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# Understanding Psychological Safety in Hybrid Work Teams: Experiences of Barriers and Facilitators

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## Abstract

This study aims to enhance understanding of the barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. It also explores whether these factors differ for hybrid teams compared to traditional settings. The research involved a literature review of existing barriers and facilitators, followed by qualitative, semi-structured interviews with members of two hybrid organisational work teams. These interviews allowed for the identification of hybrid-specific barriers and facilitators. Participants also conducted self-assessments of their psychological safety, with both teams demonstrating high levels of psychological safety. Key hybrid-specific barriers identified include *loss of informal conversations*, *loneliness*, *varying locations*, and *lack of body language*. Hybrid-specific facilitators include *established on-site relationships* and *prior experience*. The study concludes that *inclusive leadership*, *leader humility*, and *strong work relationships* are essential facilitators of psychological safety in any setting, not just for hybrid work settings. Facilitators such as *active listening*, *leader transparency*, and *social capital*, while crucial, are less visible in hybrid environments due to the remote nature of work. Moreover, hybrid teams with high psychological safety rarely face barriers such as *abusive supervision* and *job insecurity*, and issues like *enforced leadership decisions* and *being monitored* are not significant in these contexts. Furthermore, managers in hybrid teams with high psychological safety can use these insights to refine their leadership by implementing structured team interactions, ensuring decision-making transparency, and creating safe spaces for team members to express concerns. These practices can enhance team cohesion, creativity, and performance, leading to more resilient and adaptive teams. Organisations can benchmark their practices against these findings to assess and improve psychological safety.

**Keywords:** Psychological safety, Hybrid work, Hybrid work environment, Hybrid team, Team psychological safety, Barriers, Facilitators

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# 1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the background and problem area of the study. It begins by defining psychological safety and its importance in today's dynamic work environment. The chapter discusses how hybrid work arrangements impact psychological safety within teams. The problem area is identified, highlighting the need for research on the barriers and facilitators to psychological safety in hybrid settings. The purpose of the study and the research question are then formulated. Lastly, the chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

## 1.1. Background

In today's dynamic and rapidly evolving work environment, psychological safety has become a prevalent topic of discussion. As defined by Amy Edmondson, who coined the topic, psychological safety is the feeling that taking interpersonal risk is safe in the work environment (Edmondson, 2019). Further, psychological safety evolves over time, and when it is existent, members in a team will be able to seek feedback, admit mistakes and address problems (American Psychological Association, 2024). Moreover, it is a good idea for leaders to question whether they are promoting psychological safety, asking themselves if those around them feel safe to express their thoughts and ideas without concerns about facing negative consequences (Lockwood Primus, 2023).

“Team” is an additional aspect added to the concept of psychological safety. This is where psychological safety operates on a group level, influencing the learning behaviour of the team, consequently impacting both team and organisational performance. While the feeling of safety and the tendency to speak up are experienced individually, they manifest in a group. The team psychological safety can therefore enhance decision-making by creating an environment where individuals feel empowered to express their viewpoints and raise concerns, thus enriching the perspectives for consideration. Additionally, it nourishes a culture of ongoing growth and development, as team members are encouraged to openly acknowledge mistakes and embrace learning opportunities (Gallo, 2023).

While psychological safety contributes to performance, learning, and well-being, little is known about how different work arrangements affect a team's psychological safety. Given that new work arrangements, such as hybrid work, have become increasingly prevalent in



recent years, studying how hybrid work affects psychological safety has become highly relevant (Tkalich et al. 2022). Hybrid work involves employees attending the office a few times a week while having the flexibility to work remotely for the rest of the time. This model can vary, allowing individuals to choose their office days or following organised schedules for teams or the whole organisation (Gartner, 2024). Further, remote work gained its popularity during the pandemic of Covid-19, when people were forced to work from home. Now, when the pandemic is over, hybrid work is considered to be here to stay (McKinsey, 2023). Arbanas et al. (2023) present research that shows that 34% of adult workers have a hybrid schedule. Further, these hybrid workers spend on average 3 days in office and 2.6 days remotely. Hybrid work is thus the future, calling for a new context of research and exploration.

The transition to hybrid and remote work due to the pandemic has underscored the importance of psychological safety within organisations. Managers now encounter the task of addressing personal factors affecting employees' work setups. This calls for a reassessment of managerial strategies to promote psychological safety when discussing matters of work-life balance (Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021). Furthermore, unlike in-person teams, hybrid teams lack the immediate access and daily interactions that facilitate relationship-building, comfort, and consequently psychological safety. Therefore, to create an environment of innovation and high performance within a hybrid team, proactive measures are essential (Dilan, 2021).

## 1.2. Problem Area

Given the importance of psychological safety, it is compelling to further develop research in this area. Tkalich et al. (2022) highlight the significance of psychological safety for team learning behaviours and performance. However, the authors note a lack of clear understanding regarding how new work arrangements such as remote or hybrid work impact successful team functioning. The authors point out that little is known about how different work modes affect teams' psychological safety. As flexible workplaces become integral to our current way of working, exploring this is highly relevant.

Previous research on psychological safety has predominantly focused on healthcare settings, identifying several barriers and facilitators. However, this focus limits the relevance of these

findings to hybrid work environments, which are becoming increasingly common. It is essential to investigate if these known barriers and facilitators apply to other sectors where hybrid work settings are utilised, or if there are additional barriers and facilitators at play. Furthermore, this investigation can help understand how to create and maintain psychological safety in hybrid environments. Edmondson and Bransby (2023) also underscore the need for more research that leaders and team members can use to promote psychological safety. With all of this in mind, a clear research gap has been identified which creates a problem area that will be explored in this study.

### 1.3. Purpose

This study aims to increase knowledge of barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. Furthermore, it will explore whether hybrid work settings differ in terms of barriers and facilitators to psychological safety, compared to traditional on-site work settings. Therefore, this study will provide a literature review of established barriers and facilitators to psychological safety. The found barriers and facilitators will then be researched to see if they are experienced in a hybrid work environment for organisational work teams. Further, this study will uncover any additional barriers and facilitators that may emerge and how they are experienced by the team members. Ultimately, the goal is to provide insights into the specific barriers and facilitators relevant to hybrid organisational work teams, which can be valuable for management seeking to promote psychological safety in such environments.

### 1.4. Research Question

Given the limited research on psychological safety within hybrid teams and the purpose of providing insights into the relevant barriers and facilitators for such environments, we are prompted to ask the following research question:

*What are the barriers and facilitators to create and maintain psychological safety in a hybrid organisational work team, and how are they experienced?*

### 1.5. Delimitations

This study limits itself to two separate organisational work teams in a Swedish international company. The organisational work teams work closely together in a hybrid setting. For

example, some employees visit the office twice a week, while others are almost never at the office. Additionally, the team members have all experienced on-site work, ensuring nuance in their opinions. This study is limited to psychological safety in these specific hybrid organisational work teams, and will not cover psychological safety in other contexts.

## 1.6. Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into six main sections. Chapter 1 introduces the background to the subject and problem area. Further, the purpose and research question are formulated. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of existing literature on psychological safety. It covers barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety, the theoretical framework created based upon this, and psychological safety in a hybrid environment.

Chapter 3 consists of the methodology. It begins by describing the research approach, including the semi-structured interviews and the measurement of psychological safety. It then outlines the literature collection, the empirical collection in terms of sampling of organisation and respondents. The chapter concludes with data analysis, ethical considerations and reflections of validity and reliability.

In Chapter 4, the data collection is summarised and presented. Chapter 5 follows with a discussion and analysis of the empirical findings in relation to the literature. It begins by discussing the new barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment, followed by an analysis of the remaining results. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the findings to fulfil the thesis' purpose and answer the research question. The chapter ends with practical implications, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter provides an extensive review of psychological safety literature, covering its benefits, team-level dynamics, along with barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety. Additionally, it identifies the limitations of psychological safety, and then presents a theoretical framework based on the barriers and facilitators. The chapter ends with a review of hybrid work and psychological safety.

### 2.1. Psychological Safety

The construct of psychological safety was first discovered by Schein & Bennis (1965 cited in Edmondson, 1999), and was described as necessary for people to feel secure and capable of changing. Edmondson (2019) further defines psychological safety as the belief that it is safe for interpersonal risk taking in the work environment. According to the author, it refers to the feeling of being able to speak up. Speaking up describes the exchanges coworkers have back-and-forth, for example giving feedback, expressing concern and seeking help. Further, Edmondson (2019) expresses that speaking up entails navigating interpersonal risks of varying degrees. At times, it can be intimidating, while in other instances, it may seem more manageable. Yet, there are occasions, where individuals opt for silence after weighing the potential consequences. Often, individuals refrain from sharing their ideas or concerns due to underlying fears, which are not always readily apparent. Consequently, the decision to remain silent often goes unnoticed by others, safe for the individual who chose not to speak. Furthermore, Edmondson (2019) describes how you can measure a person or a team's psychological safety, presenting a survey measure (see chapter 3.1.1.2). The author also underscores that psychological safety arises within groups, and it is common for groups within organisations to cultivate distinct interpersonal climates. So, even if there is an organisation that has a strong culture, high and low levels of psychological safety are available. These variations in workplace climate influence coworker behaviours subtly yet significantly (Edmondson, 2019).

Psychological safety brings various advantages to the coworkers, and ultimately, the performance of the organisation. Agarwal and Farndale (2017) for example, argue in their study that psychological safety mediates the relationship between high performance work systems and creativity implementation. Mehmood et al. (2022) expand on this notion, as creativity calls for risk taking, due to the fact that it may not always produce desired results.

Moreover, when a workplace lacks psychological safety, employees may hesitate to exchange information among their team, leading to a decline in overall team creativity. Therefore, it is pivotal that the creation of psychological safety is prioritised, as the findings of their study show that psychological safety is an enabler for team creativity (Mehmood et al. 2022). Additionally, both Andersson et al. (2020) and Edmondson (2002), put psychological safety in the context of innovation performance and capabilities, finding that psychological safety is positively associated with innovation. Demonstrating that teams characterised by higher levels of psychological safety exhibit a greater likelihood for innovation.

Further, psychological safety has been shown to drive team performance since it establishes an environment where team members feel comfortable voicing their differences constructively, thereby enhancing the team's ability to learn from experiences and devise more creative task approaches (Schaubroeck et al. 2011). Edmondson and Bransby (2023), in their literature review, underscore that psychological safety is pivotal in allowing organisations to learn and perform within dynamic environments. The authors' research has shown psychological safety's ability to facilitate the active participation of individuals in collective efforts, both in terms of generating ideas and taking action. Moreover, Edmondson and Bransby's (2023) extensive empirical findings have highlighted the direct, mediating, and moderating functions of psychological safety in determining performance outcomes across individual, group, and organisational levels. Psychological safety consistently emerges as a critical factor in overcoming challenges in teamwork and unlocking the potential of individuals and organisations alike (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Furthermore, agreeing with the effect psychological safety has on team performance, Liu and Keller (2021) conclude in their study that psychological safety encourages knowledge sharing, task performance, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Moreover, psychological safety ensures the team's ability to generate innovative and creative results.

### 2.1.1. Team Psychological Safety

Edmondson (1999) underscores how team psychological safety is positively associated with team learning behaviour for organisational work teams. The author defines the organisational work team as "groups that exist within the context of a larger organisation, have clearly defined membership, and share responsibility for a team product or service" (Edmondson, 1999, pp. 351). Further, Edmondson (1999) describes learning behaviour as a process of

reflection and action, defined by feedback-seeking, asking questions, experimentation, result reflection, and dialogue regarding errors or unforeseen outcomes. Moreover, psychological safety mitigates excessive concern regarding others' responses to actions that may carry risks of embarrassment or threat, a common feature of learning behaviours (Edmondson, 1999). Bonde et al. (2023) further argue that members of a team often share the same experiences and perceptions of psychological safety, describing it as a group level phenomenon. Agreeing with this, Edmondson (2004) describes an individual's feeling of psychological safety as likely being shaped by interactions among close coworkers, and that team members tend to hold a similar perception about psychological safety.

## 2.2. Barriers to Psychological Safety

Presented in this chapter is previous research that explores numerous factors that hinder the creation and maintenance of psychological safety in individual or team settings. Within the context of this study, these factors have been defined as barriers, relating to what they are most often referred to in earlier research. They include any aspects that undermine psychological safety, both directly and indirectly. The categorisation made aims to cover all elements that might hinder psychological safety in an organisational work team.

### 2.2.1. Negative Leadership Behaviours

An established barrier to achieving psychological safety is various poor leadership behaviours. Lackie et al. (2023) found in their study that poor leadership negatively affect psychological safety as the coworkers are more likely to fear offending someone or possible repercussions. Remtulla et al. (2021) expand on this notion, defining poor leadership as authoritarian. The presence of authoritarian leadership hinders psychological safety as individuals perceive decisions to be enforced rather than collaboratively discussed. This can lead to a sense of disempowerment and a lack of ownership among team members (Remtulla et al. 2021). Edmondson (1999) agrees and expresses that when team leaders adopt authoritarian or punitive approaches, team members might hesitate to participate in the interpersonal risk inherent in learning behaviours, such as openly discussing errors.

Another form of poor leadership is abusive, which negatively affects psychological safety. Abusive supervision, in terms of leadership, is defined as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal

behaviours, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, pp. 178). Abusive supervision can lead to a diminished sense of workplace security, characterised by feelings of distrust, anxiety, and fear among employees. In response, individuals are driven to safeguard their valued resources and regain a sense of control by avoiding speaking up (Agarwal & Anantatmula, 2022; Yang et al. 2023). Liu et al. (2016) highlight another aspect of abusive supervision, explaining that it has the potential to strain the relationships between leaders and subordinates, potentially becoming a significant source of psychological distress for employees.

### 2.2.2. Hierarchy

Research by Remtulla et al. (2021) and Lackie et al. (2023) suggest that hierarchy acts as a barrier to psychological safety within teams. This barrier increases hesitancy to voice opinions as it fosters a perception that certain team members’ opinions are not valued as highly, thereby creating feelings of inferiority. Although Remtulla et al. (2021) state that hierarchy could potentially improve role clarity and coordination, they highlight that those “lower” in hierarchy might incorrectly assume others possess more relevant information. This could lead to team members believing that their own knowledge is irrelevant and deciding to not speak up.

