react or hold back on speaking up in a meeting due to members not listening to them (Edmondson, 2019).

### *Inviting participation*

Setting the stage is a good start for any team. However, employees will not run to their colleagues or managers and admit all their wrongdoing. Once all the boundaries are clarified, managers need to start working to put these principles into practice. PS is not an individual concept. It exists within teams and thus can only be fostered by a team. Therefore, managers cannot develop PS by themselves but need the whole team's help. The healthcare manager, whom Edmondson observed, created participation within the team by shifting the responsibility to her employees (Edmondson, 2019). When employees underperformed or made mistakes, she did not lecture or reprimand them. Instead, the manager asked questions such as, "*Was everything as safe as you would like it to have been this week with your patients?*" (Edmondson, 2019, p.156). Through this, the ownership of the issue shifted to the employee, which gave them space to think and express themselves. In addition to changing her rhetoric to invite participation, she established teams to review the hospital's accidents. The team consisted of members from all different departments of the hospital. This way, everyone felt their voice was being heard, and teams could create a genuine difference. By inviting participation in these situations, she increased collaboration, instilled trust in managers and coworkers, boosted

curiosity about problem-solving, and determined how feedback and accidents should be handled within the organization (Edmondson, 2019).

### *Responding Productively*

Once the stage is set and participation in the team is achieved, the manager must ensure that he or she is responding productively. A leader who builds clear guidelines and encourages participation from his employees, but only responds with anger, will never build PS. Furthermore, if managers do not respond in a supportive way, self-reflect, or show vulnerability PS can never foster. Hence, the manager also needs to exist within their boundaries. Otherwise, setting the stage and inviting them to participate is an opportunity wasted (Edmondson, 2019). PS exists within teams and can hence only be developed by the team members themselves. If team members act in anger, especially the manager, the team will never be able to develop PS (Dollard & Bakker, 2010).

### 2.3.6 How to Foster Psychological Safety

Several researchers have studied how to foster PS, such as Dusenbery and Robinson (2020), who explored the potential of building PS through training. Scheduling meetings, brainstorming sessions, expressing appreciation, transparent infrastructure, and allocating flex time are proven methods or benefits to foster PS (Tiwari & Lenka, 2015).

When Edmondson conducted her preliminary research in 1999, she sought to discover which teams performed best in certain challenges. She concluded that teams with PS performed better than others. To measure if teams did, in fact, successfully build PS, Edmondson (2019, p.20) did interviews and surveys in which the following questions were asked:

1. *"If I make a mistake in this team, it is held against me."*
2. *"Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues."*
3. *"People on this team sometimes reject others for being different."*
4. *"It is safe to take a risk in this team."*
5. *"It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help."*
6. *"No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts."*
7. *"Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized."*

These seven questions are based on six characteristics that foster a PS environment identified by the authors. One is how mistakes are managed in a team, how feedback is given, and if everyone has a voice in the group. It is also vital that curiosity is accepted and encouraged, that there is constant collaboration and communication, and that there is trust on a team basis (Edmondson, 2019). In addition to Edmondson's six factors, Bosler (2021) argues that self-awareness is important to promote PS in a team. Barnett (2020) supports this argument, stating that one should be self-aware and demand the same from one's team. This helps all team members to know what they want, how they want to work, and how they want to be perceived, which allows one to cater to these unique personalities individually.

Coleman (2017) added to these factors by arguing that vulnerability plays an important role. Coleman (2017) justifies this by saying that by acknowledging one's mistakes, the person shows vulnerability and thus promotes an open discourse about mistakes. As a result of the leader setting an example and showing vulnerability, the team can follow and talk openly about mistakes or challenges.

## 2.4 Summary

To summarize, Figure 1 can be examined. Starting at the left side of the figure, it can be seen that this is the model of working in the office. Part of this model concerns the structure of how to build an effective team and how to develop it. As explained in the analytical framework, PS is one of the most important factors in creating such a team (Rozovosky, 2015). From this concept, through the work of Edmondson (1999), Bosler (2021), Barnett (2020), and Coleman (2017), eight characteristics could be identified (see 2.3.6) that together define how PS a team is.

In an organization where PS exists, structures have been created for these factors, which are tailored to an office. However, looking at the right side of Figure 1, many organizations have adapted to a hybrid work environment through change management, which brings different conditions and influences on workplace life. For this reason, organizations have had to analyze, test and, adapt these practices if they no longer work in a hybrid work environment. For this purpose, change management must once again be involved, enabling companies to recognize whether a change is necessary and implement it successfully. Change management is not only responsible for moving from office to hybrid, but also for rethinking existing practices. These changes are adapted using Kotter's (1996) *8-step model* as an example, to ensure that the adaptation is carried out successfully. It is important to understand that each organization or

team assesses the situation individually; considering their environment, and thereby deciding whether change is necessary. Even if the same initial shift to a hybrid work environment has taken place in all organizations, managers may come to different conclusions and find varying solutions to the new model (see 2.1.2). Nevertheless, the goal is the same: to build and develop an effective team through PS. This can be created with existing or new practices, depending on the individuals, the organization, as well as the already existing practices that have been implemented.

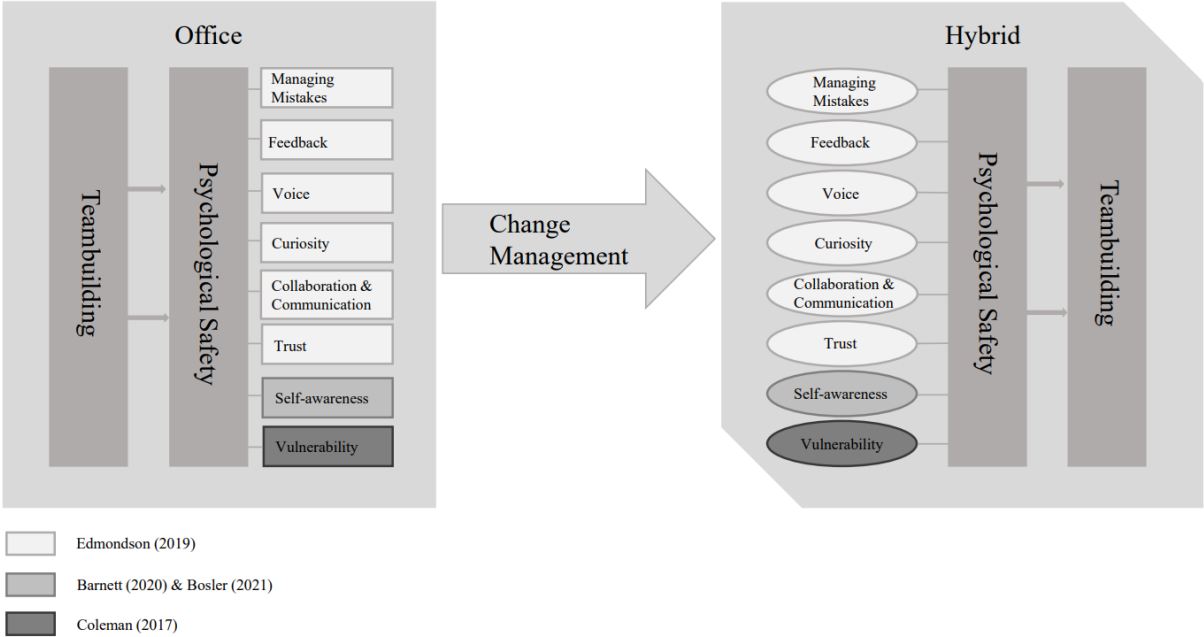


Figure 1 - A Visualization of the Analytical Framework

## 3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used in this research. First, the methodological approach, process, and design are presented in-depth. Then, the data collection, procedure, and the criteria used to define the participants are introduced. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on the characterization of the data analysis before concluding with some ethical considerations and a critical discussion of the quality of the data. Finally, a focus is placed on the implications and the limitations of this study.

### 3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Standpoint

#### 3.1.1 Ontology

The ontological standpoint describes the “*basic assumptions that the researchers make about the nature of reality*” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018, p. 61). Simply put, ontological processes are concerned with how the world functions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 110). This study aims to understand how the implementation of psychological safety (PS) has changed due to the hybridization of the work environment and what those practices involve. Therefore, the authors believe that in order to achieve their goal, they must first understand the initial situation before the change and then identify the different patterns that are now occurring in the hybrid work environment. In this approach, the authors assume that there is no single solution but that these practices depend on different motivations and factors to implement PS and not only the influence of a hybrid work environment. Based on this assumption, this paper takes relativism as an ontological position. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, and Jaspersen (2018) define a relativist ontological position as a view in which there are different truths. These truths depend on the different perspectives or facts evaluated from the observer's point of view (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018).

#### 3.1.2 Epistemology

The epistemological point of view describes “*a general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world*” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018, p. 63), thus how one perceives one's environment. In general, epistemology is differentiated into two different approaches: positivism and social constructivism. Positivism usually chooses a deductive approach and proceeds from theory to observation. To maintain the objectivity of the findings, positivists must remain independent and thus minimize interaction with the

participants. The findings are ultimately applied to the population as a whole. Social constructivism argues that societal reality is defined by people and not by objectives and external drivers. A social constructivist not only gathers facts and examines the frequency of patterns but also considers individual experiences and uniqueness (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018, p. 71). In this approach, one starts with observations and formulates a theory, which indicates an inductive method. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Given these definitions, this research is based on a social constructivist position. This is because this research aims to determine how the implementation of PS has changed and what practices are now being used. As mentioned above, it is assumed that managers have chosen different approaches and are guided by different motivations. Therefore, the social constructivist approach appears to be the appropriate one, as it allows one to explore the different perspectives and to consider “*what people, individually and collectively, are thinking and feeling, and the ways they communicate with each other, whether verbally or nonverbally*” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018, p. 70).