Moreover, the concept of power distance is rooted in hierarchical structures, according to Appelbaum et al. (2016) and serves as another aspect of hierarchy. Appelbaum et al. (2016) describe power distance as how much an individual sees differences in status and authority within institutions and organisations. Moreover, this presents as an additional barrier to psychological safety, particularly when perceived unequal and unfair. The authors’ research shows that a perceived power distance is negatively correlated with psychological safety, indicating how individuals of lower status are less inclined to question someone of higher status when they perceive the power distance as high (Appelbaum et al. 2016). Further, Lee et al. (2018) argue that hierarchy creates conflicts between team members, consequently affecting their psychological safety negatively. This perspective is supported by Fleştea et al. (2017) and Hu et al. (2018) who both identify a mutually exclusive relation between power distance and psychological safety, indicating that a higher power distance results in lower psychological safety. Additionally, Hu et al. (2018) found that higher power distance results in lower information sharing between team members.

### 2.2.3. Being Monitored

Another barrier to psychological safety is the coworkers' feelings of not being competent enough. Individuals who sense that their competence is being doubted are more inclined to feel monitored or evaluated, leading to withholding opinions to avoid risking damage to their reputation (Edmondson, 2002; Edmondson, 2004). Lackie et al. (2023) agree and further expand on this idea. While their study was performed in a simulation-based setting, the authors draw the conclusion that when individuals sense they are being observed and thus fear their mistakes will be exposed, psychological safety can be jeopardised. In situations where observation occurred, individuals reported experiencing increased vulnerability and diminished confidence. This was attributed to difficulties in completing preparatory tasks or perceived shortcomings in the necessary knowledge and experience required for skill performance (Lackie et al. 2023).

Further, the fear that comes along with being monitored, Edmondson (2019) expresses, is not an effective motivator and can moreover put psychological safety at risk. Numerous managers continue to endorse the notion that fear can serve as a motivator. They operate under the assumption that individuals who are fearful, either of management or the repercussions of underperformance, will exert heightened effort to avoid negative outcomes, ultimately leading to favourable results. While this approach might seem plausible in situations involving straightforward tasks with minimal room for error or innovation, it proves ineffective in roles that rely on learning and collaboration for achievement. Connecting this to psychological safety, Edmondson (2019) underscores that in environments characterised by psychological safety, individuals hold the belief that making mistakes or seeking assistance will not result in negative reactions from others. Instead, honesty is not only permitted but also encouraged.

### 2.2.4. Uncertainty

Edmondson (2019) argues that in an uncertain world, psychological safety becomes increasingly crucial. This safety allows individuals to fully engage in their tasks, and thus, different forms of uncertainty within the workplace act as barriers and directly influence the creation and maintenance of psychological safety. This notion is widely supported in academic literature, highlighting how uncertainty affects your chances of feeling



psychologically safe (Dieckmann et al. 2022; Jeong et al. 2023; Kim, 2020; Lackie et al. 2023; Remtulla et al. 2021; Sun et al. 2023). According to Lackie et al. (2023), uncertainty in new learning approaches adversely has a negative effect on psychological safety, whilst Sun et al. (2023) explore work uncertainty as a moderator on psychological safety, noting that the higher the perceived work uncertainty, the more pronounced its effects on psychological safety among the respondents.

Dieckmann et al. (2022) further elaborate on ambiguity and found that unclear details of organisational change processes made people feel less psychologically safe. The authors note that unclarity in which competencies and skills people possess also affected the respondents' feelings of psychological safety. Not only does other team member's knowledge affect psychological safety, but Remtulla et al. (2021) also argue that your own perceived lack of knowledge creates a barrier to psychological safety, as it attributes to a lack of awareness around respective topics. Feelings of uncertainty around a topic subsequently increases anxiety of appearing as the only member lacking in knowledge or of saying something incorrectly.

Research has delved into how job insecurity creates a barrier to psychological safety in the workplace, and how it negatively affects several organisational outcomes (Jeong et al. 2023; Kim, 2020). Job insecurity is defined as a "worker's perception or concern about potential involuntary job loss" (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006, pp 770), and according to Kim (2020), the decreasing levels of psychological safety in result of job insecurity further has harmful effects on performance within the organisation.

#### 2.2.5. Faultlines

Chen et al. (2017) introduce the concept of faultlines as being an additional barrier to psychological safety. The authors describe it as instances where subgroups form within a larger group, based on differing characteristics. The concept of faultlines is explored by Gerlach and Gockel (2022), who examine psychological safety in relation to demographic faultlines, determined by attributes such as gender, ethnicity and age. Gerlach and Gockel (2022) found that demographic faultlines are negatively associated with initial levels of psychological safety in a team, and thus, identifying these faultlines as a significant barrier.

Chen et al. (2017) also examine faultlines in relation to team performance considering psychological safety as a moderating factor. Their findings suggest that faultlines had a greater effect on team performance when a team had lower psychological safety. Whilst psychological safety is used as a moderating factor here, it highlights the relation between faultlines, psychological safety, and team performance. Furthermore, Tkalich et al. (2022) describe how the creation of subgroups can result from preferences of members to work either remotely or on site, and that this can also pose challenges to the team's psychological safety.

#### 2.2.6. High-stakes Environment

A high-stakes environment has been shown to be an established barrier to creating psychological safety, as the risk is higher. Wanless (2016) discusses that when the perception of risk is high, psychological safety is jeopardised. In such circumstances, individuals experience a lack of assurance that they will be given the benefit of doubt, leading to uncertainty and reluctance to participate. Further, Wanless (2016) introduces several factors that contribute to the high-stakes in these moments, such as increased visibility, ambiguity, hierarchical structures, or the presence of identity-related issues. Public exposure intensifies the perceived stakes due to the expectation of being judged (Wanless, 2016). Agreeing with this, Hitchner et al. (2023) express that a high-stakes environment can put psychological safety at risk, as it can be intimidating in the high-stakes environment to reveal weaknesses.

#### 2.2.7. Self-consciousness

Various personality traits can affect the creation and maintenance of psychological safety (Grailey et al. 2023; Remtulla et al. 2021). Zhang et al. (2010) found in their study that the personality trait of being self-conscious is shown to influence the feeling of psychological safety. May et al. (2004) agree, expressing that employees who constantly are concerned with others' perceptions of them are prone to experiencing lowered sense of psychological safety in the workplace. Consequently, they may feel reserved when attempting to explore new methods of task accomplishment.

Further, self-consciousness can also influence psychological safety within virtual communities (Zhang et al. 2010). Members who exhibit high levels of self-consciousness are particularly concerned about how their knowledge-sharing behaviour is being perceived by

others in the community. As a result, they are more sensitive to potential negative consequences when sharing knowledge, leading to a decrease in their psychological safety. This is shown to be particularly evident in specific virtual communities where participants' real identities are visible, and they are already acquainted with each other through offline, face-to-face interactions. Thus, the relevance of self-consciousness may diminish individuals' psychological safety within virtual communities (Zhang et al. 2010).

### 2.3. Facilitators to Psychological Safety

Alongside the barriers to creating and maintaining psychological safety, there are several factors that contribute positively to the psychological safety of an individual or a team. Within the context of this study, these positive contributions have been defined as facilitators. Facilitators include any aspects that enhance psychological safety, both directly and indirectly, and these categorisations seek to encompass a wide range of elements that play a role in facilitating psychological safety across different settings.

#### 2.3.1. Inclusive Leadership Practices

Woods et al. (2024) explore leadership behaviours that facilitate feelings of psychological safety, with a particular focus on inclusive leadership practices. They characterise these practices as leaders who not only promote inclusion and acknowledge diverse perspectives, but also model inclusive behaviours which set expectations and norms for the team. These inclusive behaviours foster positive and strong social connections among team members. Their research shows that inclusion is positively related to psychological safety and facilitates its achievement (Woods et al. 2024). Nembhard and Edmondson (2006, pp. 947) introduce leader inclusiveness as “words and deeds by a leader that invites and appreciates others' contributions”. They find that inclusiveness is positively associated with individuals' feelings of psychological safety in their teams and in their interactions with each other. Leader inclusiveness welcomes both questions, challenges and attempts to include others in discussions and decisions, fostering a sense that everyone is psychologically safe to do so.

Hirak et al. (2012) expand upon the research by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), further confirming that leader inclusiveness positively impacts team members' perception of psychological safety. This reinforces the ideas that inclusive leadership acts as a facilitator of creating and maintaining a psychologically safe team environment.

### 2.3.2. Positive Leadership Behaviours

One aspect of positive leadership behaviours that support psychological safety includes active listening, as argued by Castro et al. (2018). Castro et al. (2018) investigate the role of listening behaviours within supervisor-employee interactions. The study shows that supervisors who actively listen foster psychological safety, consequently enhancing the creativity of the speaker. Additionally, Newman et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of supportive leadership behaviour as it promotes psychological safety by creating strong connections among team members and utilises supportive organisational methods. Moreover, Newman et al. (2017) further develop on this idea, expressing that the majority of factors contributing to psychological safety, both at individual and team levels, fall within the category of supportive environments. Their results showed that psychological safety emerged as the means through which these supportive environments influenced positive outcomes, including enhanced knowledge sharing, engagement, creativity, innovation, and overall performance.

Additionally, Edmondson (2004) underscores how leadership behaviour affects psychological safety. The way that team leaders behave is often mimicked by the team, thus leadership behaviour creates an implicit model of acceptable behaviour within the team. It is therefore crucial that the team leaders explicitly demonstrate vulnerability and fallibility, to ensure that the subordinates understand that it is okay to make mistakes and feel comfortable taking risks. Furthermore, team members are likely to perceive their team environment as secure when the leader adopts a coaching approach, actively invites feedback, and is receptive towards questions and challenges (Edmondson, 2004). Expanding on this notion, Hu et al. (2018) talk about leader humility in relation to psychological safety. Moreover, leader humility had a negative association with team psychological safety in teams where there was a significant power distance between leaders and team members. Conversely, in teams with low power distance, where the hierarchy between leaders and team members is less pronounced and interactions are more equal, leader humility positively affects team psychological safety. This means that when leaders in such teams show humility, it tends to enhance the sense of safety among team members because it promotes openness and trust. Moreover, this shows the importance of leaders possessing the trait of humility, especially in contexts where the power distance is low (Hu et al. 2018).

Furthermore, another facilitator to creating and maintaining psychological safety is the leaders' competence (Mao et al. 2019). When there is a common perception among the team that the leader is both competent and non-self-serving, psychological safety was enhanced. The psychological safety that has been strengthened through leader competence affects employees' capacity to effectively utilise their available resources for job performance and engage in productive behaviours such as sharing knowledge and learning within the team (Mao et al. 2019). In addition to this, Yi et al. (2017) argue for transparency among leaders in terms of facilitating the creation and maintenance of psychological safety, as it impacts the employees' ability to focus and be creative.

### 2.3.3. Work Relationships

An additional enabler of psychological safety has been identified in the theme of relationships between team members. A study done by Carmeli and Gittell (2009) underscore the importance of high-quality relationships within the organisational team in facilitating psychological safety. Within high-quality relationships, the authors introduce the concept of relational coordination, which describes an interplay between the members and their communication. Furthermore, the authors argue that relational coordination is categorised by three aspects of high-quality relationships; shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect, and subsequently found that these aspects facilitate psychological safety within the teams.

Kahn (1990) also found that interpersonal relationships enhance psychological safety when such relationships were supportive and trusting. The author describes that these interpersonal relationships had a flexibility that allows people to embrace the risk of failing without having to fear the consequences. Building upon Kahn's (1990) research, Edmondson (2004) further elaborates that trust and respect are crucial in interpersonal relationships when it comes to promoting psychological safety.

### 2.3.4. Social Capital

A strong social capital within the team or organisation is another facilitator of psychological safety (Carmeli, 2007). Further, the author differentiates between external and internal social capital. External social capital, refers to the relationships a participant establishes in a social

network. Additionally, internal social capital focuses on the relationships among actors within a specific social collective or organisation. The essence of both internal or external social capital lies in the web of social relationships that members establish among themselves in which they can learn, create and acquire useful knowledge. Lackie et al. (2023) support this notion and state that social capital influences an individual's ability to navigate and contribute to psychological safety. Furthermore, Carmeli (2007) emphasises the importance of high-quality relationships in fostering a safe and effective learning environment, as these relationships form the foundation of social capital.

Gu et al. (2013) found in their research on social capital and innovation that psychological safety plays a mediating role between the two. With team psychological safety as a mediator, social capital and innovation were positively correlated, highlighting its importance. Conversely, Gu et al. (2013) describe two additional dimensions of social capital; the structural and relational dimension. The authors explain the structural dimension to social capital as pertaining to the overall pattern of relationships among individuals. The authors further argue that social interactions are seen as indicative of this structural aspect of social capital. This structural aspect is shown to be crucial in forming the networks that enable psychological safety. Gu et al. (2013) also present the relational dimension of social capital that encompasses qualities inherent in relationships, like trust. The authors reflect on the relational dimension of social capital and present a positive correlation to psychological safety.

In their research on workplace interventions and their positive effects on social relations, Bonde et al. (2023) explore the link between social capital and psychological safety among colleagues. The authors highlight that psychological safety is needed to give a more in-depth understanding of workplace social capital and its importance.

### 2.3.5. Supportive Organisational Context

Edmondson (1999) identifies that context support is another facilitator to psychological safety in her early research on the subject. The author found a positive correlation between context support and psychological safety and that the amount of context support can be used to predict levels of psychological safety experienced by a team. Building on this, Edmondson (2004) expands on how organisational context support acts as a facilitator for team

psychological safety. The author describes how access to resources and information typically reduces defensiveness and insecurity among team members, particularly concerns regarding the resources being unequally distributed. Dieckmann et al. (2022) support the significance of contextual factors in facilitating and influencing a person's psychological safety. The authors highlight how a supportive organisational context facilitates psychological safety, but also that psychological safety itself contributes to a supportive organisational environment.

#### 2.4. Limitations on Psychological Safety

Whilst the concept of psychological safety has been extensively explored and researched by many, Edmondson (2004) acknowledges its limitations. Psychological safety is an explanatory construct, a concept that helps explain how team members feel, their perceptions and assumptions held, rather than a tangible tool that managers can simply adjust, like a policy or procedure. However, Edmondson (2004) highlights that although psychological safety cannot be directly altered, there are still actions that can be taken to build it. Furthermore, Eldor et al. (2023) found that high levels of psychological safety may not always be positive for work performance, especially when the work consists of standardised tasks. The authors conclude that while moderate levels of psychological safety are associated with better performance, high levels of psychological safety are sometimes associated with decreased performance in repetitive and standardised tasks. This is due to high psychological safety distracting employees from their core tasks by focusing their attention on novel tasks, or encouraging team members to push boundaries in standardised tasks, where doing so is only counterproductive (Eldor et al. 2023). While psychological safety is extensively seen as having a positive relationship with performance at work, there are reasons as to why this might not always apply which are worth noting in this study. As this study aims to increase knowledge on barriers and facilitators of creating and maintaining psychological safety, its nonlinear relationship to performance for different types of work is worth keeping in mind for any manager or person aiming to foster psychological safety within their team.

## 2.5. Theoretical Framework of Barriers and Facilitators

Barriers	
Negative Leadership Behaviours	Agarwal & Anantatmula (2022), Edmondson (1999), Lackie et al. (2023), Liu et al. (2016), Remtulla et al. (2021), Tepper (2000), Yang et al. (2023)
Hierarchy	Appelbaum et al. (2016), Fleştea et al. (2017), Hu et al. (2018), Lackie et al. (2023), Lee et al. (2018), Remtulla et al. (2021),
Being monitored	Edmondson (2004), Edmondson (2002), Edmondson (2019), Lackie et al. (2023),
Uncertainty	Edmondson (2019), De Cuyper & De Witte (2006), Dieckmann et al. (2022), Jeong et al. (2023), Kim (2020), Lackie et al. (2023), Remtulla et al. (2021), Sun et al. (2023)
Faultlines	Chen et al. (2017), Gerlach and Gockel (2022), Tkalich et al. (2022)
High-stakes Environment	Hitchner et al. (2023), Wanless (2016)
Self-consciousness	Zhang et al. (2010), Remtulla et al. (2021), Grailey et al. (2023), May et al. (2004)
Facilitators	
Inclusive Leadership Practices	Hirak et al. (2012), Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), Woods et al. (2024)
Positive Leadership Behaviours	Castro et al. (2018), Edmondson (2004), Hu et al. (2018), Mao et al. (2019), Newman et al. (2017), Yi et al. (2017)
Work Relationships	Carmeli and Gittell (2009), Edmondson (2004), Kahn (1990)
Social Capital	Bonde et al. (2023), Carmeli (2007), Gu et al. (2013), Lackie et al. (2023)
Supportive Organisational Context	Dieckmann et al. (2022), Edmondson (1999), Edmondson (2004)

Table 1: Theoretical framework



## 2.6. Hybrid Work and Psychological Safety

Edmondson and Bransby (2023) argue in their discussion of future research directions that the prevalence of hybrid and remote work arrangements is increasing, emphasising a necessity for research into what effects these work arrangements have on psychological safety. Without further exploring we will not fully understand the impacts. The authors note that although there is a growing awareness in literature about a new fluid nature of modern work teams, studies have predominantly focused on more traditional, intact teams. Edmondson and Bransby (2023) also address the methodological challenges posed by these emerging research questions, such as determining the impact of remote work on psychological safety. The authors explain that much literature offers insights from observing and talking to people in natural work settings, and that limited access to these settings could be problematic.

Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2010) explore psychological safety within virtual communities, with the aim to understand if psychological safety influenced their knowledge sharing. The authors focus on a virtual community built within a particular organisation and describe these communities as facilitating information exchanges and overcoming time and space limitations, similarly to hybrid work teams. The authors argue that virtual communities play a significant role in business and describe the importance of knowledge sharing within a virtual environment. Without the sufficient knowledge needed, people might get reluctant to participate. In addition, the authors link the participation to the personal well-being and psychological safety of the participants. Zhang et al. (2010) further describe psychological safety as a context-specific phenomenon and list further literature supporting psychological safety and its effect on learning behaviour and personal engagement at work. Moreover, they suggest that psychological safety may also be an important factor in virtual settings, and especially a setting that is not completely virtual, where the members' participation in the community may also be consequential to them in the "real world", and they fear negative reactions. Zhang et al. (2010) conclude the need for future studies examining the role of psychological safety and if it differs in other virtual situations.

Tkalich et al. (2022) argue that there is a lack of understanding for how remote or hybrid work might impact successful teams and how it affects their psychological safety. They also highlight the importance of investigating this, given that a hybrid more flexible workplace

seems to be an established aspect of our future. Tkalich et al. (2022) studied a software development company, and noted that there are many differences in feelings of psychological safety when working on site, in a hybrid environment or remotely. The authors conclude, for instance, that when being remote, people often remain in listening mode, they receive less feedback, or withhold or delay questions until they are back in the office. Tkalich et al. (2022) argue that psychological safety might be hindered because many behaviours and attitudes related to feeling psychologically safe are fostered by spontaneous interactions such as speaking up, asking questions and seeking feedback. The authors describe the threshold as higher for such behaviours when working remotely, due to things like a need for planning, waiting, technical issues or arranging the digital set up. Additionally, Tkalich et al. (2022) present the frequency of spontaneous interactions when working on-site, hybrid teams or fully remote teams. The on-site teams had a low ability to focus, but more spontaneous interaction which facilitated their psychological safety. The hybrid teams with flexible work arrangements who had some working on site and some remote, had periodically spontaneous interactions, formation of subgroups, and periodically focused work. When the teams were always remote, there were limited spontaneous interactions, but the work was highly focused. Furthermore, the people who are remote rarely ask for help, or contribute to the problem solving, and they are likely to feel alienated and excluded from office discussions. Tkalich et al. (2022) describe that the experience of belonging in the team contributed to feeling valued. This feeling was enhanced through spontaneous office interactions and exchanging positive feedback. When working remotely, people felt a weaker sense of belonging, especially new employees who did not have the ability to develop informal bonds with each other. To mitigate feeling excluded when working remotely, and to get to know each other on a personal level, the participants scheduled digital after-works and chats over coffee. Moreover, the absence of contextual clues for remote workers makes it more difficult to time interactions.

As this aspect is still relatively unexplored, Edmondson and Bransby (2023) conclude by stating that there is a lot of uncertainty still about how the world of work arrangements will change following the covid-19 pandemic. How this uncertainty regarding different work arrangements will shape and influence the psychological safety research over the next few years proposes an open and interesting question.

## 3. Method

This chapter describes the methodology of this study. It details the research approach, highlighting the utilisation of qualitative semi-structured interviews and the measurement of psychological safety. Additionally, the chapter describes the process of literature collection, the sampling of organisation and respondents along with a description of the interviews. Moreover, it provides an overview of the data analysis and addresses ethical considerations, reflecting on bias and reflexivity. The chapter ends with a critical reflection on the validity and reliability of the study.

### 3.1. Research Approach

The purpose of this study is to explore barriers and facilitators to create and maintain psychological safety within organisational work teams in a hybrid work environment. The research has been done on people within two organisational work teams who work in a hybrid setting. In order to gain comprehensive insights of their perspectives of the barriers and facilitators found in the literature review, as well as gaining viewpoints on any additional barriers and facilitators that are specific for a hybrid work setting, it was crucial to employ an appropriate research method for gathering empirical data. The study has therefore adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders.

Additionally, the study has used a deductive approach. According to Alvehus (2023), the deductive approach is used to test theories against empirical material. Further, Bell et al. (2019) note that while the deductive approach may appear linear, it is quite intricate in practice. This is due to the fact that the researcher's perspective of the theory and literature may change as the process unfolds. Moreover, this is something that has been taken into consideration when conducting the study, as the non-linear nature of the deductive approach has enabled us to become adaptive in our approach.

#### 3.1.1. Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach has been used to explore the barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety among organisational work team members in their hybrid work environments. Silverman (2022) describes a qualitative method as appropriate when delving into individuals' perceptions, understanding processes, studying social interactions in

real life situations, and investigating complex issues. A qualitative method, according to Silverman (2022), offers a more nuanced and in-depth perspective of the phenomenon in question, showcasing how it unfolds through people's interactions.

By employing a qualitative method, it has been possible to not only investigate if the barriers and facilitators found in the literature review are experienced in hybrid work environments, but also to identify if there are any additional barriers and facilitators that are specific for hybrid work settings. Such a multifaceted and nuanced picture of how psychological safety is being created and maintained would be unattainable with, for example, a quantitative approach (Barbour, 2008). Barbour (2008) supports that a quantitative method would have been suitable if the study aimed to find out how many people experienced a phenomenon or studying the cause-and-effect relationship between variables (Barbour, 2008). The qualitative method, in contrast, has offered this study rich and detailed insights into the complex dynamics of psychological safety within organisational teams operating in hybrid work settings.

#### 3.1.1.1. Semi-structured Interviews

The collection of empirical data was facilitated through semi-structured interviews. According to Barbour (2008), conducting interviews is both an art and a science, requiring the interviewer to ask insightful questions and actively listen to responses. This balance is crucial for gathering relevant, valuable and rich data. Further, Barbour (2008) states that in order to capitalise on new ideas and reflections from the respondent, the semi-structured aspect is crucial, as it allows for the respondent to dictate the direction of the encounter, ensuring that attention is given to what they find most relevant, while also allowing the researcher to address all the questions and topics that are scheduled. Moreover, in the context of identifying barriers and facilitators to create and maintain psychological safety within hybrid work environments, the semi-structured approach was particularly beneficial, as it allowed new aspects to emerge which were relevant in our context. This allowed the respondent to further elaborate on their experiences with psychological safety and the significance it has for them.

#### 3.1.1.2. Measurement of Psychological Safety

We complemented our approach with numerical data, measuring the level of psychological safety within their teams. Specifically, each participant responded to a psychological safety

survey created by Edmondson (2019). This approach not only enriched the study with numerical insights, but also helped give background to the team members' experiences and perceptions they shared during the interviews.

The psychological safety was measured on a five point likert-scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The measurement consisted of the following seven items:

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you. (R)
2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
3. Members of this team sometimes reject others for being different. (R)
4. It is safe to take a risk on this team.
5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help. (R)
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 utilised.

Figure 1: Measurement of psychological safety

Four of the seven items were expressed positively, such that agreement with the statement indicates a higher psychological safety. Three items are expressed negatively such that disagreement with the statement indicates a higher psychological safety. These items are reversed (R) in analysing the data, so that a 5 in the data set is converted to a 1, for example. Edmondson's (2019) scale has proven to have a high inter-item reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), which shows how related the set of items are as a group, and that the different items aim to measure the same thing, which in this scale is psychological safety. Additionally, Edmondson (2019) emphasises the great usage of the scale, stating that it has been translated into multiple languages.

### 3.2. Literature Collection

The research presented is largely built on the foundational work of Amy Edmondson and further complemented by a systematic review of relevant academic literature that examines psychological safety and several factors that influence the creation and maintenance of it. Databases such as Lubsearch and Google Scholar were utilised in collecting literature with the criteria that a majority of the articles should be peer-reviewed to ensure the high quality and integrity of our sources. Keywords searched for and used in the collection process were psychological safety in combination with the following: barriers, facilitators, enablers, hindlers, limitations, learning behaviour, performance, hybrid work and remote work.

Additionally, we enlarged our literature collection and identified relevant academic papers through examining the citations of Amy Edmondson's key papers. This approach helped us identify related articles as they elaborated on her work and provided further insights into factors that were negatively or positively correlated to psychological safety. Whenever a factor was discovered as either a barrier or facilitator, additional literature searches were conducted to find supporting evidence for the initial claim. This approach ensured that these barriers or facilitators were not lone findings but were observed and supported by multiple authors, confirming their validity and significance in the context of psychological safety.

It is worth noting that the prominent reliance on the works of Amy Edmondson, may be perceived as a limitation in terms of the diversity of sources consulted. While Edmondson's contributions to the understanding of psychological safety are widely acknowledged and respected, the over-reliance on her work could potentially limit the breadth of perspectives considered in this study. Thus, while this study accepts and incorporates Edmondson's ideas into its framework, it also serves as a critical examination of her theories. Specifically, the research aims to assess the applicability of Edmondson's concepts within the context of hybrid work environments for organisational work teams. By doing so, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of psychological safety in hybrid settings.

Additionally, it is important to note that the identified barriers and facilitators had varying degrees of impact on psychological safety, with some being more influential than others. Furthermore, some barriers and facilitators acted as a moderator between psychological safety and an additional variable. Those barriers and facilitators that were identified as not having a direct connection to psychological safety, had to have multiple authors proving its relevance, in order for it to be classified as such. Additionally, it should be noted that while a thorough literature review has taken place, it is highly unlikely that every single barrier and facilitator to psychological safety have been found.

### 3.3. Empirical Collection

During the data collection phase of our study, criteria were established at both the organisational and respondent levels. The careful selection of suitable organisation and teams was pivotal in accomplishing our goal of exploring barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety within hybrid work teams.

#### 3.3.1. Selection of Organisation

The organisation selected needed to meet specific criteria. The organisation had to be value-driven, placing importance on principles such as learning, teamwork, and encouragement at its core, as it correlates with the concept of psychological safety. Additionally, it was necessary for the organisation to embrace hybrid work, transitioning from predominantly on-site work before the pandemic to a hybrid approach. Overall, the organisation should reflect modernity, innovation, and an international perspective.

The selection landed on company X, a prominent and diverse retail organisation based in Sweden. To maintain anonymity during interviews, the specific company chosen has remained undisclosed. Company X met all of the criteria set, and was therefore the most suitable choice for interviewing employees on psychological safety. Furthermore, interviews were carried out with employees from two different organisational work teams in company X. While there was discourse of reaching out to other organisations, the initial contact with company X resulted in more contacts within the organisation. Therefore, it facilitated the search for suitable teams. Furthermore, it was determined that the size of the organisation gave us a multifaceted perspective on psychological safety due to its diverse employees.

#### 3.3.2 Selection of Respondents

The selection of respondents entailed selecting employees within the same organisational work team in company X. Edmondson (1999) defines an organisational work team as a collective of individuals operating within the context of a larger organisation. They possess distinct membership, and collectively share responsibility for delivering a product or service as a team. Thus, our respondents had to meet the criteria of being a part of the same organisational work team. Another criterion concerning respondents is that they have experience of working on-site, and are currently in a hybrid work arrangement. Bonde et al. (2023) argue that drawing conclusions about psychological safety across an entire

organisation might pose challenges, given its diverse teams and hierarchical levels. Therefore, examining psychological safety is more effective with data gathered from teams comprising multiple members within each team. We chose to conduct the study in two organisational work teams that work closely together, had extensive organisational experience, and share the same leadership and resources. Given this, and the larger sample size (11 respondents), we were able to analyse our findings across the teams, irrespective of their belonging, and give nuance to our research.