### 3.2 Research Approach / Research process

When creating a research strategy, the relationship between existing theories and data must be considered to get the most out of the study. As discussed in the literature, most research on PS comes from the *work in the office* framework. Because a hybrid work environment has only gained importance in recent years, theories in such a setting are limited. This has led to identifying a research gap, where theories and data analysis can be used to analyze how the implementation of PS has changed. However, the fact that this is an entirely new environment means that teams face new challenges, which vary individually, making it problematic for this study to apply a strictly deductive reasoning.

Formulating a hypothesis and designing a research strategy based on an unknown area of research would influence the results and not achieve the desired insights. Therefore, inductive reasoning was chosen for this paper. This allows existing theories and models to be taken and analyzed in a new research area. This approach allows the authors to reach conclusions through these observations (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The literature on change management, hybrid work environments, PS, and team building was reviewed to get a clear picture of the context and collect the necessary research results. These topics were considered separately but also in combination with each other.

Initially, the authors discussed how to obtain the most valuable result from this research question. With regards to the changes in different working environments and applied practices, the research area had to be limited in terms of geographical location. Therefore, this paper has resulted in qualitative research. A description of how the data was collected and how the analysis was carried out can be found later in this chapter.

## 3.3 Research Design

### 3.3.1 Sample

As previously stated in the purpose, the participants had to be managers in Sweden who have both led a team on-site and hybrid. The reason for this was to observe the differences between these two environments. The following two factors were why Swedish managers were chosen for this study. First, Swedish managers made up a large portion of the authors' network. Secondly, thanks to the managers' interest, Swedish managers presented the greatest potential to obtain valuable data despite the time limit. To get a clear overview of the changes in the implementation of PS in Sweden and their practices, managers from different departments and business fields were needed. This broad focus allowed for entirely different experiences to be observed and collected.

Various methods were used to recruit managers suited for this research. Both authors made a post on the social networking page LinkedIn. In the posts, the authors provided a description of the research, an overview of the requirements, and a call for participation if the requirements were met, and the research seemed interesting. Even though the reach of both posts was significant, few managers followed the call to participate. However, two other strategies to acquire participants were more successful. Personal connections to managers or employees who had interested managers helped get potential participants on board. The authors also obtained managers who fulfilled the requirements through a search on LinkedIn for managers with the location of Sweden. Those managers were contacted with a brief overview of the research, a link to the post for further information, and asking them for their help. The difficulty was ultimately getting a response from managers. Even though the LinkedIn post received about 2100 views, only one response from one prospect was received. Contacting on LinkedIn with private messages also did not have the desired response rate. Of the 119 managers contacted, only 62 accepted the message, 24 responded to the more detailed description, but only 19 showed initial interest in participating. The managers who did not reply or hesitated were asked



again and sent further reminders. In the end, however, only three managers could be convinced to invest 30 to 45 minutes of their time for an interview. Apart from not responding to the message, the most common reaction from the others was that no time could be found in the calendar or that they did not meet the requirements for the study. The additional four interviews were organized thanks to the network of the two authors and recommendations from the managers interviewed.

Table 1 below presents the managers who were interviewed for this research. First, it shows the job title in which they worked. Furthermore, it shows the number of employees they manage and the experience in years they have gained in a leadership position.

Table 1 - A Summary of the Managers Interviewed

	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Team size [Number of people]</b>
Person A	Adult Education	6
Person B	Recruitment Consulting	8
Person C	Technology Consulting	8
Person D	Packaging Industry	8-10
Person E	Recruitment Consulting	10
Person F	Learning and development Consulting	6
Person G	Audit Consulting	10

### 3.4 Data Collection Method

The interviews were conducted with managers in Sweden who led a team both on-site and in a hybrid setting. Since this research aimed to explore the differences between the two work environments regarding PS, the interview questions were pre-written so that the participant could be guided through the different topics. The topics were selected based on the literature review. Table 2 shows the connection between the topics and the research from Edmondson (1999), Bosler (2021), Barnett (2020), and Coleman (2017).

Edmondson (1999) designed an assessment for employers to measure PS within a team or a company (see Table 2 below). Since this research focuses on a managerial perspective, those exact questions were not qualified as interview questions. Therefore, the main drivers in each

statement had to be identified. Furthermore, as described in the literature review, some other drivers for PS were identified by other researchers. With the base of this framework, interview questions were designed. The table below shows how the guiding questions in the interview are linked to the literature. An attempt has been made to identify the main issues responsible for the measurement of PS from Edmondson's seven findings, as well as to link them to other factors that have been discovered in the literature.

Table 2 - The Connection between the Analytical Framework and the Interview Questions

Topic	Analytical Framework	Interview Question (see Appendix 4)
Managing Mistakes	Statement 1 out of Edmondson's Assessment to measure Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2019, p. 20)	Interview Question 1
Feedback	Statement 2 out of Edmondson's Assessment to measure Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2019, p. 20)	Interview Question 2
Ensure everyone has a voice	Statement 3 and 7 out of Edmondson's Assessment to measure Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2019, p. 20)	Interview Question 3
Foster an environment of Curiosity	Statement 4 out of Edmondson's Assessment to measure Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2019, p. 20)	Interview Question 4
Collaboration and constant Communication	Statement 5 and 7 out of Edmondson's Assessment to measure Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2019, p. 20)	Interview Question 5
Trust	Statement 6 out of Edmondson's Assessment to measure Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 2019, p. 20)	Interview Question 6
Self-awareness	Statement 1 out of Shana Bosler's (2021) "9 strategies to create psychological safety at work" Statement 4 out of Greg Barnett's (2020) "8 ways to create psychological safety in the workplace"	Interview Question 7
Vulnerability	Statement 3 out of Bernard Coleman's (2017) "Are you psychologically safe?"	Interview Question 8

As shown in Table 2, most of the interview questions are based on Edmondson's model. Some of the findings in this model could simply be adopted. Other findings are more deeply interconnected, linked to several themes, or could not be asked in the same way as the interviewee could have been influenced in their answer.

In order to collect the required data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This method is prevalent in business research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This form of data collection relies on asking questions within a predefined thematic framework. Thanks to this structure, the authors were able to ask additional questions to explore and immerse themselves in the answer of the participants (Barbour, 2011). This method gives the interviewer the flexibility to capture the participants' reflections and the opportunity to go into more detail or clarify some of the answers and thoughts when needed.

Since the participants of this research were from all around Sweden, the geographical location had to be considered when conducting the interviews. Out of the eight interviews, seven were conducted in English, and one was held in Swedish.

Participating managers were given the choice of interviewing in-person or online. However, because of the limited time and resources to travel, all the interviews had to be conducted online. Having the interviews set up like this was advantageous because the individual well-being due to the pandemic was taken into consideration, but also that the available sample for participants of the study was not limited. A week before the interview, an overview of the topics and definitions of the terms were sent to the interviewees to prepare for the interview and ensure all participants were using the specific terms identically. Additionally, an agreement was made that the interviews could be recorded for study purposes.

Due to limited time and resources, seven of the eight interviews were conducted by one author. This person made sure at the beginning that the recording was accepted and then conducted the interview using the interview guide and added follow-up questions where necessary. One interview was conducted with both authors present. In that case, one author led the interview while the other was responsible for recording the session. Both interviewers had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to clarify answers or lead the interviewee back to the desired topic field. The complete interview guide, as well as the pre-interview letter, can be found in the Appendix 3 and 4.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

For the presentation of the data and the analysis, the base transcription approach was used. In this approach, the focus is not on how the interviewee says something, but rather on what he/she says (Norrby, 2014). This means that the transcription only has answers in the form of words and themes, not word for word, and pauses are removed. This method is more time efficient, and the material becomes more readable for the parties involved (Norrby, 2014). To ensure that no topic or practice is overlooked and that the data is interpreted correctly, the recordings were gone through separately by both authors, and the base transcription was carried out. Finally, the results were compared, but no differences were found.

For the analysis and use of the data, an inductive thematic analysis was applied. With this approach, themes can be identified and coded. This helps to find traces, highlight similarities, and discover differences in the participant's answers (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In order

to achieve this, themes were coded, and mind maps were created to organize the different responses of the participants and visualize a network of the topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is achieved by reducing the data. To do this, the most important aspects need to be extracted from the interviews and inserted into the mind map (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The most important topics and practices were taken out of the base transcript, thus achieving a data reduction. These points were then inserted into a mind map to identify relationships and differences. Once this has been done, quotes can be added to give the whole picture context. This also helped to recheck the connections and adjust them if necessary. Finally, through this process, conclusions could be drawn, and the research questions answered.

### 3.6 Quality of data

It has now been explained in this chapter which methodological approach was chosen, how and which data was collected for this research, and also with which approach it was analyzed. In the following sub-chapter, the concepts of reliability and validity need to be addressed, as they are important factors of qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Reliability addresses the research results and the extent to which these are repeatable, in other words, the consistency of the study. Validity describes how accurately the data and results collected by the method measure and represent what was intended. It can therefore be assumed that if the reliability is high, this is an indicator of a valid measurement (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Therefore, it was ensured that by the time the interviews were conducted, both authors had acquired a thorough knowledge of the topic so that what was said during the interview could be better and more deeply analyzed. However, to maintain the best possible objectivity, the recordings and notes were independently reviewed by both authors several times afterward to ensure that the data was comprehensive and ambiguities could be identified. Furthermore, the work was transparent in that the documents in which the work was done were accessible to both authors. This process ensured that personal values and dispositions did not alter the data and that the work presented was objective. To strengthen the objectivity, interpretations and conclusions have been explained and clarified so that it is understandable that action was taken in good faith (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Since the data analysis was based on an inductive approach in which the themes were linked to the data, it could be ensured that this result was not influenced by the interests of the authors

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Another point worth mentioning is that in this paper, more extensive descriptions were presented to make the details clear and help the reader judge the transferability of the study. In addition, the quotations are there to show the diversity of responses and, ultimately the authenticity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, it must be noted that the scope of this study is relatively large compared to many other qualitative studies, which creates limitations in terms of transferability and generalizability (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important marker for a qualitative study and must be respected (Tracy, 2010). Therefore, before the interview, the interviewees were provided information on what type of topics the interview was about. It was made clear to them that this interview was clearly voluntary and that they could withdraw from this study. Furthermore, confidentiality was agreed upon with the participants. According to Tracy (2010), this agreement might lower the context of a qualitative research since context plays an essential role in understanding an individual's motive. However, this approach was important for participants to not withdraw from the study. Doing so also made sure that the interviewees were answering the questions truthfully.