It is crucial to note that our interviews were limited to individuals we initially had access to. In this study, respondents were selected based on their context rather than their skills, knowledge, or demography. The convenience sampling method was employed because it was easy for these individuals to meet the criteria required for participation. According to Alvehus (2023) convenience sampling refers to when the selection of respondents is based on which respondents are available. Further, the author argues that using convenience sampling may put the study at risk of only reflecting a certain group rather than a general phenomenon (Alvehus, 2023). This study addressed this risk by not drawing general conclusions to every type of organisational work team. It should also be noted that psychological safety is a topic which is highly personal and can vary from person to person. Therefore, our results are not the common truth. Instead, it is a suggestion for possible facilitators and barriers within our context.

### 3.3.3. Interviews

After conducting a thorough literature review which identified various barriers and facilitators, we developed a theoretical framework (See Table 1). Utilising this framework, we crafted an interview guide (See Appendix 1) containing questions tailored to each identified barrier and facilitator. These questions encompassed three dimensions: the barrier/facilitator itself, its impact on psychological safety in hybrid work, and any differences in experiences between hybrid and on-site work environments, to further nuance the answers. Our aim was to determine the experience of these barriers and facilitators to members of organisational teams operating in a hybrid work setting. Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the interview guide allowed us to supplement our existing theoretical framework by identifying additional barriers and facilitators pertinent to psychological safety in hybrid organisational work teams. These additional barriers and facilitators could therefore be brought up irrespectively of the question asked. Moreover, the



interviewees were allowed to direct the interviews, not only responding to predefined questions but also highlighting barriers and facilitators they deemed relevant whenever they wanted to. Consequently, the interview guide did not limit the collection of data.

Furthermore, we decided to conduct a pilot interview, which allowed us to adapt and verify our questions to obtain the necessary information. Thus, the pilot interview revealed certain questions to be wordy or redundant, which prompted their revision or removal to optimise data quality. Barbour (2008) highlights the advantages of a pilot interview as semi-structured interviews often lead to fluid interview schedules. A pilot interview can test the progression of discussion themes while also verifying that the questions asked elicit the necessary information to address the research questions. This step was key for us in ensuring that the interview process was efficient and successful in obtaining the desired data.

The interviews were conducted via Google Meet, however, adaptability was maintained by offering Microsoft Teams as an alternative platform based on respondent preference. Further, most interviews lasted between 30 to 48 minutes to ensure thorough coverage of discussion topics. Given the qualitative and semi-structured nature of the interviews, questions were open-ended, avoiding simple yes-or-no questions.

The interviews themselves began with introductory questions about tenure within their team and at Company X, as well as how often they work from home. Additionally, we first addressed facilitators to establish respondent comfort. Subsequently, we explored barriers, presenting each one individually to allow focused consideration. Finally, at the end of the interview, the respondents were invited to reflect on any additional barriers or facilitators that came to mind during the interview. Lastly, we asked for their participation in Edmondson's (2019) survey in order to measure their psychological safety within their team.

In Table 2, an overview of each respondent is presented, showing their respective gender, team, company experience, and their interview time. Further, as indicated by Table 2, the majority of the respondents were men. This can therefore affect the results of the study, giving a less diverse perspective.

Respondent	Gender	Team	Company Experience	Interview Time
A	Male	1	4 years	38:23
B	Male	1	9 years	43:25
C	Male	1	10 years	48:48
D	Male	1	9 years	38:46
E	Female	1	6 years	40:05
F	Male	2	20 years	46:47
G	Male	2	6 years	41:54
H	Female	2	15 years	30:33
I	Male	2	18 years	33:46
J	Female	2	15 years	26:51
K	Male	2	24 years	44:55

Table 2: Table of Respondents

### 3.4. Data Analysis

To analyse the data, various tools were used to streamline the process. In transcribing the interviews, we utilised the dictate function available on Microsoft Word, allowing real-time conversion of spoken words into text throughout the interview sessions. Using this enabled us to fully concentrate on asking the right questions and observing the interviewees' reactions to the questions. Additionally, to validate the transcription's word accuracy, each interview was audio recorded. This made it possible to re-listen to the interviews if there were any uncertainties regarding phrasing of the respondent's answers, and to manually correct transcription mistakes. The corrections included fixing transcription mistakes, eliminating repetitions, and making line breaks where the speaker changed between interviewer and respondent. These changes were made while preserving the original meaning of the content.

Further, this study's purpose and theoretical framework was used to create specific categories for organising the collected data. As noted by Barbour (2008), these coding categories typically mirror the questions posed during the interviews. Table 3 shows these categories, highlighting each focus area. The first two categories reflect whether or not the barriers and facilitators were experienced in the respondents' teams. Secondly, the next categories explore

any differences in how these barriers/facilitators manifested in hybrid work environments. Finally, the last categories are used to identify new barriers and facilitators to complement the existing theoretical framework.

Category	Have Experienced	Have Not Experienced	Difference	No Difference	New Barrier	New Facilitator
Colour						

Table 3: Categorisation colours

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

Several ethical principles were considered when conducting this study, helping us to ensure that ethical risks were minimised. According to Bell et al. (2019), the four main areas of ethical principles in business research to be considered when conducting our interviews are; avoidance of harm, informed consent, privacy, and prevention of deception. These ethical principles often overlap; for instance, ensuring privacy also involves protecting a respondent’s career from potential harm. Therefore, in order to minimise the ethical risks, we informed the participants about several key aspects: their anonymity, voluntary participation, their right to cancel the interview at any point, and that the interview would be recorded and transcribed. We also assured the participants that the information provided would be used solely for this thesis. All participants provided their consent based on this information before the interviews began.

The respondents were also fully briefed on the interview topics ahead of time, enabling them to make an informed decision about whether they wanted to participate or not, and helping to prevent deception. Furthermore, Bell et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of managing the data correctly. In line with this guidance, recordings have been deleted once they have been transcribed to ensure the confidentiality and security of the data.

#### 3.5.1. Biases and Reflexivity

Biases might have influenced the research, including how interview questions were formulated or in the analysis of the data (Bell et al. 2019). Given that the interviews were conducted within a well-known organisation about which we already held preconceived notions and thoughts, bias was crucial to consider. To minimise the risk of biases, we developed our interview-questions based entirely on a systematic and thorough review of

existing literature. The questions were open-ended and non-directive; encouraging respondents to provide genuine and unguided responses. Additionally, the anonymity of the respondents as well as lack of awareness about who else was interviewed reduced the likelihood of them not being transparent in their answers. Since their participation was voluntary, respondents had no incentive to provide anything but their honest opinions.

An important consideration in qualitative research is the researcher's own position within the study. Further, it is crucial for researchers to recognise how their own presence influences both the process and the content of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2023). For instance, the sectioning of barriers and facilitators was based on their similarities and whether they shared common concepts. This process was most likely shaped by our own perspectives of these aspects. However, by thoroughly exploring each aspect within the sections during the interviews, we mitigated risk of bias in the questions asked. Bell et al. (2019) describe reflexivity as the practice of questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and being aware of your own reflective stance within cultural, political and social contexts. Acknowledgement of our role throughout the research process contributed to higher transparency and us being aware of the implications, thereby ensuring a higher quality.

### 3.6. Validity and Reliability

Jacobsen (2002) argues that in qualitative research, the primary importance is ensuring the study aligns with the research questions. He proposes that while the concepts of validity and reliability originate from the logic of quantitative research, they must also be adapted for qualitative studies. Bell et al. (2019) support this notion, suggesting that alternative terms to validity and reliability are necessary to assess qualitative research. The authors therefore recommend using different aspects of trustworthiness as alternative terms for evaluating qualitative studies; credibility, transferability and dependability.

Jacobsen (2002) divides the concept of validity into two different ones, internal and external. The internal validity concerns the accuracy and relevance of the generated results, including correct representation of the phenomenon that is being studied. Bell et al. (2019) parallel this aspect with credibility - questioning how believable the findings are. High internal validity and credibility were ensured through us carefully selecting the method, respondents and organisation, all of which were suited to address our research question. Furthermore, basing

the interview questions on an extensive literature review ensured that the correct barriers and facilitators were explored.

External validity on the other hand, refers to the ability to make generalisations. Jacobsen (2002) discusses whether qualitative results might be generalised at a theoretical level or to other contexts. Bell et al. (2019) parallel this with transferability - asking if the findings apply to other contexts. Our approach to ensuring a high external validity and transferability involved providing comprehensible answers to the research question. Given that our interviews gave us clear insights into the barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety in hybrid work teams, it is plausible that similar results might be observed in other hybrid work teams. However, due to the limited scope of our empirical data, these findings should not be viewed as universally applicable truths for all contexts.

Furthermore, Jacobsen (2002) describes reliability in qualitative studies as questioning whether the results are dependable or if any element in the research process could have influenced the results. Bell et al. (2019) align with the aspect of reliability with dependability - asking if the findings are likely to apply at other times. Ensuring a high reliability was done by accounting for reflexivity and bias as described in chapter 3.5. Additionally, all interviews were performed in the same way and the results were critically examined in the analysis of the interviews.

## 4. Result

Firstly, in this chapter, the organisational work teams' measured psychological safety is presented. After this, our results on each barrier and facilitator are accounted for, displaying the respondents' different opinions of the barriers and facilitators for the given context. Further, a subchapter will be dedicated for presenting any new barriers and facilitators. The interview findings are presented irrespective of the team membership and instead based on their common experiences. This is due to the fact that both organisational work teams had similar scores and the same leadership.

### 4.1. Psychological Safety Measurement

All 11 interviewees participated in a survey designed to measure their psychological safety. Five of the participants were a part of Team 1 and six of the participants were a part of Team 2. The possible survey scores ranged from 7, indicating the highest possible level of psychological safety, to 35, representing the lowest possible psychological safety. The lowest score recorded was a 7 while the highest was 12. Overall, the result from the participants demonstrated high psychological safety among the respondents, as indicated by their low scores, in line with Amy Edmonson's (2019) usage of the scale. Team 1 had an average of 8.2 and Team 2 had an average of 8.8. The standard deviation for both teams was low, which suggests a small standard deviation and a tight clustering of data around the average, indicating homogeneity in the psychological safety score among the respondents within each team.

### 4.2. Barriers

#### 4.2.1. Negative Leadership Behaviours

Regarding negative leadership behaviours in terms of enforced leadership decisions, respondent A took a general approach, discussing how it has affected him in the past. He explained that it makes him feel uncomfortable sharing and expressing his opinions as he knows it will not impact the decision. Respondents J and F agreed, expressing how enforced decisions silence workers and make them feel disengaged. However, the majority of the respondents made it clear that this is not something that has been prevalent in their organisational work teams. For example, both D, E and I mentioned how this is not a barrier for their team specifically, however, it is a problem higher up. While the enforced leadership decisions are there, respondent D argued that he felt protected by his team leader. This notion

is one that respondent B agreed with. He expressed that he had not experienced enforced leadership decisions in their team constellation. Further, he argued that his team leader's transparency has created a safe environment. Again, highlighting the leader's ability to take responsibility for protecting their team.

*“Perhaps the continuation of enforced leadership decisions is that one doesn't feel inclined to be loyal to the organisation. But I received incredible support from my manager and her manager. That's what matters more to me, namely my immediate manager, so to speak.”*

(Respondent D, Own translation)

Whether enforced leadership decisions are more frequent in a hybrid work environment, H explained that the difference lies in the “distance” to the conversations of the decisions. *“There are more surprises when you are working remotely as you are not a part of the conversations due to the fact that you don't meet each other”* (Respondent H, Own translation). Moreover, the decisions can feel enforced, but this is due to the fact that it is harder to be a part of the conversations. Further, respondent F agreed and argued that decisions feel more enforced, it is therefore more a feeling rather than reality. However, the consensus among all the respondents is that there is no difference in frequency of enforced leadership decisions.

In terms of abusive leadership as a barrier to creating and maintaining psychological safety, respondent A argued that while he had not experienced that in his team, if it were to happen, he would feel as if he was not able to freely express his opinions or concerns in any matter. Further, respondent C mentioned that the abusive leadership would make him feel passive and introverted, as there is a danger in making mistakes and doing a bad job. While the abusive leadership had not been a problem in the studied organisational work teams, it became apparent that it is a problem among the higher ups (J, K, F, D, H, I). Respondent F further develops on this notion, mentioning that when hostility comes from higher ups, it affects his willingness to speak up. Respondent I agreed and mentioned that it creates a resistance among employees.

Looking at barrier of abusive leadership specifically in a hybrid work environment, H gives an example on how hostility among people higher up in the hierarchy manifests with hybrid work:

*“I’m thinking about how it generally works here, another manager, a higher-up manager, who calls everyone to a meeting, and then doesn’t come into the same room but sits in another room and interacts via Teams, and it’s like she doesn’t dare to meet us face-to-face. It’s like there’s a protective barrier of some sort when it comes to meeting on Teams. I think that it’s easier to be unpleasant on Teams than it is, actually, face-to-face in reality.”* (Respondent H, Own translation)

Further, respondent A mentioned that the impact of abusive leadership is more in remote work. In face-to-face interactions, you can gauge the tone and intention behind someone’s words. However, in a remote setting, even if someone expresses something, it is harder to determine if it is meant in a positive or negative way. In addition to this, respondent D argued that hybrid work has made it easier to be hostile. In large meetings, it is easy to feel uncomfortable taking the stage saying something. But online, it is more stripped-down and less personal, which he thinks makes it easier. Respondent E agreed, mentioning how she herself can be more hostile behind a screen compared to face-to-face interactions.

While some respondents believe that there is a difference in how abusive leadership manifests in hybrid work environments, respondents J, G, K, I, B, and F all agreed that there is no difference.

#### 4.2.2. Hierarchy

Regarding experiences of hierarchical structures within their previous teams, all the respondents agreed that there had been no feelings of hierarchy among the members, except respondent F, with his lone stance in believing that there might have been a little hierarchy based on competence, that wasn’t openly expressed. Respondent A, however, stated that they all felt valued and could contribute and express their opinions, highlighting a high team psychological safety. Respondent B mentioned that someone might have taken the leadership-role informally, in some situations, but that there wasn’t really any hierarchy in it. However, respondents I, C, H, K and G all agree that they have experienced the hierarchical



structures more clearly recently with the organisational changes. Respondent K expressed that he experiences that people now don't listen as much to others below them in the organisation. Further, respondent G mentioned how the current hierarchical structures make him feel:

*“If it is a hierarchical structure, and somebody has asked me to do something, I will not go beyond that, so I will limit my work only to the task that is assigned rather than to seek feedback or help, so I will close down myself to that specific task.”* (Respondent G)

Furthermore, about half the respondents did not experience that hierarchy or power distance were more prominent when working remotely (B, I, D, J, K, A) whilst the others (C, E, H, G and F) experienced a difference, or mentioned that it might be a difference in a hybrid environment in regards to people higher up in the organisation. Respondent C for example, believes himself to be far away from where things happen, and that he experiences the hierarchy stronger when working remotely. Respondent E also believes it makes a difference.

*“When working in a hybrid environment specifically, the outgoing people who have more power, would take up more time online because they would not notice or who they interrupt. It's very difficult for people who are not talkable to interrupt others and speak their mind”* (Respondent E)

#### 4.2.3. Being Monitored

Regarding the barrier of being monitored and its impact on creating and maintaining psychological safety, all respondents unanimously agreed that this is not an issue within their respective organisational work teams. Consequently, they could not determine whether this barrier becomes more apparent when working in a hybrid environment.

#### 4.2.4. Uncertainty

Regarding whether uncertain organisational situations act as a barrier to psychological safety, the opinions differentiated. For instance, respondents I, E, D, F and K describe how they are all more inclined to ask questions and speak up, because it is necessary and there is more to find out and understand. Respondent D says that he can see a difference in who speaks up more and respondent K mentions that it depends on the stability of the organisation and if he trusts his colleagues.

*“Yes, it feels like I become even more inclined to ask questions, because there are simply more question marks, and yeah, then you have to do it, ask those questions.”* (Respondent I, Own translation)

Some respondents (A, G and H) agreed that organisational uncertainty made them hesitant to speak up and ask questions, when they didn't know who to raise questions with or how it would be received. Respondent B reflected about the importance of his team in situations of organisational change where there is more uncertainty, and that he tries to find out how to get the best out of the situation.

Regarding situations where the respondents feel like they are lacking knowledge, respondents D, F, K, A and B answered that they are even more likely to ask questions and be open than the opposite. Respondent D expresses that you need to evaluate the situation first and that it depends on what the culture looks like. He goes on to describe that support from team leaders has always been there 100%, so in those situations, confessing shortcomings has never been an issue. On the contrary, respondents G, H, E and J all describe that they go more quiet when lacking in knowledge, with respondent H stating that she'll go quiet because she wouldn't know what to question.

None of the respondents had felt worried about losing their job whilst in their previous teams, however, the effect this general worry could have on their psychological safety differentiated. Several respondents (B, I, D, K, C) agreed that mistakes were a part of the job, and that it wouldn't make them less likely to admit them or ask questions within their team. Factors both D and C mention that could play a role are things like how big of a mistake it was or where you are in your career.

*“I probably did more at the beginning of my career. You learn that you can always make mistakes and that it is important to be open to that .... losing your job is perhaps a fear that may be present, but I think it's important to remember that there are always opportunities for improvement and that mistakes can lead to learning and development. So I strive to be open to admitting mistakes and learning from them.”* (Respondent C, Own translation)

Respondent F and A both agree that being worried about losing your job can affect your psychological safety negatively, with respondent A saying that it depends entirely on the management.

The overall consensus among the respondents is that different types of uncertainties are greater when working remotely (F, J, I, E, C, H, D, G and A). Respondent A, F and C explain that it is due to the reduced contact among your colleagues. Specifically, C highlights the feeling of not being on the same level as others and questioning why you are not involved. Respondent H agrees and believes that there is a big difference in her likelihood of speaking up and asking questions in uncertain moments when working remotely or when she is in the office, describing a feeling of vulnerability when working alone from home. Furthermore, respondent I argues that the uncertainties come from lack of interactions when working remotely.

*“I think to a certain extent that it is increasing a bit and that is because you probably don't get as much digitally. You get as much information, but maybe you don't hear anything else or maybe you don't raise that quick issue with someone just passing through, you don't reach out in chat the same way, so yeah.”* (Respondent I, Own translation).

Respondents C and K however, believe it to be about the same, but only because of their team and that they know each other so well from before.

#### 4.2.5. Faultlines

There was a common consensus among the respondents that faultlines exist within their organisational work team. Their effect on psychological safety however, was not agreed upon. Respondent G mentioned that the subgroups that exist within their team makes it harder to feel included when not being a part of them. The people who are in a subgroup together, tend to have meetings just by themselves, not inviting others. While respondent K agreed that subgroups exist he brought up that his seniority makes him less sensitive towards the barrier. However, respondent K speculated that the new people, who started working during the hybrid environment might feel differently. On the other hand, respondent B and C both agreed that sub groups are existing and not negative to the creation and maintenance of psychological safety. Further, respondent C argued that if you are part of a specific group or community, you might be more inclined to seek support and collaboration within that group.

It is about feeling involved and sharing experiences with others who understand your situation. Therefore, groups make him feel more psychologically safe.

In terms of how the barrier manifests in a hybrid work environment, there are different opinions amongst the respondents. While respondent I has experienced no difference in relation to on-site work, both respondent K and H believe that the sub groups become less and weaker when working in a hybrid setting. More specifically, K mentioned how the loss of informal conversations decreases the amount of sub groups, as people are not able to get to know each other on a friendly level. In contrast, respondents G, D, C and B all agreed that the sub groups become more prevalent in a hybrid work environment. The common argument was that the team became split up due to different roles and responsibilities.

*“When working closely with certain individuals, one naturally becomes more bonded with them, whereas there might not be the same sense of camaraderie with those who you do not share tasks with. I believe this is a risk”* (Respondent D, Own translation)

Further, respondent B expanded on this notion explaining that the sub groups are not on a relational level. The sub-groups occur naturally with whom you work with the most.

#### 4.2.6. High-stakes Environment

In regards to feelings of high stakes and pressure at work the respondents had different feelings of how it affected their psychological safety. Respondent A, G and I clearly stated that high pressure situations made them even more inclined to ask questions and speak up. More specifically, respondent I described that he is likely to ask more questions which enables him to get out of the situation and deliver results, which feels more important for him in these moments. Respondents K, F and H agree that they are less willing to ask questions and raise questions when stakes or pressure are higher, but for varying reasons. Respondent K mentions how it is to save time and respondent H points out the lack of contact and moments to actually raise issues while working remotely.

Furthermore, a few of the respondents had conflicting views on the matter of how high stakes influenced their psychological safety (C, D, E, and B). Respondent E describes how it could go both ways for her, either she feels like her psychological safety decreases and she wouldn't speak up, but if there is something that is really bothering her, she would do what it

takes to get out of the situation. Respondent D says that it depends on his relationships with colleagues and whether he believes raising issues or asking questions will be beneficial to him. Respondent B agrees with the notion of wanting to ask questions that would be helpful.

*“I think I probably tend to be more cautious and that would in such cases lead to me wanting to ask more questions to ensure that I am delivering and doing the right thing, maybe trying to minimise the mistakes you might be scared about.”* (Respondent B, Own translation)

The respondents also had conflicting opinions on whether they felt more or less pressure when working remotely and if they experienced the stakes and pressure as high when they were not at the office. Respondents I, C, H, J and G all agreed that there is more pressure when working from home, with respondent G emphasising that it doesn't have anything to do with his daily tasks, but depends on the higher up management. On the contrary, respondent A believes there is less pressure when working remotely and respondents K, D, E and B experience the pressure the same when working remotely. Respondent B mentions that it depends on the strain of the work instead of the hybrid environment.

#### 4.2.7. Self-consciousness

In terms of self-consciousness as a barrier for creating and maintaining psychological safety, respondent D took a general approach, mentioning that self-confidence is very important. He explained that you have to believe in yourself when asking questions. Further, respondent D expressed that support from coworkers and leaders can decrease self-consciousness. Respondents A, B, D and K all agreed that they had already overcome self-consciousness. Respondent B reflected further on this, arguing that he feels confident in his team, and is allowed to make mistakes. Additionally, respondent D mentioned how past informal conversations in his team have made him more confident, as it made him feel like he is not alone in his feelings. However, respondent A argued that it all depends on how the manager reacts to the mistakes made. If his manager were to negatively react, he would be more self-conscious.

On the other hand, two respondents have expressed that their self-consciousness is a barrier to psychological safety. Respondent F said that his self-consciousness makes him less likely to ask questions. Additionally, respondent H expressed feelings of exclusion and isolation due

to changes in their work environment, particularly as a result of frequent reorganisations. She mentions feeling disconnected from her colleagues and lacking the affirmation and support that comes from being part of an organisational work team. Moreover, this has negatively impacted her self-esteem, as she thrives on interpersonal interactions with coworkers.

Whether this self-consciousness is increasing in a hybrid work environment has also been discussed. Multiple people asserted that there is no difference in how hybrid work affects their self-consciousness in comparison to working exclusively on-site (B, I, & K). While other people argued that they felt less confident working in a hybrid setting. Respondent F, for example, feels self-conscious due to the fact that he is not used to presenting to a computer:

*“I myself have a personality where I don't really have any issues, rather the opposite, I can enjoy being in front of people and speaking. But it is frightening to talk to black screens on teams. It's a big difference.”*

(Respondent F, Own translation)

Further, respondent A agreed and commented that he prefers having face-to-face conversations, as it is easier to have a dialogue and present arguments than doing it remotely.

#### 4.2.8. New Barriers

##### 4.2.8.1. Loss of Informal Conversations

A barrier to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment that appeared during the data collection was the loss of informal conversations. Respondents K and C discussed the significant difference between working remotely and in the office, emphasising the social aspect. The respondents mentioned that being in the office allows for more informal interactions with colleagues, including discussing non-work-related topics and sharing thoughts and opinions. These informal connections, such as going out for lunch with coworkers, are missed when working from home, where conversations tend to be more focused on work-related matters. Respondent F highlighted the ease of having spontaneous conversations in person compared to initiating a call on Microsoft Teams. Further, respondent F argued that being physically present allows for the development of social connections, building the relationships between colleagues and creating a sense of belonging and safety, which plays into psychological safety within the workplace. Additionally, respondent B reflected on the need to have informal conversations as the daily contact between team

members is not guaranteed. Respondent B added that the informal conversations create the opportunity to seek help when necessary, and foster a sense of support and transparency with colleagues. Furthermore, respondent I took an organisational perspective where he asserted that the less of informal conversation also affects the information flow from the organisation. Usually, the informal coffee talks facilitate the information flow throughout the company. Moreover, respondent I claimed that this creates uncertainty which ultimately affects the psychological safety of the employees.

#### 4.2.8.2. Loneliness

Another barrier encountered during data collection was the experience of loneliness, as an effect of the remote work aspect of hybrid work setups. This barrier was one that respondent J, H, C and F all agreed to. Respondent H reflected on the remote work and organisational changes, expressing that *“changes when you’re together are something completely different from when you’re alone and receive the news; you’re much more vulnerable then”* (Respondent H, Own translation). Additionally, respondent H added that this vulnerability jeopardises one’s sense of safety in the organisation. Moreover, respondent F continued reflecting on the sense of loneliness in remote work. He noted that the isolation between online meetings can lead to overthinking and self-criticism as being alone for extended periods without human interaction can amplify negative thoughts and feelings. Respondent F also mentioned that being in an office surrounded by people can mitigate these feelings to some extent. Thus, as emphasised by respondent F, the action of overthinking and having negative thoughts directly affect the individual’s psychological safety.

Respondent C mentioned the disparities in access to information between remote workers and those closer to decision-makers, making it challenging to participate and influence outcomes. Additionally, respondent C discussed the difficulty of being the only remote worker in their team, highlighting the tendency for those physically present to overlook their presence. The respondent noted the challenges of speaking up and joining conversations, feeling disconnected from the core of events. This disconnection has also been highlighted by respondent F, who mentioned how the action of calling, texting, or emailing, takes more energy than going to talk to someone face-to-face. This, moreover, acts as a barrier to speaking up when in remote work, as argued by respondent F.

#### 4.2.8.3. Varying Locations

During the data collection, another barrier came forward which was the varying locations of each team member. Respondent D discussed the dynamics of virtual meetings depending on the arrangement of participants. He highlighted the challenge when some participants are in the same room while others are remote, as achieving equal visibility and participation becomes more difficult in such situations. He noted that the employees on-site have a sense of social cohesion, compared to those who are remote. Moreover, respondent D asserted that this makes the employees online less likely to speak up during meetings. Respondent F agreed and explained that there is a large difference between everyone working remotely compared to having a few people in the same room at the office. He mentioned that he did not feel as comfortable speaking up in those situations. Additionally, respondent C linked this issue to leadership, explaining that it becomes a barrier when the team leader operates from a different location than the rest of the team. This situation undermines effective communication and collaboration.

#### 4.2.8.4. Lack of Body Language

Another barrier identified is the lack of body language in remote work. Both respondents E and F pointed out how remote work can intensify interactions and impede the full expression of emotions and body language. The respondents stressed the significance of physical presence in communication, highlighting how it facilitates comfortable expression and reception of opinions, as well as reactions to those opinions, between both parties in a conversation. Furthermore, respondent I explained how lack of body language made him hesitant to speak up, not feeling as safe with what response he would get when he couldn't fully tell how others felt and thought. Respondent I further argued that it made a difference when sitting in the same room as his colleagues. Additionally, respondent G explained that when he is in the office he can get to know his colleagues and their body language easier, and that it is an aspect clearly missing when working remotely.