The data was anonymized, and only the factors (see table 1) of (1) the sector in which they work and (2) the team size they manage are used in this paper. The interviews were recorded by Zoom and, in case of a malfunction, also by the Program OBS Studio to collect the necessary data and to use it again for the analysis. After the thesis has been submitted and graded, the recordings will be deleted and thus not be used anymore for any purposes.

## 4. Data Analysis

The following chapter will cover the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The chapter is divided into sub-chapters, in which all the collected data regarding the eight factors are individually discussed and analysed.

### 4.1 Managing Mistakes

The managers expressed similar yet different experiences depending on the team's development. Managers with teams that had insufficient knowledge regarding psychological safety (PS) or going hybrid expressed similar experiences, while teams with more knowledge had, in turn, similar experiences. Teams with a low understanding of PS expressed a need to give ownership of mistakes to the individual. Person A expressed that through clear and transparent communication, he/she managed to form boundaries which the employees could successfully be owners of their work and test/fail freely.

*"Before it was enough with communicating a no-blame culture, hybrid forced us to move the ownership to the employees themselves. So they could test and move freely, within clear communicated boundaries" - Person A*

Person B and Person E had a similar experience but were different from Person A. Person B and E had their respective team working independently before going hybrid; they were all familiar with clear boundaries and having ownership of what they are doing. Both managers had experienced an increase in ensuring that their employees did a good job and that their mistakes were okay. Person B said the following:

*"Before the pandemic, they could discuss with their colleagues before acting on an idea, today, in hybrid, they can still do it, but it is more complicated because they do not see each other. Hence they need more confirmation from me" - Person B.*

Person C gave a similar statement to Person A, however, he/she expressed that giving ownership and setting boundaries is not enough. Setting the stage is needed to have the foundation to stand on. Nevertheless, it is constant work, and he/she as the manager needs to pick which mistakes they should discuss if they mention all errors being conducted, they will lower their confidence. Person D agreed with the statement of giving ownership, yet it should not be to the individual. It should be the team that bears the ownership then, and they could solve the mistakes as a team and build themselves stronger together.

*"If I comment on everything they do, I will break them down. It's really hard to lift someone you have already broken down"* - Person C

*"Organizations are built up by teams, if they are going to work as a team, in hybrid or office-based, they need to own their own mistakes and success"* - Person D

In contrast, Persons F and G express little to no change when moving to a hybrid work environment. They express that the communication and practices themselves remained the same, yet it takes more time and requires more communication from the manager.

*"If I communicate my own mistakes, as I always have done, they will, in turn, feel safe enough to share their mistakes"* - Person G.

## 4.2 Feedback

Data collected regarding the managers' adaptation to feedback and fostering an environment of feedback proved interesting. Some interviewees had opposite experiences while others had quite similar. Person B mentioned that they had lost a big part of their feedback culture due to losing the natural everyday feedback. Their feedback culture before going hybrid was a mixture of natural and structured feedback. They did give feedback during Monday's meetings, but as their manager, Person B would also encourage giving feedback to their desk neighbor. Moving to a hybrid work environment, they could no longer give honest feedback in the same setting since colleagues were remote. When they were in the office, he/she noticed that the team did not want to give feedback. They were more unsure of each other. Person B thought this uncertainty about giving feedback face-to-face came from working hybrid and only meeting colleagues every other week. To counter this, Person B hired consultants to conduct activities and workshops with the team. They needed to relearn how to give feedback and work with feedback proactively. Person B said:

*"We learned that through asking, how did you do that, you showed interest in learning and feedback became instead of giving feedback, an opportunity to learn best practices proactively"*  
- Person B.

Person F and Person C had similar experiences to Person B. They lost a big part of their feedback culture going hybrid and needed to adapt, both in a similar factor as Person B and structuring feedback sessions.

Person G had an opposite experience from Person B. While office-based, Person G had for a long time worked with digital feedback. He/she had prepared for potential changes in the workplace and did not want their feedback culture to be static. Hence why they started working with digital tools at an early period. When they moved to a hybrid work environment, their feedback challenges did not change, and Person G focused on communicating more about the need to give feedback, but the methods did not change.

Person A focused primarily on how he/she met feedback from his/her team; he/she wanted to lead by example. Since going hybrid, more employees email him/her with concerns or feedback, and his/hers number one focus is to give fast replies. Person A may not be able to answer, but he/she responds to show that he/she has seen the employee's concern and that he/she is working on it. Person A implemented a new way of giving feedback in his organization. He/she told his employees to gather their teams and mix them into different feedback groups. Person A experienced struggles from one team, and then another team had no issues regarding that topic. Instead of lecturing teams about what they should do, he/she gave ownership to the teams once again.

*"I knew one group had an issue with X [sic], and then another team did not, so instead of me being a middle man, we started giving feedback in mixed groups. This way, they learned from each other"* - Person A

In contrast to Person B, F, and C, Person D had a well-structured form of feedback before going hybrid. Person D's team worked in structured intervals; they would work four weeks on the road, then have a session or several where they would reflect and give feedback. The model itself has not changed since going hybrid, but he/she did emphasize the need to have office-based feedback sessions if they were giving more personal feedback.

*"As they have the ownership of their time, they can have a digital meeting where they plan for an office-based meeting. This gives the team time to prepare and be more receptive to feedback"* - Person D

Person E agrees with Person B's comment that it is difficult to maintain the same feedback culture in a hybrid work environment. This manager continued to hold the feedback sessions on Mondays, now hybrid, but the unstructured feedbacks are now less frequent. In addition, he/she emphasizes that, as Person D says, personal feedback should take place in the office. This is because personal feedback is difficult to do in a digital setting because it can feel



impersonal, and what is said can come across very harshly, which is why, as Person E says, *"every word has to be checked twice to make sure it comes out right"*.

### 4.3 Ensure everyone has a voice

Every manager interviewed expressed increased difficulty in ensuring everyone had a voice in a hybrid work environment. They all explained that they relied on body language to read the employees before going hybrid and see who needed or wanted to speak up. Nevertheless, they adapted to different methods. Person D has a philosophy that he/she, as a manager, has no right to speak more than the rest. Before in an office-based environment, he/she should always take an observer role where he/she gives the word to the individuals who need it. Going hybrid has made things more difficult because digital meeting programs usually only focus on the speaker. To counter this, he/she implemented rules, all participants needed to have their camera on, and if they wanted to speak up, they needed to raise their virtual hand (if someone else was already speaking). Person D felt he/she could better observe who spoke and who had not spoken through these adaptations.

*"These rules simplify having a digital meeting; however, we still prioritize having our meetings office-based because it works better"* - Person D.

Person G was hesitant to answer this question because he/she felt that they had failed to find a suitable method to work by when having hybrid meetings. They still prioritize having all meetings office-based; depending on the topic, they could move it to digital if all participants could join. They did not perform any hybrid meetings. Person G's only adaptation so far was similar to Person D's. He/She implemented a rule that everyone participating in the meeting needs to speak up at least once, even if it is to say hello and tell everyone how they are feeling.

*"It is not enough, but at least this way I can hear all the participants, and they have the room to speak"* - Person G.

Person B's team has all sorts of meetings and does not prioritize a certain type of meeting. Of course, they all prefer to meet each other, but as their job as consultants demands flexibility, they have meetings of any sort possible. Before, they only had office-based meetings, and due to the drastic change, Person B did experience some difficulty adapting. His/her method has been to create a structure where everyone in the team receives a timeslot during the Monday meetings where they are expected to give a summary of their to-dos. The time given to each

individual is quite extensive, and they do not always talk for the entire time, but by giving each person enough time to speak, Person B felt that they are more likely to share their true feelings.

*"Due to us having an office, hybrid and digital-based meetings, it is hard to develop any other structure. With this form of time booking, at least I know that my teammates have time and room to speak up regardless of location. Moreover, they are expected to!" - Person B.*

Before going hybrid, Person A's team meeting was structured so they had a new weekly leader responsible for taking notes and ensuring everyone knew what had been said. Moving to hybrid, this was not enough. Person A noticed that because employees were not always in the office, they could no longer discuss the meetings and make sure everyone knew about them. Topics that would be discussed and finalized were being forgotten. Person A changed the structure of the meetings and implemented three phases for each meeting. First would be *decisions today*, then *discuss* where they talked about a topic that may need to be moved to next week's meeting, and finally, *inform*. Together with the weekly leaders, this new method will keep the topic alive and no longer be forgotten until the next meeting. Person A expressed concern that this might not be enough, but it is the first step.

Both Person C and Person F express that they missed being able to rely on body language because hybrid and digital meetings made it much more difficult. Person F's team decided to take a group responsibility and sign a contract, saying that everyone is expected to speak up and everyone is required to listen to others. He/she felt that creating a team contract would put everyone on the same level, and they would all know what is expected from them. Person C changed how he/she communicated and asked individuals to speak up. He/She noticed that by asking team members *what they think* of another similar phase, they would say, *I agree or okay*. Person C started instead by asking, *"please tell me what you think"*. If they answered I agree, he/she would reply with, *"you can agree and think the same, but please tell me with your own words"*.