### 4.3. Facilitators

#### 4.3.1. Inclusive Leadership Practices

All of the respondents felt like their psychological safety increases by encouragement and inclusive leadership practices. Respondent A and G agreed that it helps both motivation and boosts morale in the team so everyone feels comfortable sharing opinions. Respondent A



emphasised that when someone actively includes him, he feels safe to fully express his opinions of what is right or wrong, and gave credit to his manager who facilitated this environment. Furthermore, respondent K agreed that inclusive leadership has a very positive impact on his psychological safety, making him willing and comfortable in sharing opinions, as well as it provides more opportunities for feedback between members of the team. Respondents C, J, E, and B also experienced a positive impact, highlighting aspects as genuine interest, supportive language and encouragement. Respondent B and I both described the strong culture they've had in their teams where there was never any fear of expressing themselves or fearing any consequences. Respondent B underscored that everyone in his team was always interested in supporting and encouraging each other, which facilitated the psychological safety within their team. Whilst respondent H, D and F agreed that inclusive leadership has a positive impact on their psychological safety, they both explained that it does depend on who is encouraging them and what relation they have to each other. For instance, encouragement to speak up in itself is not enough.

The respondents had different experiences of inclusive leadership practices when working remotely, some of them feeling that there were no differences (A, B, D, F, J, G), whilst others experienced a difference in how often they were actively included and encouraged. When reflecting over potential differences in inclusive leadership practices in a hybrid environment, neither Respondent B or D could find a difference, giving credit to the great environment they already had in the team since earlier and their established relationships from before. Respondent F agreed with this, explaining how it depends on who sits in the leadership position. On the contrary, respondents I, C, E, H and K felt like they were less encouraged and felt less likely to share their opinions and thoughts whilst working remotely. Respondent K explained how it is easier to facilitate safe conversations and situations while in the office. Moreover, respondent E described a barrier of not seeing body language and because of that, not feeling as comfortable with sharing.

*“There is this barrier that you do not see the body language, it does depend on how the person is encouraging you and the colleague through camera if that is on, but yeah I think it's easier to encourage each other to speak up if you are meeting somebody in person, when working from home through the technology I think it's less encouragement, and less feelings of safety in sharing. It happens more naturally if you sit together in the same*

*meeting room, and it would also be easier to read through the body language.” (Respondent E)*

#### 4.3.2. Positive Leadership Behaviours

Leader humility is something that positively influences every respondents’ feelings of psychological safety. Respondent E explicitly explained how that increases her psychological safety, saying that when her manager or leader shows vulnerability, they become role models for her. Respondent H explained that trust in her manager increases and respondent A illustrated how it gives him safety and that he feels supported to take calculated risks himself. Additionally, respondent D added that it’s a must for him and questions how to work with someone who cannot admit any wrongs. Several respondents (D, I, K) brought up the importance of this aspect, highlighting that this is integrated in the values of the company and something everyone should follow.

Respondent B explained that his feelings can be influenced by the frequency and graveness of mistakes a leader might be making. However, a leader who is humble and regards making mistakes as a learning opportunity helps foster the feelings of psychological safety in the team. He described leadership humility like this;

*“It also made you feel that it was okay to make mistakes. You dare to take risks, you dare to see the chances that exist. So I absolutely think it's very important. If it is the case that there is some incentive for the managers to never make mistakes and so on, then that culture would not have existed, I think.” (Respondent B, Own translation)*

Additional leadership behaviour that is crucial for all respondents is actively listening to each other. Both respondents C and E described it as the key for them wanting to share their opinions and for fostering a safe environment in their team. Respondent B explained how he has no problems with expressing his opinions, but feeling like someone cares about what you have to say and shows that they are actively listening to you makes expressing yourself even easier. Further, respondent D described it as a must, especially for a team manager who is responsible for the work. He went on to say that the manager doesn’t need to always agree, but to show that they are listening makes everyone feel more safe.

Nevertheless, actively listening is not as easy, and does not happen as much when working remotely, according to several of the respondents (I, E, C, D, F, J, G, and A). Respondent I expressed how even if the communication technology is sufficient, you cannot always speak up in the same way, or determine someone else's feelings because of a lack of body language. He explains how you cannot be as sure how the recipient will receive what you are saying. Respondent E mentions how sometimes you can tell that people are doing something else at the same time as trying to listen to you. Both respondents C and D pointed out that if there is only one person, or a few, working remotely, it is much harder to get equal experiences, if everyone else is in the office. However, some respondents again highlight the importance of a *good* team. Respondent C mentions that they have always been good at listening in his team, and respondent H says that when you do listen, she experiences it in the same way, even though the opportunities might get fewer.

Regarding a leader's transparency, the respondents took a general approach to the question and agreed that it helps their psychological safety in numerous ways (I, B, E, A, G, K, J, F, D, H, C).

*"Yes, it helps me, if there is a transparency, I will dare to... it automatically makes you say more of what you think, you feel safer. And that's the climate that for me is what we always wanted, as it's supposed to work here."* (Respondent I, Own translation)

Respondent B explains that transparency has never been a problem in his previous team, stating that it's vital for him to feel safe when making decisions. Respondent A agrees that historically in his team, there has always been transparency which fosters contributions from everyone. Most respondents reflected over what lack of transparency would mean for them.

*"Transparency is important, and daring to take risks is also about that you feel trust from your boss when you make mistakes. Being able to say, 'Maybe this wasn't the best idea', but still have the chance to try. If, on the other hand, someone is constantly defensive and not transparent in that way, but just saying, 'It's my opinion that counts', ... then it can be difficult to feel comfortable expressing your own opinions and ideas. In the end, it can lead to you stopping coming up with ideas at all, because you are afraid of being questioned or not being listened to."* (Respondent C, Own translation)

When asked if a leader's competence is a facilitator to psychological safety, a few of the respondents reflected over different types of competence, agreeing that a social competence is much more important than a technical competence, namely that your leader does not have to be an expert (A, K, F, D, C, B, I). These respondents highlight characteristics such as being able to coach, delegate and making sure their team can develop and enjoy their work. Respondent F, however, mentions; *"I think it feels safe to have a boss who knows what you're doing, who can assess your work and so on as well."* (Respondent F, Own translation).

Respondent A and B found no difference in how they experience a leader's transparency and competence when working remotely, explaining that it is thanks to them knowing their manager from before. This is agreed upon by respondent J and E. Respondent K added to this, saying that it would have been a difference if he had not known his manager from before. However, the other respondents disagreed. Respondent F speculated whether a hybrid work environment would make it harder for a leader to hide behind smiles and make it more apparent if his manager was transparent and competent. On the contrary, respondents H, I, and C perceived that their leader's transparency and competence is not as visible when working remotely.

*"There is much more going on around and things that you take part in when you are physically there. On site, one can perhaps notice the transparency and competence in how someone behaves or acts, which can create a feeling of safety and responsibility."* (Respondent C, Own translation).

#### 4.3.3. Work Relationships

In terms of relationships being a facilitator for creating and maintaining psychological safety, various respondents agreed that it is crucial. Respondent I has highlighted how some of his relationships at work have been ongoing for over 18 years, which he believes has made him more psychologically safe. Furthermore, both respondents B and C emphasised the importance of feeling a strong connection and social bond within the team, where members can engage in casual conversations and social interactions beyond work-related matters. They suggest that without this chemistry among team members, the team dynamic may become more introverted, causing coworkers to refrain from speaking up and asking questions.

Respondent H added to this, expressing that without these good relationships and trust, communication can suffer, leading to avoidance of interaction with certain individuals. While acknowledging the significance of relationships among team members, respondent K emphasised the importance of fostering a good relationship with one's boss. Specifically, respondent K expressed satisfaction with his connection to his boss, highlighting their longstanding relationship spanning several years within the team. Respondent K thus asserted the importance of spending time working with someone to build trust in them. Moreover, respondent A reflected on his relationship within the team and how that affected his work life and well-being:

*“I have a healthy relationship with all my team members, I feel welcomed and everything. That is my experience the last four years. I was never sad or worried to come to the office, and just looked forward to Monday, because all of my colleagues have a similar mindset, it is just to have a common goal for our team and deliver it. There is no right or wrong when it comes to ideas. It is always a collective decision.”* (Respondent A)

There was a common consensus among all of the respondents that the hybrid work model affects the relationships, which in turn affect the level of psychological safety. Respondent B expressed that they have taken certain measures to maintain the relationships when working remotely. They have scheduled informal meetings online where they chat, to compensate for lost coffee talks and lunches. However, respondent E asserted that building relationships remotely takes time as one tends to reach out less when working remotely, rather than when you are at the office. While this might be the case, both Respondent B and E have found that the prioritisation of remotely building relationships with coworkers boosts the feelings of psychological safety. Furthermore, respondent A argued that building strong relationships with coworkers is crucial for effective remote collaboration. Without such relationships, expressing opinions in virtual meetings or chats can lead to misunderstandings, as tone and intent can be misconstrued.

#### 4.3.4. Social Capital

Most of the respondents agreed that a strong social capital was also a facilitator for creating and maintaining psychological safety. Respondent D explained that by expressing his opinions and asking the relevant questions he built his social capital, and in turn does this

social capital help him feel confident in expressing himself, indicating an interaction in both directions. Both respondents G and E also highlighted how a larger social capital makes them feel more comfortable in general. More specifically, respondent E pointed out that a social capital makes her feel more enabled to take risks, knowing that someone could back up her ideas.

Respondent G described the difficulty in building his social capital when working remotely, explaining how working on a specific task makes him interact with only a few people. Respondent D did not experience his social capital as being there in the same way when working remotely, emphasising the difficulty in utilising what you have in the same way. Respondent C described how a team can become more isolated from the rest of the company when working remotely but how a strong team can increase your feelings of psychological safety in those moments. Respondents J, A, E and H further agreed that the size of, or the access to your social capital changes when working remotely. *“You might still have your network, but then again, you might not meet as often, and thus you get a little further apart, so I think that affects it negatively.”* (Respondent H, Own translation).

#### 4.3.5. Supportive Organisational Context

Regarding supportive organisational context as a facilitator for psychological safety, various respondents spoke generally, emphasising its importance. For example, Respondent E expressed that insufficient resources or lack of information diminishes her sense of safety and importance. She argued that humans tend to question themselves when such needs are not met, leading to decreased psychological safety. Further, respondent E emphasised the importance of receiving necessary resources and information to feel valued and secure within the team. Similar thoughts were expressed by respondent D, as he discussed how uncertainty can negatively impact creativity and planning, leading to a decrease in motivation and productivity. On the other hand, respondent G took a practical perspective, highlighting that simply having information written down without direct communication can lead to a lack of psychological safety among employees. He advocated for two-way communication where doubts and concerns can be addressed, fostering an environment where employees feel empowered to contribute and ask questions.

Looking at the teams in question, various respondents have expressed opinions on the current organisational support. For instance, respondent I highlighted the effects of inadequate

information and support, particularly during periods of uncertainty and organisational changes in his team. He noted it resulted in speculation, and consumed valuable time and energy, consequently affecting the psychological safety within the team. On the contrary respondent B reflected on the period leading up to the present and praises the effectiveness of available support and encouragement.

*"I think it's worked fantastically well. We've known that there's been support and backing for things, which has also made us dare to take responsibility. We've dared to step in and stop things, make decisions, and some things we've done have perhaps been good, and others less so. Some might have been a bit reckless, but we've still dared to do it because we know there's been support and backing for it. So, I think it's been immensely important; it's also meant that the team has functioned very well under such circumstances, given the opportunity." (Respondent B, Own translation)*

Furthermore, Respondent C emphasised the importance of information flow within the organisation, emphasising its impact on participation and involvement. He highlighted that when information does not circulate effectively, it hampers individuals' ability to ask questions or contribute their ideas and opinions, leading to a sense of disengagement. On the other hand, Respondent F discussed the importance of support, noting that as he has gained experience and aged, he has become less reliant on it. However, respondent F emphasised that even though they may need it less, it is still crucial for feeling connected and valued within their work environment. Further, respondent K mentioned how the need for support varies depending on if they work independently or collaboratively. Thus, if one is alone in their task, they might need more organisational support to feel psychologically safe.

Many respondents have agreed that there is no difference in the need for organisational support when working in a hybrid setting (I, B, C, D, H & K). While this is the case, respondent F acknowledged the need for clearer communication, particularly when working remotely. He emphasised the importance of clarity in defining roles and responsibilities when team members are physically separated, to ensure feelings of psychological safety. Respondent E, further reflects on this, mentioning how information spreads more quickly when being physically present than working remotely. Therefore, it is important to keep this in mind when delivering support.

#### 4.3.6. New Facilitators

##### 4.3.6.1. Established on-site Relationships

A new facilitator to create and maintain psychological safety in a hybrid work environment for the respondents was established on-site relationships. Several respondents (A, G, F, D, I, E, K, C, H) highlighted the difference in building relationships when working remotely and how much easier they thought remote work was thanks to their established relationships. Respondent A explained how having worked in a normal office setup before, they already knew and trusted each other. He then contemplated that it would be a bigger challenge with new colleagues. Respondent G agreed that working with his colleagues before you start working remotely helps him feel connected to them and increases his psychological safety. He also went on to speculate about the challenges of starting in a new company. Furthermore, Respondent F argued that getting hired and joining a hybrid team must pose a challenge to building psychological safety, and respondent D described discussions they have had in his team about how to handle situations where new people join them, explaining that it is much more difficult to build relationships remotely. Having had his relationships with his coworkers prior to working from home has helped facilitate his psychological safety massively (Respondent D). Respondents E and K also added to this point:

*“Yeah remote work definitely requires more time to build relationships. Reflecting on that I started in the new role kind of end of pandemic, it probably took a bit longer time than if I would have been seeing them every day, because when connecting remotely I think you reach out to less amount of people per day than when you're actually in the office, you automatically connect more.”* (Respondent E)

*“But if you are new to the organisation and if you need to work a lot remotely, then I think it is actually quite negative, at least to begin with. So I think something that companies should think about more is that if there are new people coming into the organisation, that you somehow make sure that they are integrated with the others that you work with in the same team.”* (Respondent K, Own translation)

Additionally, Respondent I agreed with the difficulties in creating and maintaining psychological safety for new members and explained the barriers he feels in building



relationships with his colleagues that work from other countries, whom he has never met. Furthermore, respondent C pointed out that his new current manager works entirely from a different country and respondent H said that she is used to having colleagues that have never been in the same office as her.

#### 4.3.6.2. Experience

During the data collection process, various respondents highlighted the significance of their experience within the company as a facilitator of psychological safety. Respondent I, drawn from years of experience, expressed confidence in voicing opinions, regardless of circumstances or opposing viewpoints. Respondent F also noted a decreased reliance on organisational support for creating and maintaining psychological safety as they gained experience, suggesting a shift towards greater self-assurance and resilience within the professional environment. This sentiment was something that other participants agreed to, emphasising the role of experience in navigating organisational changes in a hybrid work environment. Respondent B discussed how familiarity gained through previous organisational experience contributes to a sense of stability and safety, even in uncertain situations. Similarly, respondent C stressed the importance of experience in adapting to changes and overcoming challenges.