*"And when they told how they agree with their own words, they noticed that maybe they do not agree, and in that way, we create healthy debates and grow as a team. Regardless of Hybrid, office or digital" - Person C*

Person E observes in his/her team that they are much more reserved in a digital or hybrid work environment. Before, as with other managers, he/she could pay attention to body language and interactions. He/she could then also signal who is taking up space and who should perhaps have

it more. In a hybrid setting, meetings need to be more structured to ensure that everyone has the space to express themselves. Person E emphasizes that "*this is essential especially for the new ones, so they know they are heard*" In addition, Person E mentions that this issue has been a learning process for his/her team. When the meetings were hybrid, they had to be planned and enforced so that "*those in front of the screen are not completely left out*" As this was too complicated and inconvenient, the manager decided that in case of meetings with multiple parties, they would either be entirely digital or on-site. This makes it easier for the manager to ensure that everyone is heard and for the team to feel more comfortable.

#### 4.4 Foster an environment of curiosity

The question of how practices have changed to promote curiosity in the team was answered quite differently by the participating managers. Some managers did not need to adapt due to the practices already implemented before, while others had to look for new solutions.

Person D, for example, was one of the managers who adapted. When the team was still in the office, they referred to how the short conversations, such as when they were going to the coffee machine or during breaks, helped the staff members awaken their curiosity. On the one hand, the team was able to pick up new perspectives and exchange ideas in the discussions, and on the other hand, they were able to perceive how much work the other person had to do at the moment. The manager in this team is convinced that too much work prevents people from being curious and thinking creatively. Since in a hybrid work environment these short conversations are no longer necessary and it is much harder to keep track of the workload, Person D has come up with two new practices to bring more curiosity back into the team.

First, after certain meetings, the team is sent into breakout rooms for about 10 minutes, where the participants can talk about the topic of the meeting, what they think about it, or simply what is on their minds. Person D hopes this will create more curiosity and replace the less frequent coffee talks.

Furthermore, Person D has also found a solution to the second problem, that there is no longer a good overview of the workloads of the different team members. He/she has decided that when starting a new project where creativity and curiosity are required, the person involved should immediately allocate 50-70% (depending on the type of project) of the working time to the new project. In this way, the person can free himself/herself from previous stress and get enough time for brainstorming and testing new areas and ideas.

Person E has noticed, just like Person D, that these short conversations have become fewer in a hybrid work environment. However, this manager has found a different solution to this problem. Once a week, they have breakfast online, which is considered an open meeting and allows the team to talk about anything. Person E says that *"these kinds of meetings make it come naturally"* and describes it as *"no strict meeting, but more of like an open forum"*.

Person B also sees the lack of short conversations as a cause of declining curiosity in a hybrid model. Therefore, the manager says, in order to reawaken curiosity in the team, meetings *"need to be scheduled because it doesn't come as natural anymore"*. Therefore, at the end of the weekly team meeting, a timeslot is reserved where problems or ideas can be raised and team members can discuss them. Person B describes the result of this process as follows:

*"This way, the curiosity comes back a bit more naturally, even though I had to encourage everyone in the beginning to take this opportunity to exchange ideas (...). But it takes more time for me because I need to schedule and structure those discussions (...). Before, those kinds of discussions just happened during a short walk to the coffee machine or in the break room"*.

Person A, C, and F said that there is no need to adopt further measures in a hybrid work environment because of how they communicate with their team. For example, Person A thinks that questions like *"we do it like this year, how will we do it next year?"* or *"why did this happen?"* trigger the curiosity and creativity of the others. To add to this, Person C says that it helps not to give examples because this leads to *"controlling the conversation and creativity,"* but you want the other person to *"explore the discussion themselves"*. Person G, on the other hand, says that because of the nature of the job, a curious attitude is not required in the team. Every few months, the team has a brainstorming session on how they can make established processes better. However, these meetings have not been adapted and are now simply held in a hybrid work environment.

## 4.5 Collaboration and Constant Communication

This question consisted of two parts. The first was to find out to what extent constant communication between the manager and the team is ensured. Second, it wanted to find out how collaboration and communication within the team are maintained.

Regarding the first question, the main issue was how check-ins have changed. All seven managers experienced the same difficulties, some more than others, depending on the hybrid

model. It became clear that informal conversation and check-ins could no longer be carried out or not with the same frequency. When everyone was still working in the office, these short conversations could be integrated into the daily routine by briefly passing by the office or having a short exchange on the way to the break room. However, even though everyone encounters the same difficulties, all managers have come up with a different solutions to this problem.

For example, Person B has decided to make a weekly list and free up time in her calendar to check in with all team members at least once and share. This helps the manager not forget anyone and, as Person B puts it, "*to show that I am still here*".

Person F raised another interesting perspective. At the beginning of the shift to a hybrid model, the manager tried to check in with his team in a very unstructured and random way, asking about their well-being. After a while, this person realized that they needed to be more structured so that it was fair for everyone and no one was forgotten. A similar concept was then chosen, i.e., a planned and structured model.

Furthermore, they have increased their weekly meeting to sometimes three times a week. According to the manager, this meeting was about "*celebrating the work of last week and appreciating the successes and failures*". This varies greatly, "*depending on the need of interpersonal support and interaction,*" and is now often done in a very informal setting over a cup of coffee.

Person E said that now, in addition to a mandatory monthly meeting where everyone can exchange ideas and scheduled one-on-one calls or conversations, two more voluntary meetings have been introduced that allow team members to step in when needed and share their work situation or whatever is on their mind over a cup of coffee.

Person G even said that the check-ins were much more frequent than before. When everyone was still in the office, the short conversations were enough for her to understand if it needed to be followed up. In their hybrid model, these processes have now become formalized. This means not only the formalization in terms of planning at what moments these conversations are held, but also what questions need to be asked of the team members. In addition, check-ins were now also carried out at the beginning of each meeting. Previously, it was mainly the behavior and interactions with each other that the manager observed to recognize if something was wrong or simply to assess the room.

Person D, on the other hand, has decided to have a short meeting every day at the beginning of the day where everyone can talk, and the manager hears in an informal setting from everyone whether all is going well. In addition, Person D continues to attach great importance to the short discussions in the office with the team members who are also there on that day, even if they have become fewer.

In contrast, for Person A not much has changed. Since Person A's team has agreed on which days everyone is in the office, these check-ins are carried out similarly, just less often than before.

To ensure that communication remains between everyone and that no one is excluded in discussions, practices were also adapted for this. In Person A's team, they struggled with the problem that the team members did not know where the others were and how they could be reached (availability). The solution to this can be described as follows:

*"You cannot just look them up anymore and talk because maybe they are not available, or their mailbox is full. This is why we started with Google chat, so everyone can just shortly reach people and ask them something".*

The problem with this solution is that the older generation of the team is not satisfied with this approach. For them, *"it is a cumbersome approach as it is another communication process, in addition to the already existing"*.

Person F also saw the need to introduce a new platform to ensure communication between the team and involve everyone in the meetings. They use the platform Miro *"for collaboration, and it makes sure that if the meeting is hybrid, not only the people in the same room are talking to each other"*. Despite the platform, the manager and the team have decided that *"the whole team has to agree that a meeting is held hybrid otherwise, it has to be online or on-site"*.

Person B sees the challenge in the meetings to ensure that everyone is included in the discussion. The manager describes it as follows:

*"I haven't found a way yet on how to include everybody in the meetings or collaborations yet, but even before we worked hybrid, it was a difficult topic. I believe that in the end, it comes down to trust in the team, that they feel comfortable to raise their voice"*.

In addition to trust, Person B also sees that structuring and planning play a significant role in meetings or discussions to ensure that communication takes place.

Person G, the manager who felt that more check-ins were being done than before, also saw a reason to adjust their practice. Since this manager does a check-in round with the team at the beginning of each meeting, a certain level of communication can be established in the team. This strategy not only helps him/her to see how everyone is doing but is also for the others in the team. Person G describes this as follows:

*"The check-ins in the meeting are not only for me but as well for everyone else in the team. It helps to show everyone how the other person is doing, creating an understanding of their workload and their performance. I want the others to know how everyone is doing, so the team has a transparent communication and understanding of each other".*

A different approach was taken by Person C. Two perspectives were presented on this topic, indicating a change in practice. First, the manager clarifies how he/she communicates with his/her team so that everyone can be honest and transparent. Person C gives the following explanation:

*"I think that leading the conversation is not a good thing. That is why I started regular conversations with employees about random stuff, which would later on transition into what the employee wanted to talk about. Then you gain their honest opinion".*

In a hybrid work environment, however, this is more difficult to produce naturally. Therefore, *"now I need to create the opportunity for people to speak up in meetings, which is more difficult hybrid, because I have to set up the stage and make sure the other people still think it comes natural and not forced".*

Person C then explained how the meetings have also changed now. Back then, when everyone was still in the same room, *"we could rely and use our body language to make signals. For example, if you have something to ask, while someone is presenting something, you would just raise your hand in a discrete way".* This is now impossible in a hybrid work environment when certain participants are only connected online. Since body language is no longer used, something new had to be introduced, which is even more apparent. Manager C puts it this way:

*"Raising your hand in a zoom call can be distracting, so we need to decide beforehand as a team what signal we want to give each other to speak up, in a way formalize it to be accessible for everyone".*

According to Person C, this signal is still being sought after because they were not yet satisfied with the ones used so far.

Person E thinks that the structure of the meetings does not necessarily have to be changed, "*as long as the team is given the opportunity to exchange information on an informal level, which makes everyone feel comfortable afterward on a formal level, to also participate in meetings as the only digital participant, or to contact others in the team with questions*". This means that the meetings that have been introduced, which are partly voluntary, are intended on the one hand for the manager to hear how the team is doing but are much more for the team itself to exchange information and create a basis for ensuring that communication and collaboration can also be guaranteed in a formal setting afterward.

Finally, it should be mentioned that while most of the managers have adapted to conduct certain meetings in a hybrid work environment as long as the team agrees, Persons A and C have decided to do it differently. As the two managers are not satisfied with the communication flow in a hybrid setting, they have agreed with their team that before each meeting with several parties involved, it must be mutually determined whether the meeting will take place in the office or online. In such a case, hybrid is not an issue for both managers, as the risk is simply too high that someone is not part of the discussion.

## 4.6 Trust

This question was about the trust of the team towards the manager, as well as within the team.

Person A, B, D, and F all mention that practices to build trust had no excessive change in a hybrid setting. Person A points out that to build trust, it is important to have a clear agenda and "*to make it important who is talking*". Therefore, the only practice that has changed with the switch to a hybrid work environment is the adaptation of open calendars. This makes sure that "*everyone knows where to find you and contact you, to make sure that no one feels alone when help is needed*". Furthermore, an open calendar makes sure to build clear boundaries and transparency within the team.

For Person B, it is important to lead by example, sharing mistakes with the team and showing them that he/she is giving them the support needed. Those practices have not changed in his/her team. Nevertheless, Person B indicates that the mindset has not changed, but the lack of control concerns him/her. The issue with this is that they do not see each other daily, so they are not



aware of the struggles everyone experiences, how everyone is feeling, or what they do. This makes it challenging to build up trust within the team.

Person D agrees with Person B on leading by example to build trust. Furthermore, he/she explains that having an open dialogue about the importance of trust and transparency is vital for establishing trust in his/her team. The manager mentions that the practice itself has not changed, but because of the more planned informal meetings, trust can be established. Trust is created through these kinds of meetings, as people get to know each other and see what and how much everyone is doing, thus creating an understanding of each other. Also, the meetings planned outside of work help strengthen interpersonal connections and respect.

Person F agrees that leading by example is a solution for building trust. The only difference, however, is that this person does not see building trust as more difficult in a hybrid work environment but simply as demanding more time and giving more attention to new team members.

Person C takes a different approach than the previously mentioned managers. He/she argues that trust starts with oneself, and once you give others a feeling of trust, the same is returned. Due to the lack of communication and interconnectedness in a hybrid work environment, the manager felt the need for workshops to build trust and reconnect as a team.

Person E used a completely different approach for the same problems as Person C. First of all, he/she introduced the concept of a *buddy*. Every new team member gets introduced to someone else in the team who is responsible for this person. "*This lays the foundation for having trust later on*". Furthermore, the manager saw potential in organizing team-building workshops because the talks in the coffee breaks when personal stories are shared do not exist anymore.

Lastly, Person G also has a different opinion on how trust can be established in a hybrid team. This manager sees this as a bigger challenge than before. Since the team does not know and see the manager as well, the manager have to be much more active in letting others know that he/she is there for them, listening to them, and supporting them. This means that he/she must respond much quicker to messages, and it requires much more time listening to what others have to say. Also, to build trust within the team itself, the manager needs to play a much more active role in encouraging the team to communicate with each other. He/she sees this as the basic framework for building trust, or in other words, "*actions about trust are not implemented, but an indirect factor, that comes with communication and thus build relationships*".

## 4.7 Self Awareness

Person A experienced a decrease when moving to a hybrid-based team. While they were office-based, Person A would rely on observing and reading the individuals to find their strengths and weaknesses and then having meetings where they were discussed. He/she expressed that acting as an observer and pointing things out was only possible because he/she led by example. Person A was always meticulous, and he/she would share his/her strengths and weaknesses first. Leading by example in a digital setting was still possible; however, in a hybrid work environment, it was not enough. Employees were hesitant to share personal struggles through Zoom, and when at the office, they just wanted to be around each other without the need to reflect. Therefore, Person A introduced structured meetings to discuss this topic, but emphasised that it is still important to lead by example.

*"No one will open up about their struggles if you are not the first to do it. You need to lead by example"* Person A.

Person E, F, and G had similar views. Being self-aware is often a requirement in the recruitment process. Hence, hiring managers would not hire an individual who, in their eyes, could not be self-aware and reflect on their actions. Person E elaborated and told us about a meeting they conduct every second week, *Fika for change* (Fika is a Swedish term for a break with coffee and a bun). They would talk openly about their needs and strengths during these meetings and then reflect on past actions to improve.

Person B used to give feedback and ask questions where he/she asked and expected reflection from the teammates, such as, *"how did you do it, why did you do it like this, and how does it feel now?"*. These more natural conversations, which would occur after the meetings and accomplished projects or at the coffee machine, have turned into something more structured. Today in a hybrid-based team, they use a skill matrix, where many different skills are depicted, and the employee rates himself/herself. This rating becomes a discussion or reflection in a one-to-one meeting with the manager.

Few changes were implemented in Person C's team. As a manager with an extensive background in managerial roles, he/she had developed a practice where he/she would ask leading questions to make the employee reflect. When conducting these meetings, he/she would always do it office-based and in small groups or one on one to increase personal discussions.

In a hybrid work environment, Person C's practice did not change. He/she calls for a meeting with notice so everyone has time to arrive at the office.

*"It is the employees who need to reflect. I cannot do it for them. My job is to create the room and opportunity to do so" - Person C*

Person D's answer was a combination of A, B, and C. He/she has similar experiences as Person A. In a hybrid setting, he/she could no longer observe strength and weakness naturally and needed to structure meetings. While similar to B and C, he/she mentioned that managers need to trigger reflection and self-awareness themselves need to reflect. With this knowledge, he/she turned to professional help, which could help set the stage for self-awareness in a hybrid work environment.

## 4.8 Vulnerability

The data collected regarding fostering vulnerability was small, but a distinct red thread through all the answers was seen. Every manager expressed that due to hybrid being digital and office-based, little to no change in their adaptation to fostering vulnerability had changed. The process had just become longer due to employees being in the office less frequently.

All the interviewees answered that strong vulnerability is accomplished through transparency and leading by example. If a manager can be vulnerable, so can the employees. The method itself had not changed, but the process had become longer. Person C said that vulnerability is a product of successfully fostering the other factors of the interview.

*"If you can build a feedback culture, the vulnerability will arise with trust and good collaboration. Fostering it in a hybrid setting has not changed. It just becomes a longer process" - Person C.*

Person E and F gave individual examples of why the process had become longer. Person E expressed that leading by example becomes more complex when going digital because it is harder to gain the opportunity to lead. Hence, he/she created the opportunity. He/she implemented an Excel file where the employees would log their successes and downfalls from last week and log what they have on their plate this week. In doing so, it is easier for Person E to lead by example, even when digital. Person F highlighted that due to the missing body language and other factors individuals use to connect personally, it had become more challenging to build trust and for transparency to be vulnerable.

The vulnerability was held in high value by all the managers, yet little to no change had been implemented. They all explained that fostering vulnerability needs to be led by the manager; it is unfair to assume employees will be vulnerable with managers and other team members if the manager fails. Person C, the manager with the most experience in a managerial position, said, "*no one will be vulnerable if you can't be it, so if I'm resilient, my team will be*". Hence all managers agreed that vulnerability is required from being transparent and leading by example. Of course, some adaptations could be implemented to simplify the process of being transparent and leading by example, such as the Excel file Person E mentioned. Nevertheless, the foundation and key success factors in fostering vulnerability in one team are, without a doubt, transparency and leading by example.

Person G explained that the situation became more complicated. For the team to feel comfortable showing vulnerability, the manager tried to lead by example. In everything the person does, and by also showing different and personal sides of oneself, "*the same is transferred to the team*". This is no longer so easy to accomplish in a hybrid work environment because the team can no longer perceive the manager as often due to less contact with the team. Because the work is done digitally with words and not with a physical presence, it comes across as much more formal. The manager must take much more time in one-to-one meetings and ask directly how the other person feels. Person G mentioned that he/she is no longer satisfied with an *I am fine* response but wants to hear more personal things. In addition, the manager felt the need to tell planned personal stories in the meetings, which may not come so naturally, but hopefully have a similar effect as in the office. Persons A, B and D, on the other hand, did not comment any further, but simply stated that no changes were made and that the process has instead been longer.

## 4.9 Overview of results

Through the interviews, for all 8 factors that foster PS in a team, certain practices were found that needed to be adapted. Table 3 presents a summary of the main adjusted practices of all interviewed persons.

Table 3 - Main Adjusted Practices from each Manager Regarding each Question

	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E	Person F	Person G
<b>Managing Mistakes</b>	Ownership, Communication	Communication	Picking mistakes	Ownership to the team	Communication	No change, just longer process	No change, just longer process
<b>Feedback</b>	Structure, Digital tool	Structure, Workshops, In-person activities	Structure, Workshops, In-person activities	Office-based, structure	Office-based, structure	Structure, Workshops, In-person activities	Digital tool, Communication
<b>Ensure everyone has a voice</b>	Structure	Structure	Communication	Rules in digital meetings	Structure, No hybrid meetings	Team contract	Rules in meetings
<b>Foster an environment of Curiosity</b>	No change	Informal meetings, Structure	No change	Informal meetings, Structure	Informal meetings	No change	No change
<b>Collaboration and constant communication</b>	Digital tool	Structure, Informal meetings	Communication, Structure	Informal meetings	Informal meetings	Structure, Informal meetings	Structure, Informal meetings, Digital tools, Communication
<b>Trust</b>	No change	No change	Workshops	No change	Workshops, Buddy	No change	Communication
<b>Self-awareness</b>	Structure	Skill matrix	Office-based, Structure	Workshops	Informal meetings	No change	No change
<b>Vulnerability</b>	No change	Digital Tool	Questionnaire	No change	No change	No change	No change

## 5. Discussion

The following chapter will discuss the data collected in correlation with the literature.