Additionally, Respondent K elaborated on how shared experiences over time foster a sense of safety, underscoring the significance of familiarity in promoting safety and cooperation within the team. Respondent K also noted that with increased experience, initial uncertainties tend to diminish, leading to improved relationships with colleagues and overall effectiveness in the workplace. Respondent I further discussed his 18 years of experience, highlighting the diversity and openness within the workplace. Despite encountering challenges in adapting to new colleagues, he emphasised the importance of relying on experience to navigate such situations effectively.

## 5. Discussion

This chapter delves into the discussion of psychological safety within hybrid work settings, initially focusing on the newly identified barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety (5.1-5.2). Following that, in 5.3 we discuss the general experiences of the barriers and facilitators identified in Chapter 2. Literature Review, by examining the empirical findings in relation to the found barriers and facilitators to understand how they affect the creation and maintenance of psychological safety. Lastly, we explore how these barriers and facilitators are experienced in a hybrid environment compared to traditional experiences of on-site work settings (5.4). Furthermore, by analysing all of these parts, we are able to increase our knowledge of what the barriers and facilitators are to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment, as well as understanding how they are experienced.

### 5.1. Hybrid-specific Barriers

This chapter discusses new barriers in creating and maintaining psychological safety that are unique to working in a hybrid setting.

#### 5.1.1. Loss of Informal Conversations

The result highlighted a new barrier to psychological safety in a hybrid work environment; the loss of informal conversations. This topic frequently arose throughout the interviews, as respondents reflected on how much this aspect was missed when working from home or in hybrid settings. These informal conversations at the coffee machine, at someone's desk or during lunch breaks help facilitate psychological safety for hybrid organisational work teams. Therefore, losing this aspect when working remotely presents a significant barrier for teams that score high on psychological safety, such as the teams in this study. The empirical result showed that the respondents were missing the social aspect of their interactions, experiencing fewer conversations overall, and observing that time spent together, especially in meetings, was much more work-focused. This aligns with findings from Tkalic et al. (2022) who also discovered a reduction in informal interactions when working remotely, and that focus lies on work-related matters, instead of informally getting to know each other.

Moreover, the empirical findings showed that the respondents experienced less information flow and had greater need for communication due to the loss of the informal interactions,

which could hinder the facilitation of psychological safety. Edmondson (2004) also highlighted this aspect, describing how access to resources and information facilitates psychological safety. Furthermore, the informal interactions that are missing are the ones that help build strong relationships between colleagues (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Kahn, 1990). Therefore, losing the informal interactions in hybrid work could pose a significant challenge of maintaining the work relationships. However, this is something that the two organisational work teams are trying to compensate for, by scheduling meetings aimed for informal talk that is not job focused.

### 5.1.2. Loneliness

Loneliness was frequently mentioned as a significant barrier to psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. The findings showed that remote employees feel particularly isolated and vulnerable during organisational changes when receiving news alone at home. This aligns with research by Bonde et al. (2023), who noted that team members often share similar levels of psychological safety. Therefore, in teams with high psychological safety, such as the studied teams, loneliness and disconnection could become common issues, undermining overall psychological safety. Edmondson (2004) explained that psychological safety develops through shared experiences, so when you are not a part of the shared experiences, you do not have the same opportunity to maintain psychological safety together. Thus, addressing loneliness in a hybrid work setting is crucial to maintaining psychological safety within teams.

Further, the empirical findings displayed reflections on the isolation that occurs between online meetings, noting that this isolation can lead to overthinking and self-criticism. Being alone for extended periods without human interaction can amplify negative thoughts and feelings, which can directly undermine an individual's psychological safety. This aligns with Edmondson (2019) who elaborated that psychological safety arises within groups. However, achieving this sense of safety may be challenging when individuals do not feel part of the group in the same way.

Additionally, the empirical findings highlighted the difficulty of being the only remote worker on their organisational work team, emphasising the tendency for those physically present to overlook remote colleagues. This oversight creates challenges in speaking up and joining conversations, leading to a sense of disconnection from the core of events. The

literature supports these observations. Tkalich et al. (2022) found that remote workers rarely ask for help or contribute to problem-solving, often feeling alienated and excluded from office discussions. This alienation stems from the lack of spontaneous interactions that naturally occur in a physical office environment. Although remote teams may experience highly focused work, the absence of casual, spontaneous interactions can limit their sense of connection and inclusion.

### 5.1.3. Varying Locations

Another frequently mentioned barrier to psychological safety in a hybrid work environment was the varying locations of team members, such as when some are on site while others work from home. These arrangements change the dynamics of meetings, and pose challenges to feeling psychologically safe. The result showed experiences of social cohesion for those at the office, which remote workers could not participate in, potentially hindering them from speaking up or feeling safe to do so. Tkalich et al. (2022) described how there are differences in focus between the two settings, and more spontaneous interactions between members in the office which facilitates psychological safety. The social cohesion and the lower focus for those at the office could potentially be the reason why remote workers did not feel as psychologically safe to share their opinions and speak up. The result also indicated that the varying locations led to fewer opportunities and less ability to interrupt or share opinions. Furthermore, it created a challenge of achieving equal participation. This aligns with findings from Tkalich et al. (2022), who found that remote workers often remain in listening mode and delay their questions until they return to the office. Respondents highlighted a notable difference compared to when everyone was working either remotely or at the office.

### 5.1.4. Lack of Body Language

The empirical findings showed that when working remotely, people often miss out on interpreting body language, which has been shown to be valuable for comfortable expression and confirming reactions in these teams with a high measured psychological safety. This aligns with Tkalich et al. (2022), who mentioned that remote work minimises the presence of contextual clues. Without these clues, individuals could feel less certain about the responses they will receive, making them more hesitant to speak up and share opinions, thereby negatively affecting psychological safety. Additionally, Edmondson (2019) discussed how the fear of potential consequences impacts psychological safety. Therefore, the absence of body language in remote work, combined with the fear of possible reactions, can decrease

organisational work team members' psychological safety. The lack of body language is thus considered a barrier in the hybrid work environment.

## 5.2. Hybrid-Specific Facilitators

The following chapter explores new facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety that are specific to working in a hybrid setting.

### 5.2.1. Established on-site Relationships

The role of having trusting and respectful relationships in achieving psychological safety has been supported by many authors (Carmeli & Gittell 2009; Edmondson, 2004; Kahn, 1990). However, the empirical findings displayed a new dimension to this facilitator, specifically when in a hybrid environment, which is already established on-site relationships. The respondents noted that knowing and trusting colleagues from prior in-office interactions made remote work easier since they had already fostered trust and built a connection. The established on-site relationships could be a large contributor to the teams' high psychological safety score. Furthermore, they discussed the difficulties in building relationships remotely, particularly for new hires, as it was found that remote work requires more time for relationship-building. Tkalic et al. (2022) agreed and mentioned that new hires did not have the ability to develop the same informal bonds with each other.

### 5.2.2. Experience

The result indicated that long experience was another key facilitator of psychological safety in hybrid work environments. Sheer experience is closely tied to the time it takes to build strong relationships between team members. Experience of working in the same team has created mutual trust between the team members, knowing that they won't be judged and that they feel supported by their team members. This notion is similar to the findings of Edmondson (2004) who described building mutual trust as important in relationships. Additionally, the respondents extensive experience within the organisation contributes to their comfort and confidence in expressing themselves. This applies to both their field of work and their understanding of the organisation as a whole. Due to the fact that the respondents possess much information they might be more likely to share insights and opinions. Their expert knowledge could potentially have enhanced the feelings of psychological safety, knowing that they are educated in the topic in which they are sharing, and displaying a high

team psychological safety. Furthermore, the result showed how familiarity attained through previous experiences provides respondents a sense of safety and stability, even when things might be unclear. The familiarity might be created around both processes, potential challenges or confidence in abilities.

### 5.3. Experiences of Barriers and Facilitators to Psychological Safety

This chapter reflects on the general experiences of barriers and facilitators to psychological safety identified in Chapter 2 (Literature Review). Moreover, we examine the empirical findings in relation to these theories to understand how the barriers and facilitators affect the creation and maintenance of psychological safety.

#### 5.3.1. Barriers

*Negative leadership behaviours*, particularly authoritarian approaches, as argued by Lackie et al. (2023) and Remtulla et al. (2021), act as a significant barrier to creating and maintaining psychological safety within teams. The empirical findings revealed that although respondents had not encountered authoritative leadership within their current organisational work teams, they did reflect on past experiences in former teams. Furthermore, the respondents identified enforced leadership decisions as a factor contributing to feelings of discomfort due to the discouragement of collaboration. As a consequence, this negatively affects psychological safety, agreeing with Remtulla et al. (2021). Additionally, the past experiences shared by respondents reflect the fears of reprisal and lack of empowerment commonly associated with such leadership approaches, aligning with Lackie et al. (2023). On the other hand, while enforced leadership decisions were acknowledged as a potential barrier by some respondents, the majority of the respondents noted that this was not prevalent within their immediate teams, in line with the high team psychological safety they measured. Some respondents highlighted the importance of having supportive team leaders, as it mitigates the impact of poor leadership behaviours.

Further, the literature suggests that *abusive supervision*, characterised by sustained displays of hostile behaviours by leaders, can significantly undermine psychological safety in the workplace (Tepper, 2000). Furthermore, the empirical findings closely correlated with existing literature. Respondents emphasised general negative impacts of abusive supervision on their psychological well-being and work engagement. They expressed concerns about

feeling inhibited when sharing their opinions and a fear of retaliation in the presence of abusive leadership. These findings closely mirror the research of Agarwal and Anantatmula (2022) and Yang et al. (2023) who agreed that abusive supervision may create a sense of decreased workplace security, resulting in an avoidance of speaking up. On the other hand, while the result showed that abusive supervision was non-existent in their teams, the results shed light on the prevalence of abusive leadership behaviours particularly among higher-level managers. The empirical findings noted that hostility from higher-ups adversely affects their willingness to speak up, creating a culture of fear and organisational resistance among employees. Furthermore, a resistance among the coworkers suggests a strained relationship with the higher-ups, which is something that Liu et al. (2016) argued is a possible consequence of abusive supervision from leadership.

Additionally, the empirical findings from the interviews revealed that only one respondent experienced an unspoken *hierarchy* within their organisational work team. The majority had not experienced hierarchy in their team, thus it can not be identified as a barrier to creating and maintaining psychological safety for these particular teams. These opinions align with the high measured psychological safety the teams reported through the measurement by Edmondson (2019). Beyond their own teams, several respondents reflected on their perceptions of hierarchy in general, influenced by the recent reorganisation or higher level hierarchical structures, which they agreed created a barrier to their psychological safety, and aligns with research presented by Retmulla et al. (2021) and Lackie et al. (2023).

Further, according to Lackie et al. (2023) and Diekmann et al. (2022), *uncertainty* in organisations have nuanced effects on psychological safety. While Lackie et al. (2023) found that uncertainty can make people hesitant to speak up, the empirical findings showed that many individuals are motivated to ask questions in such environments, especially when supported by team cohesion and organisational stability. This indicates that a psychologically safe environment can mitigate the negative effects of uncertainty. However, some respondents still felt hesitant because they were unsure whom to approach with their concerns. Moreover, Diekmann et al. (2022) highlighted that ambiguity during organisational changes typically decreases psychological safety, as unclear information and uncertainty about personal competencies lead to discomfort. Despite this, the lack of clarity also prompted many respondents to seek out information and ask questions, which in turn enhanced their psychological safety by fostering a culture of proactive inquiry. Therefore,

while both studies showed that uncertainty and ambiguity can initially undermine psychological safety, they also reveal that supportive environments and proactive behaviours can help mitigate these negative effects.

On the other hand, Remtulla et al. (2021) emphasised the role of *perceived lack of knowledge* as a barrier to psychological safety. They argued that individuals' own uncertainties about their knowledge create barriers to feeling psychologically safe within a team environment. This aligns with the observation that some respondents tended to become quieter in situations where they lacked knowledge, expressing uncertainty about what to question. The fear of appearing uninformed or making mistakes due to their perceived lack of knowledge likely led these respondents to withhold their contributions, thus affecting their psychological safety. However, the empirical findings also showed support for the respondents not being affected by their lack of knowledge, prompting them to ask more questions and speak up.

Further, *job insecurity*, as defined by De Cuyper and De Witte (2006) and further discussed by Kim (2020), revolves around coworkers' concerns regarding potential job loss. Jeong et al. (2023) and Kim (2020) expressed how job insecurity acts as a barrier to psychological safety in the workplace. The empirical results indicated a nuanced relationship between job insecurity and psychological safety among respondents. While none of the respondents reported feeling worried about losing their job in previous teams, the general concern about job security was still expressed as having the potential to influence psychological safety in various ways. Some respondents expressed a resilient attitude towards mistakes, viewing them as opportunities for learning and growth. This suggests that their psychological safety may remain relatively stable despite the presence of job insecurity concerns, or that their high team psychological safety reduces the impact job insecurity has on them. Their willingness to admit errors and seek clarification indicates a certain level of confidence and trust within the team environment. However, other respondents suggested that job insecurity could indeed have a negative impact on psychological safety, particularly depending on management practices, aligning with Kim (2020).

Additionally, the empirical findings suggested that *faultlines* are prevalent in the studied teams. Chen et al. (2017) described faultlines as instances when subgroups have been formed in a group, based on different factors and characteristics. Furthermore, the results indicated that the subgroups in the teams were based on roles and responsibilities, and not due to



demography as proposed by Gerlach and Gockel (2022). Interestingly, when asked if subgroups were perceived as a barrier to maintaining psychological safety, the respondents mentioned stronger feelings of psychological safety when such groups existed and they themselves were a part of a group. Being a part of a subgroup was shown to make the individuals more comfortable with asking questions and speaking up. This notion goes against Chen et al. (2017) who introduced the idea that psychological safety is negatively affected by subgroups.