Subchapter 5.1 highlights the practices and experiences managers had with the eight factors in an office environment. Subchapter 5.2 discusses managers' challenges when fostering psychological Safety (PS) in a hybrid work environment and how it affects the eight factors. These two sub-chapters serve as a foundation to clarify the last part of the discussion. They show what the situation in the office was like, why these practices were chosen at that time, what challenges arose in the change to a hybrid model, and what this meant for the previous practices. Finally, a discussion in subchapter 5.3 explains the main adjusted practices in fostering PS. These adjusted practices were developed in response to the challenges managers faced moving from office to a hybrid environment.

### 5.1 Fostering Psychological Safety in an Office

#### 5.1.1 Managing Mistakes

Studies mention the importance of fostering an environment where mistakes are acceptable and team members are confident that taking risks will not be punished. Edmondson (1999) presents the practice of creating and communicating clear boundaries. The purpose of boundaries is not to create a space that restricts others. It is argued that by creating these boundaries, employees will know to what extent they can take risks and feel free to fail (Edmondson, 2019). Person B and E implemented clear boundaries in an office-based setting with good results. However, Person A explained that boundaries are not enough; he/she also emphasized having clear communication, which encourages a no-blame culture.

#### 5.1.2 Feedback

Throughout the literature review, feedback is seen as a big part of any organization. This does not suggest that it is easy to give feedback, but all organizations and teams must implement a feedback culture (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010). Feedback is one of the seven factors Edmondson uses for measuring PS because it shows how comfortable individuals feel raising critical issues and how those issues are received (Edmondson, 1999). In the interviews, it was evident that all managers placed significant value on a feedback culture. Most managers agreed that feedback is a natural consequence of continuous, encouraging communication and constant collaboration. This allows employees to give each other brief, personal feedback that is either

spontaneous or planned. The feedback can be done in a trustworthy environment due to collaboration and formal and informal communication.

### 5.1.3 Ensure Everyone Has a Voice

Ensuring everyone in a team is being heard and that everyone has a voice is an essential aspect of PS. PS is about being safe enough to speak up and being able to challenge the status quo without fear of blame or judgment. Some practices can be found in literature: structuring meetings, brainstorming sessions, and workshops (Tiwari & Lenka, 2015; Dusenbery & Robinson, 2020). In combination with structuring meetings, Persons C and F mention that they pay close attention to the employees' body language in meetings. This allows them to recognize signals and approach the person if they suspect that he or she is not feeling well or is not being given the opportunity to express himself or herself.

### 5.1.4 Curiosity

In Edmondson's (2019) three stages to foster PS, she mentions that managers need to invite participation and give the employees room to innovate. Furthermore, creating a particular focus group with different individuals from different teams can spark curiosity (Barnett, 2020). Person A, C, and F said that managers need to spark curiosity within the employee by giving them room to think. Start by asking non-leading questions. Person C even stated that managers should be careful with their words so they do not give perceived correct answers. An example is asking, *"should we change this process to that"*, which could inflict the employee with thoughts of a correct answer and hence little to no curiosity can be inspired.

### 5.1.5 Collaboration and Communication

The ability to collaborate is essential in a team, in order for individuals to work together. Managers can create and foster healthy collaboration through focus groups, and regularly working together help foster an environment of collaboration and communication (Dusenbery & Robinson, 2020). All the interviewees pointed out that being in the office allowed the team to have informal and short spontaneous conversations with each other. Doing so helped the collaboration and communication in the team at work in the long run. In addition, managers were able to have short check-ins on the way to the break room, for example, which ensured that there was a constant exchange between the team and the manager. Furthermore, Person C points out that the flow of communication, often in meetings, often occurs through body

language. As a result, physical signals could be given to who wanted to speak and how what was said came across.

### 5.1.6 Trust

A team without trust is without interpersonal safety. Employees need to trust that their work and risk-taking will not be judged or blamed (Edmondson, 2003a). Person D's response is directly connected to Tuckman's (1965) theory that trust is fostered through regular collaborations and informal meetings, such as coffee or lunch breaks. Other managers agreed that leading by example is necessary in achieving trust. By communicating their own mistakes and showing vulnerability, managers can foster trust.

### 5.1.7 Self-awareness

On the topic of self-awareness, there were different strategies. Three managers mentioned that these qualities were already considered during the recruitment process. The other four, Person A, B, C, and D saw the need to promote self-awareness in the team through leading by example, initiating specific discussions, having question rounds, and conducting feedback sessions. Promoting self-awareness allows individuals to find out who they are, how they are perceived, and how they would like to work best. This is consistent with Barnett's (2020) argument for why self-awareness is important for PS.

### 5.1.8 Vulnerability

Practices related to vulnerability are also congruent with the literature. As Coleman (2017) points out, the managers interviewed use the practice of leading by example, being transparent, and showing vulnerability to create open discourse and to make the team feel comfortable showing that side of themselves as well. When managers show their vulnerability, they can set an example that promotes collaboration, trust, and communication within the team (Edmondson, 2019). This approach could be observed in all interviewed managers.

## 5.2 Challenges in Fostering Psychological Safety in a Hybrid Work Environment

As is seen in the literature review, there are a few challenges with moving a team to the hybrid model. Challenges such as increased difficulties with team development, conflict management,



decision making, collaboration, and increased risk of subgroups forming within the team (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). The challenges identified concerning the eight factors are discussed below.

### 5.2.1 Managing Mistakes

In the interviews, five out of seven managers agreed that through moving to a hybrid setting, they encountered challenges regarding their methods of managing mistakes. However, some managers did not experience a change in management style. Those who experienced no change had already cultivated a method that worked in a hybrid setting. Three out of five managers noticed a lack of collaboration and communication between the individuals and the manager, as Haas (2022) also discovered in her research. This resulted in a decrease in experimentation due to a higher need for assurance. Person A expressed that before hybrid, his/her focus was fostering a no-blame culture. The person explained that he/she was the owner of managing mistakes, meaning he/she would hear about all the mistakes which had happened and then be able to guide the conversation. In doing so, he/she could simply foster such a culture through his/her responses. However, when moving to a hybrid, this was not enough. Similar to Person B's experience, employees become too worried and need more assurance.

Nevertheless, they did experience a decrease in their effectiveness with experimenting, which these boundaries create room to explore. It is assumed that this is due to Person B's experience. His/her employees had already communicated clear boundaries to operate within, yet he/she experienced an increase in employees' need to get assurance, hence requiring more communication from their managers to ensure that they can own up to their mistakes. It is believed that the increased need for assurance could be related to communication issues, as Mitchell and Brewer (2021) explained. According to them, these issues occur when moving to a hybrid setting.

### 5.2.2 Feedback

In several interviews conducted, managers expressed concern about their feedback culture. Their teams' feedback culture had taken a grave hit due to the decreasing collaboration and communication the hybrid work environment brought. A hybrid work environment decreases communication and collaboration, thus affecting the feedback culture (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021).

Person B expressed a considerable loss in the team's feedback culture due to going hybrid. Notably, the regular day-to-day feedback disappeared. Going hybrid, they had stopped meeting and working together regularly. As their feedback culture depended on collaboration and giving day-to-day feedback, it disappeared in a hybrid setting.

A correlation could be made to trust, which will be discussed further. Trust is a factor fostered through regular synchronous connectivity and face-to-face activities (Haas, 2022). Due to going hybrid and losing these activities, employees lose their trust in each other, thus lowering the feedback rate. This can be explained by Bloom-Feshbach and Poyet (2018), as well as Edmondson (2019), who argue that lost trust also means that feedback is no longer given as easily. Even though hybrid is partly office-based, Person B noticed that when employees were in the office, no one wanted to give feedback, and employees were too unsure of each other. Interestingly, Persons F and C both express similar situations where they had lost a significant part of their feedback culture due to the loss of an exclusively office-based environment.

### 5.2.3 Ensure Everyone Has a Voice

As mentioned, team members who feel like their opinion are being heard and that their actions have an impact are more likely to speak up. Team members who are more likely to speak up will heavily benefit the team in innovation, effectiveness, creativity, and more (Edmondson, Bohmer & Pisano, 2001). All managers were aligned that the move to hybrid had affected their ability to ensure everyone was feeling heard. None expressed a complete loss due to their inability to meet in the office for certain meetings, yet they all had relied heavily on reading body language, which is limited in a hybrid setting. Person C even noticed an increase in what Edmondson (1999) called *being nice* (see chapter 2.3.4). Employees agreed with other employees' opinions out of fear or were uncomfortable in the virtual meeting, leading to confusion and lack of collaboration.

Person G was even quite hesitant to answer the interview question; he/she expressed that they barely did hybrid/virtual meetings. He/she explicitly said that due to failing to ensure everyone has a voice, meetings should be office-based at all costs. All managers expressed a negative feeling regarding this question, and almost all said that they would always prioritize office-based meetings if possible.

#### 5.2.4 Curiosity

Curiosity is a virtue sought after by any organization due to its noticeable increase in innovations and development. By giving everyone a voice and inviting participation, managers can spark curiosity within their members (Edmondson, 2019). Person A, C, F, and G mentioned no significant challenges with curiosity due to moving hybrid. The managers thanked their success on the adaptations implemented beforehand, similar to the managers who successfully managed mistakes in a hybrid setting.

Nevertheless, Persons B, D, and E experienced a deficit. Due to the lack of informal conversations and participation, curiosity dwindled. The challenge for the managers is that curiosity is mainly created by these factors and cannot be forced, which they are also aware of. Their view on this subject relates to what neuroscientist Levitin (2015) argues in his research. He claims that curiosity and innovation develop most significantly when teams are not forcing it, but employees' minds are allowed to wander freely (Levitin, 2015).

#### 5.2.5 Collaboration and Communication

A hybrid work environment has been proven to harm collaboration and communication (Haas, 2022). Tuckman (1965) credits collaboration as one of the critical factors in developing trust within a team. Hence, moving to a hybrid meeting without adapting would devastate the team with low collaboration and trust, resulting in a divided team without PS (Tuckman, 1965; Edmondson, 1999). Collaboration is a vital step in developing PS in any team. Since PS is a team construct, collaboration is essential to foster PS in Edmondson's three stages (Edmondson, 2019). All the interviewed managers agreed and were affected by a lack of communication and collaboration in a hybrid setting. For example, check-ins with the employee were no longer possible to the same extent as before. A hybrid work environment generally means that constant communication and collaboration are no longer a given, as Haas (2022) argued. This means that the number of check-ins, informal chats, or collaboration happens less frequently.

#### 5.2.6 Trust

Hybrid work environment have been shown to lower trust within the team due to their decreasing effect on collaboration and communication (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). Through informal, regular face-to-face activities, trust can be fostered (Pinsonneault & Caya, 2005). Because collaboration and communication directly decrease in hybrid work environment, trust

can be difficult to foster. Persons G and C had extensive difficulties fostering trust in a hybrid setting, while other managers had successfully fostered trust through specific adaptations and practices.

Four out of seven managers answered that they had successfully fostered trust in a hybrid setting. All seven managers agree that trust cannot take root in the team without managers leading by example. If employees are to trust others, they need to feel trust from their manager. However, only four expressed that they had completed this task in a hybrid setting. Person G and C explained that trust in a hybrid setting is more challenging since the team sees the manager and other members less than before.

### 5.2.7 Self-awareness

Due to the diminishing communication and interpersonal interaction, as Haas (2022) points out, a hybrid work environment creates difficulties in promoting self-awareness. This can also be seen in some of the managers interviewed. They point out it has become more difficult in this setting since there is a lack of communication and collaboration and, as Person A mentioned, the missing body language. Apart from these challenges, no other major difficulties could be identified.

### 5.2.8 Vulnerability

In contrast to the other factors, most managers expressed no significant challenges in fostering vulnerability in a hybrid setting. They expressed that fostering vulnerability did not differ enough in a hybrid work environment and could be fostered similarly in an office-based environment.

## 5.3 The Impact of the Challenges on Team Building, Development, and Change Management

### *Team Building and Development*

The literature review has shown that PS is one of the main factors for an effective and successful team. This is because PS promotes other important factors that are needed, such as communication, collaboration, and trust (Bloom-Feshbach & Poyet, 2018). This can be justified by the model of Arizeta, Swailes & Senior (2007), in which the factors *common vision*, *common incentives*, *coordination and communication*, and *trust* were identified to form an effective

team. Furthermore, according to Tuckman and Jensen (2010), based on Tuckman's (1965) model, similar factors emerge that address how a team can be developed. All managers stated that constant communication, collaboration, and building trust were significant problems in a hybrid setting. This is important due to two factors. First, it shows that these are important factors for managers as an effective and successful team is essential. Second, it expresses the importance of PS and how it is essential to build a team, but also how it affects and promotes these specific factors, as Bloom-Feschbach and Poyet (2018) have shown.

Moreover, a team that conducts team building in an office work setting and then later moves to a hybrid work environment could, in turn, face challenges. As mentioned previously, *common vision*, *common incentives*, *coordination and communication*, and *trust* are four leading factors, which teams need to be effective (PS is represented by trust, coordination, and communication). In a hybrid setting, the workplace differentiates from office-based to digital, hence the issue of building trust and coordination and communication arises. *Common vision* should not change depending on the work model; the vision remains the same: *sell more, better feedback, lowering cost, etc.* *Common incentives* are unaffected by working models: *better numbers, bonuses, etc.* *Communication and coordination* are the opposite. There are countless management consultants supporting managers in communicating and coordinating teams in an office setting due to the difficulties of ensuring everyone is understood and heard. The hybrid work environment adds additional complications; team members are no longer together as they used to, and some colleagues might not even meet physically for weeks. Mitchell and Brewer (2021) highlight these concerns when transferring to a hybrid work environment.

### *Change Management*

As a result of these challenges found in the hybrid setting, all managers had to make at least certain adjustments to ensure that the desired climate prevailed in the team again. This can be explained by the fact that the change to a hybrid work environment meant that practices could no longer be carried out, or only to a limited extent, as they were not in balance with the new environment, which required an internal reaction (Porras & Silver, 1991). The discovery of imbalance arose because the environment, such as the flow of communication, was no longer the same, creating an urgency to adopt practices. However, as explained in the chapter on change management (see 2.1.2), institutionalizing new practices is not as simple. For example, Person B had to give the team an explanation for a practice to promote curiosity and then encourage the team to take it seriously so that everyone could benefit. Person G reports the same experience with trust. This observation can be described with Kotter's (1996) model. He

says that a vision is essential to implement change; otherwise, the need is not clear, and resistance arises. Moreover, the people involved must be encouraged to act on this vision repeatedly for this vision to become institutionalized.

Another observation was the flexibility needed when making adjustments. This should occur in a state of *changing* where those involved are willing to adapt (Lewin, 1947). For example, Person E talked about how the new practices used at the beginning were not working as they should, so adjustments had to be made with the help of feedback from the team. This made it possible to explore what works while the practice has not yet been institutionalized. From the interviews, Porras' and Silver's (1991) argument was observable. They argue that even if all managers go through the same initial change, different solutions are found (Porras and Silver, 1991). Depending on the conditions in the team and the resources, different practices are put in place to help reinforce the dwindling PS.

## 5.4 Main Adjusted Practices

The following discussion addresses how the challenges listed prior can be countered. When looking at the data analysis, certain patterns can be detected (see Table 3 in 4.9). The following four elements are overarching themes identified by analyzing the manager's various implemented practices used to promote PS. These elements appeared in several categories, as they can be used for different purposes.

### 5.4.1 Structure

Throughout the interviews, it was found that managers who focused on creating a clear structure for how their teams should work hybrid had a significant benefit in fostering PS. Managers described that structuring meetings to be digital or on-site beforehand had benefited employees and met the following factors: ensuring everyone has a voice, feedback, communication, and collaboration. This gave them a sense of clarity and transparency to better prepare for the meetings.

Clear communication was a practice most managers highlighted through almost all the factors discussed. Regarding managing mistakes, communicating clear boundaries in which their employees would be free to experiment and fail must be more transparent and structured, which provides the missing assurance. This is a crucial practice to shift the ownership to the employees (Mitchell, 2021). Ensuring everyone feels heard was a significant concern for most managers.

To foster PS in a hybrid setting, they felt the need to structure the agenda in the meeting and, in doing so, make sure everyone had time to speak up. Changing their rhetoric to enforce engagement and encourage them to share their genuine opinions was of great help for managers. Organizing their meetings benefited factors such as trust and self-awareness while also ensuring managers and employees would have more time with each other. Finally, structuring formalized questions for check-ins and one-on-one meetings helped managers communicate and be vulnerable with their employees.

#### 5.4.2 Digital Tools

From the interviews it could be seen that digital tools are increasingly used to foster PS in teams. Different tools are used to support some of the 8 factors. With today's technological possibilities, managers and their teams can respond quickly to each other's concerns. This helps the feedback culture because, as Manager A explained, "*it shows that someone is there and it will be taken care of.*" It also helps with trust because it makes the other person feel looked after and that their concerns are a priority (Edmondson, 2019).

Digital tools are also used for feedback in general. Platforms are utilized where quick and unconventional feedback can be requested and received. Other platforms also ensure that communication and collaboration can be maintained. For example, Google Chat provides the opportunity for constant communication and accessibility when needed. Miro is another platform that fosters collaboration in a hybrid setting. An openly accessible calendar can build trust in the team by creating boundaries and transparency. Finally, digital tools are used to work on self-awareness in the team. Person B applied a digital skill matrix to identify strengths and weaknesses more easily, as the interpersonal exchange in the team was missing and reflection was lost.

#### 5.4.3 Workshops

Workshops emerge as a solution for several of the eight factors. This type of seminar can be used, for example, to learn how to give feedback and how it should be received in a hybrid work environment without coming across too negatively in a personal context. Furthermore, workshops were used to build trust in the team. This helps to re-establish an interpersonal connection with the team and get closer on an informal level. Finally, workshops can also be used to promote self-awareness. In these sessions, employees must often focus on themselves and hear other perspectives, which makes them start to reflect (Bosler, 2021). Workshops are

also used by the Persons A, B, and E to create understanding and clarify the importance of these issues so that further practices can be put in place and the team continues to build on what has been discussed (Kotter, 1996).

#### 5.4.4 Informal Meetings

It was noticeable that managers spoke highly of introducing more informal meetings. As mentioned in the challenges, managers generally miss the casual conversations that arise in an office setting. To counter this and foster PS in a hybrid setting, managers organize informal meetings after each official meeting. Employees could continue to stay if they had any more topics they wanted to elaborate on and, in doing so, create room for curiosity.

Communication and collaboration were heavily hit by going hybrid due to the lack of office-based work. Several managers organized voluntary meetings where employees could share projects they were working on and chat with their peers. Furthermore, as mentioned before, trust is created by regular informal meetings, where colleagues can form interpersonal connections, which is a crucial point in fostering PS (Edmondson, 2019). Several managers countered this challenge through these informal meetings where employees were allowed to take time from their work to focus on their interpersonal relationships.



## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to collect data from Swedish managers in order to answer the two research questions, (1) *Why have Swedish managers changed their practices to foster psychological safety in a shift to a hybrid work environment?* and (2) *What are the main adjusted practices used by managers to foster psychological safety in a hybrid work environment?* The data collected was compared with the literature in the discussion and reviewed accordingly. The two mentioned research questions will be answered, followed by an outlook on possible future research in this field.

### 6.1 Research Question One

*Why have Swedish managers changed their practices to foster psychological safety in a shift to a hybrid work environment?*

Hybrid work environments are becoming more and more attractive among employees. Organizations that want to be attractive workplaces must adapt to a hybrid work environment (Mitchell & Brewer, 2021). Nevertheless, change is no easy task; a shared vision needs to be communicated, and a sense of unity must be formed within the team. However, moving to a hybrid work environment attracts some additional challenges for change. As explained in the discussion, managers expressed difficulties with *communication, feedback, and collaboration*. These three factors are directly connected with change. Hence, the hybrid work environment creates challenges that complicate the change process. psychological safety (PS) is regarded as an essential factor for team building and team development nowadays (Bloom-Feshbach & Poyet, 2018). Teams are built through a shared vision, shared incentives, coordination, communication, and trust (Tuckman, Jensen, 2010). PS influences these indicators just as it determines how well a team can develop using Tuckman's (1965) phase model. However, from the interviews, it is now recognized that in a hybrid work environment, trust, feedback, communication, and collaboration no longer appear naturally in everyday working life because the structures for them are not in place. Consequently, this impacts how effective teams can be and how they develop.

For this reason, it is essential and relevant to find out how PS can be fostered in a hybrid work environment. Managers need to question their old practices that worked in the office setting, identify what they were suitable for, understand whether this is still being achieved, and adapt

if necessary. The following sub-chapter will answer which main practices managers can adapt to tackle these challenges.

## 6.2 Research Question Two

*What are the main adjusted practices used by managers to foster psychological safety in a hybrid work environment?*

From the data of the interviews, it could be seen that the eight identified factors to promote PS are very interconnected. Many of the practices presented addressed different factors. For example, group trust can be created if communication and collaboration are in place, and making mistakes is not seen negatively in the team. Another example of the interconnectedness between factors is that when group trust, vulnerability, communication, and collaboration are present, it can be ensured that everyone in the team has a voice. Based on this network of determinants of PS, the identified adapted practices in a hybrid work environment are those that were most mentioned by managers and address a wide range of factors.

The first identified exercise is structuring work processes and meetings. This ensures that a feedback culture is strengthened, groups can be trusted, and vulnerability, and self-awareness can be promoted. Furthermore, communication and collaboration can be improved, and it ensures that everyone has a voice in the team. Furthermore, different digital tools are now used in a hybrid work environment. These tools or platforms can help strengthen communication, collaboration, trust, and self-awareness and introduce a new process for feedback. Workshops can be used in teams to help build trust by strengthening interpersonal bonds, giving feedback, or strengthening self-awareness through mutual exchange. Finally, informal meetings strengthen curiosity, communication, collaboration, and trust in the team.

Due to the interconnectedness and interdependence of the factors, these practices are considered essential to promote PS. Other solutions presented by managers were sometimes very creative but tended to be company-specific or did not have the same range of influence as the various factors. This could be because this topic is still in its early stages, so most organizations are still in a learning process of testing and searching for the most appropriate solution. The future will show which practices will become established. However, a trend can already be observed that due to their adeptness, the four identified practices are valuable for managers.

## 6.3 Future Research

If further research is to be done in the same area and the limitations in chapter one (see 1.5) are to be addressed, certain points need to be included.

First, it would be important to study a larger sample group to take a holistic perspective. However, this requires a longer period and more resources to conduct such research.

It would also be advantageous if the interviews lasted longer than 30 to 60 minutes. This allows one to delve deeper into the answers, ask more follow-up questions, and thus get a better understanding of what was said. It could also be determined that if only the manager's perspective is considered, whether the practices are the appropriate ones and have the desired impact on the team.

Lastly, such a project can provide valuable experience at a later stage. As a hybrid work environment is still a new concept for many teams, fundamental experiences are still being gained. This means that certain practices will continue to change, so it will be interesting to see what structures and practices become established in the future.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix 1 - Call for Interview

#### Post on LinkedIn

English below.

Leder du ett hybrid arbetslag?

Som en del av vår magisteruppsats vid Ekonomihögskolan vid Lunds universitet, söker vi individer som har en ledande position i ett hybrid arbetslag i Sverige.

Min uppsatspartner Raffael Bless och jag undersöker hur hybrida arbetsplatser har påverkat dig som chef att anpassa hur er kultur fostrar trygghet, frihet att tala ut och respektfull ifrågasättande (psychological safety).

Vi vill genomföra korta live- eller online intervjuer för att få en inblick i dina erfarenheter och insikter. Vi kommer dock att behandla dina resultat konfidentiellt

Om beskrivningen passar in på dig och du är intresserad, eller om du känner någon som är det, vänligen kontakta oss via LinkedIn eller via e-post:

Pablo.Velazco97@gmail.com

Blessraffael@gmail.com

Vi tackar dig för att du stöttar oss med vår uppsats och för att du delar detta inlägg.

#### ENGLISH

Are you managing a team in a hybrid work environment?

As part of our Master's thesis in Management at Lund University School of Economics and Management, we are looking for individuals who have a team lead position in a hybrid team in Sweden.

My thesis partner Raffael Bless and I are interested in finding out how you as a team leader have adapted in a hybrid work environment to create a culture based on trust, allowing everyone to speak up and ask curious questions in a respectful environment (psychological safety).

For this purpose, we would like to conduct short live or online interviews to get an insight into your experiences and insights. However, we will treat your results confidentially.

If the description fits and you are interested in the topic, or if you know someone who is, then please get in touch with us on LinkedIn or by email:

Pablo.Velazco97@gmail.com

Blessraffael@gmail.com

We thank you for supporting us with our thesis and sharing this post.

#University #Master #Thesis #Management #Psychologicalsafety #Team #Hybrid



**MASTER THESIS IN THE WORKS**

# **MANAGER NEEDED FOR INTERVIEW**

*We are looking for managers who lead a  
team in a hybrid work environment in  
Sweden.*

---

**HAVE YOU DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED  
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN YOUR HYBRID TEAM?**

**THEN WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY!**

if the description fits and you are interested in the topic, or if  
you know someone who is, then please get in touch with us on  
LinkedIn or by email:  
Pablo.Velazco97@gmail.com  
Blessraffael@gmail.com



## Appendix 2 - Random Messages to Managers on LinkedIn

### First Message to connect on LinkedIn

Hey! I am a student at Lund University School of Economics and Management and I am currently working on my master thesis. My thesis partner and I are exploring psychological safety in a hybrid team. May I ask you to accept this request so that I can explain it to you in more detail? Thank you!

### Message once connected

Hi X!

Thank you for accepting my request!

My thesis partner and I are looking for managers who are leading a team that transformed into a hybrid team. We are interested in finding out how the implementation of psychological safety has changed through hybrid workplaces and what practices are now used to create such a working environment. Otherwise, you can also have a look at our post on my profile.

Would that be something you would be interested in?

Have a nice evening!

Best,

Y

## Appendix 3 - Pre-Interview Information

The following interview will be anonymous, we will not mention your name or the company name. However, the following data will be collected and mentioned: company industry, team size, and years of experience. We will not mention any information which can lead back to you or the company.

Moreover, would you agree that we could use some of your comments as quotes to give more meaning to the message.

To prevent us from missing any critical information, would you allow us to voice record this interview? All recordings and other material connected to you or the company will be deleted after publication.

### **Topics we will be discussing in the Interview**

1. Managing mistakes
2. Feedback culture
3. Ensure everyone has a voice
4. Motivate Curiosity
5. Encourage Collaboration
6. Building Trust
7. Creating Self-awareness
8. Encourage Vulnerability

### **Definitions of terms used in the interview**

#### *Psychological Safety:*

“A shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.”

#### *Hybrid Work Team*

“A team that works from home as well as in the office. It can be decided individually (up to a certain degree) where the work is done.”

#### *Self Awareness*

“Self-awareness is the capacity to recognize your own feelings, behaviors, and characteristics - to understand your cognitive, physical and emotional self.”

#### *Vulnerability*

“Willing to show emotion or to allow one’s weaknesses to be seen or known.”

*Trust*

“Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”

## Appendix 4 - Interview Questions/Structure

### Start of the Interview

Do you agree with the information regarding anonymity, recording and using your quotes for the text, which we sent you beforehand?

### Questions to start with

1. How big is the team you manage?
2. What type of organization is it?
3. For how long have you been in this type of role?

### Main Questions

1. Managing mistakes
  - a. How did/do you ensure/communicate that people are allowed to make mistakes?
    - i. How do/did you manage mistakes within your team?
2. Feedback
  - a. How (in what setting) did your employees give feedback and how do they do it now?
    - i. Only one communication channel?
    - ii. How is it perceived?
  - b. In what way did/do you foster a culture of Feedback?
    - i. How did/do you motivate people to give feedback
3. Ensure everyone has a voice
  - a. How did you make sure that everyone has a voice?
  - b. How do you make sure that everyone has a voice?
4. Foster an environment of curiosity
  - a. How do you trigger curiosity within your team and how did you used to do it?
5. Collaboration and constant communication
  - a. How did you do check-ins before and how do you do them now? How did you settle with the structure of the check-ins (daily, weekly, etc.)
  - b. How do you include people to be part of discussions when some are at the office and some at home?
6. Trust
  - a. How did you develop trust within your team?
  - b. How do you do it now?

7. Self-Awareness

- a. How did you motivate your team to be self-aware?
- b. How do you do it now?

8. Vulnerability

- a. How did you encourage your team to be vulnerable?
- b. How do you do it now?