Further, the results align with the literature, showing varied responses to *high-stakes environments* and pressure at work. Some respondents felt more inclined to ask questions and speak up in high-pressure situations, which counter Wanless's (2016) assertion that high perceived risk generally leads to hesitation. The empirical findings showed that asking more questions helps to navigate these situations and deliver results, which is found in their organisational work team to be crucial when under pressure. Moreover, the findings showed that the willingness to speak up depends on relationships with colleagues and the perceived benefits of raising issues, emphasising the role of interpersonal dynamics in psychological safety. This suggests that in some cases, in teams where team psychological safety is high, as in the studied teams, high-stakes can motivate proactive behaviours such as asking questions, perhaps as a coping mechanism to reduce uncertainty. Conversely, some respondents were less willing to raise questions in high-stakes scenarios. However, the reasons for their silence differed from those identified in the literature. While Wanless (2016) and Hitchner et al. (2023) attributed this hesitation to fear of public exposure and judgement, the results from this study indicated that respondents' reluctance was due to time constraints and lack of opportunities. This highlights how structural factors and situational constraints can further diminish psychological safety in high-pressure environments.

Moreover, the result showed that many respondents had previously managed to overcome their feelings of *self-consciousness*. They felt confident in their team, and with help from supportive leadership the self-consciousness was reduced, therefore minimising the risk of low self-confidence impacting their psychological safety. Zhang et al. (2010) and May et al. (2004) however, found that self-consciousness negatively affected the feelings of psychological safety, and this barrier was also somewhat experienced within the team. This manifested in respondents not asking the same amount of questions and experiencing feelings of isolation when working remotely. Zhang et al. (2010) discussed the fear of negative

consequences when members of virtual communities share knowledge, and this aspect was further discussed as a general barrier in the empirical data. For instance, respondents described how the manager's reaction plays an important role, and that bad reactions would cause more self-consciousness.

### 5.3.2. Facilitators

The result indicated that *inclusive leadership practices*, such as encouragement and inclusivity facilitated higher levels of psychological safety. The empirical data demonstrated that managers who fostered an inclusive environment and actively participated in including and encouraging team members made the members feel more psychological safe, on site as well as remotely. This, in turn, increased the likelihood of them speaking up, sharing their opinions and both seeking and giving feedback. These behaviours further confirm the measured high team psychological safety for both teams. This finding aligns with research from Woods et al. (2024), who argued that a leader who models these inclusive behaviours establishes expectations and norms for the team. The respondents' experiences also portray these norms for the team, describing a strong team culture in which there was no fear of expressing themselves, and that the inclusive behaviour was practised by everyone, not just the team leader. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) and Hirak et al. (2012) further emphasised that leader inclusiveness should encourage both questions and challenges, as well as attempting to include others in discussions and decisions.

Furthermore, research by Edmondson (2004) and Hu et al. (2018) underscored the importance of *leader humility* in fostering psychological safety. Leaders who demonstrate vulnerability and acknowledge their fallibility creates a culture of openness and learning. This aligns with the empirical findings from respondents. Moreover, the respondents indicated that leader humility increases their psychological safety, with some noting that it helps build trust and supports risk-taking. This suggests that when leaders show humility, it encourages team members to feel safe making mistakes and learning from them, fostering a supportive and trusting team environment. As the respondents all showed high psychological safety according to the measurement by Edmondson (2019), it indicates that this facilitator is successfully supporting the maintaining and creating of psychological safety. Additionally, the critical role of *active listening* is another aspect of positive leadership behaviours, supported by Castro et al. (2018), who found that leaders who actively listen enhance psychological

safety and creativity among employees. Respondents in the study similarly highlighted that active listening by leaders is essential for them to feel safe and willing to share their opinions.

*Transparency* is another crucial factor in enhancing psychological safety, as indicated by Yi et al. (2017). Transparency helps employees feel secure, encouraging openness and trust. Respondents universally agreed that leader transparency is vital for their psychological safety, indicating that their own leader has been transparent, seeing that the result from measuring the teams' psychological safety was high. Further, transparency fosters an environment where they feel comfortable expressing their ideas and taking risks. This alignment suggests that transparent leadership practices are fundamental in building a psychologically safe workplace, enabling employees to engage more fully and contribute their ideas without fear of negative consequences. Furthermore, Mao et al. (2019) found that perceived *leader competence* enhances psychological safety, as it reassures employees about their leader's ability to guide and support them effectively. Respondents in the study also valued social leadership skills, such as coaching and delegation, over mere technical competence. This highlights that while skills are important, the ability of leaders to connect, support, and develop their teams is more critical for fostering psychological safety. Leaders who are perceived as competent and non-self-serving create an environment where employees feel safe to utilise their resources and engage in productive behaviours.

Moreover, the result showed that *work relationships* were one of the things the respondents found most important for facilitating their psychological safety. The empirical findings showed that the respondents kept coming back to the topic of their strong relationships with their colleagues when reflecting on their psychological safety in various ways. Carmeli and Gittell (2009) highlighted that elements such as shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect are foundational for high-quality relationships that promote psychological safety. These theoretical findings resonated with the experiences of the respondents who also pointed out the significance of these elements in their day-to-day interactions. Many respondents highlighted long friendships who contributed to a strong sense of psychological safety where they felt comfortable expressing themselves without fear of negative consequences. This is in line with Kahn's (1990) findings that noted the importance of support within relationships, and suggests that supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships exist in the interviewed teams, allowing the team members to embrace risks and share their opinions. Furthermore, the result demonstrated that building trust between each other was important for the

relationships, aligning with Edmondson's (2004) notion that trust and respect within interpersonal relationships are crucial for promoting psychological safety.

Furthermore, the respondents' experiences underscored the critical role of not only relationships, but a *social capital* in fostering psychological safety within a team or organisation, which aligns with Carmeli's (2007) findings. The empirical results indicated that engaging in actions that promote psychological safety can build social capital, and having social capital can, in turn, create and maintain psychological safety. This highlights the bidirectional nature of their relationship. The findings also show that when the team members feel enabled to take risks because of a supportive network, it illustrates the practical implications of Carmeli's (2007) internal social capital, where strong intra-organizational relationships facilitate a psychologically safe environment.

Edmondson (1999) identified organisational context support as a critical facilitator of psychological safety. The author found a positive correlation between supportive contexts and the level of psychological safety experienced by teams. The empirical findings emphasised that insufficient resources or lack of information diminishes psychological safety, causing individuals to question themselves and their importance within the team. This directly aligns with Edmondson's (2004) notion that access to resources and information reduces defensiveness and insecurity. When these needs are not met, team members' psychological safety is compromised, reinforcing Edmondson's (2004) findings on the necessity of supportive context. Further reflecting on this, the findings showed that uncertainty can negatively impact creativity and planning, leading to decreased motivation and productivity. This resonates with Dieckman et al. (2022), who highlighted that a supportive organisational context not only facilitates psychological safety but that psychological safety, in turn, also fosters a supportive organisational environment. Further, this suggests that when team members feel secure, they are more likely to be creative and productive, as they do not fear negative consequences.

Lastly, the empirical findings displayed the importance of two-way communication, where employees can address doubts and concerns, thereby confirming the high team psychological safety. Additionally, the findings stressed that effective information flow is crucial for participation and involvement. Poor information flow leads to disengagement. These insights connect with Edmondson's (2004) emphasis on the role of resource and information

accessibility in reducing insecurity among team members. Furthermore, a context that promotes clear and direct communication ensures that team members feel heard and valued, reinforcing their psychological safety. The findings underscored the risk of inadequate information and support during periods of uncertainty and change. This observation aligns with the findings of Dieckman et al. (2022), who emphasised the role of a supportive context in maintaining psychological safety. Effective communication and support seem to be critical in navigating organisational changes without compromising team members' psychological safety.

#### 5.4. Do these Experiences differ in a Hybrid Work Environment?

In the following chapter, we discuss whether experiences of the barriers and facilitators identified in Chapter 2. (Literature Review) differ in a hybrid work environment compared to a traditional on-site setting.

##### 5.4.1. Barriers

Regarding whether the barrier of *authoritarian leadership* to psychological safety is affected by a hybrid work environment, the empirical results showed that the “distance” to decision-making conversations in remote work settings highlights a potential challenge in maintaining transparency and inclusivity. Furthermore, the decisions may feel more enforced, even if they are not, due to the communication barriers the remote setting brings. Tkalich et al. (2022) further elaborated on the communication barriers hybrid setting brings. The author argued that individuals who are working remotely often remain in listening mode, giving and receiving less feedback, will affect the communication negatively. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there was consensus among all respondents that the frequency of enforced leadership decisions did not differ significantly between remote and in-person work settings. This suggests that while remote work may create feelings of detachment and uncertainty, the underlying leadership dynamics remain consistent across contexts.

Further, respondents highlighted the implications a hybrid work environment has on *abusive supervision*. The empirical findings showed that the physical distance inherent in remote work settings may intensify feelings of distrust and anxiety, as individuals struggle to interpret the tone and intention behind digital communication. This notion aligns with findings from Tkalich et al. (2022) who found that there were less contextual clues when

working remotely, making it more difficult to interpret the meaning behind someone's words. While some respondents perceived a difference in how abusive leadership manifests in hybrid work environments, the majority agreed that the frequency and impact of such behaviours remain consistent across remote and in-person settings. This suggests that while remote work may amplify certain dynamics, the underlying issues related to abusive leadership persist irrespective of the work environment.

Furthermore, approximately half of the respondents noticed differences in their experiences of *hierarchy* when working remotely, while the other half felt no change. Worth noting, however, is that these reflections by the participants were often more general, since they described their own teams as very flat and non-hierarchical. The result also showed that feeling like you were further away from the action and decision making made the feelings of hierarchy more prominent and decreased psychological safety. Moreover, despite not finding hierarchical structure in the team, the power differences between people were experienced as stronger when working remotely as it was harder to interrupt the people who take up much space, making it challenging to speak your own mind. This scenario mirrors the study done by Hu et al. (2018), who argued that a higher perceived power distance is correlated to lower psychological safety. Additionally, Tkalic et al. (2022) found that people working remotely often avoided speaking up until they returned to the office. This, in combination with the fact that it is harder to interrupt when there is a stronger power distance, could put psychological safety at risk.

The consensus among respondents about the *uncertainties* associated with hybrid work, included feelings of disconnection and vulnerability, which directly aligns with the literature's focus on the impact of remote and hybrid work on psychological safety. Tkalic et al. (2022) noted that these are differences in psychological safety between on-site, hybrid, and remote work environments. The authors observed that remote workers often stay in listening mode, receive less feedback, and withhold questions until they return to the office. This aligns with respondents' reports of feeling disconnected and vulnerable, as these behaviours contribute to a sense of isolation and reduced psychological safety. Tkalic et al. (2022) also emphasised the higher threshold for behaviours like speaking up and seeking feedback in remote settings due to technical and planning barriers, which mirrors the respondents' experiences of limited digital interactions and decreased opportunities for informal chats.

Further, there was no common consensus on whether *faultlines* are more or less prevalent in the hybrid work environment. Some findings show that the subgroups weaken when working remotely due to loss of informal conversations. While other findings show that subgroups are more apparent when working hybridly, because the roles and responsibilities are stronger. Thus, agreeing with Tkalich et al. (2022) notion that subgroups are likely to be formed in a hybrid work environment.

Regarding *high-stakes environments* in remote work, opinions were divided. Some respondents felt more pressure when working from home, which could be due to the fact that they are never able to leave work entirely. Others felt less pressure remotely, which could potentially be due to the fact that their home environment enables them to have a higher focus with less interruptions. This notion is supported in Tkalich et al. (2022) who argued that focus is much higher in remote settings. Other findings showed consistent pressure regardless of the work environment, suggesting that individual perceptions of stakes and pressure can be independent of the physical workspace. Moreover, it is generally suggested that the hybrid work environment will ultimately affect the feeling of pressure.

Whether or not the feelings and effects on *self-consciousness* increased or decreased when working remotely, the opinions varied. The findings showed that less interactions with colleagues caused feelings of disconnect, as well as lack of affirmation and support. Not knowing what reactions your team members would have to your opinions when working remotely further decreases psychological safety. This is supported by Zhang et al. (2010) who found that members in virtual settings fear negative consequences when expressing themselves. Furthermore, these feelings could affect the overall self-esteem of the respondents. Additionally, the challenge of technical aspects such as speaking in front of a computer, also posed difficulties. This aligns with findings from Tkalich et al. (2022) who noted that the threshold is higher for participation due to factors such as the digital set up and technical issues. Moreover, the feeling of self-consciousness is affected by the hybrid work environment and could therefore negatively affect maintaining psychological safety within these hybrid teams. However, it has not gotten to that point, as the teams measured a high team psychological safety.

Looking at a barrier that has not been validated by the respondents, *being monitored* is not a concern in their hybrid team team. According to research by Edmondson (2002; 2004), feeling monitored often stems from insecurity about one's competence. Though the empirical findings showed occasional self-consciousness, no respondent indicated feeling monitored or evaluated as a result. Thus, the view of Lackie et al. (2023), that people fear making mistakes due to the fact that they are being monitored, is not experienced in these teams. Additionally, there were no empirical findings if the barrier is affected by a hybrid work environment as no team member expressed it as affecting their psychological safety.

#### 5.4.2. Facilitators

Whilst some respondents agreed that *inclusive leadership practices* persisted when working remotely, others felt less encouraged and included when working from home, suggesting that the facilitator of inclusive leadership practices was not as effective or experienced in a hybrid environment. The result also indicated that facilitating inclusive conversations and discussions was more challenging when working remote, aligning with the findings of Tkalich et al. (2022) who noted that when people are working remotely, they often remain in listening mode, receive less feedback and delay their questions until they return to the office again. Additionally, the empirical data showed that the respondents who did not perceive a difference in inclusion often referred to previously established relationships and their effective leadership, thus highlighting the importance of these other positive aspects or facilitators in maintaining inclusion when in a hybrid environment. Some respondents felt less included when working remotely, noting that conversations or discussions were less frequent remotely. This suggests that while inclusive leadership practices continue to be a facilitator to psychological safety, the frequency of this facilitator might be less when working remotely. Therefore, this implies that ensuring facilitation of an inclusive environment when working from home requires concentrated efforts from leadership, and creation of such environments could be simplified by already established relationships between team members.

Additionally, the respondents also noted that *active listening* is more challenging in remote work settings due to the lack of non-verbal cues and potential distractions. This suggests that while active listening is a key leadership behaviour for psychological safety, leaders need to adapt their listening strategies in remote or hybrid work environments to maintain its



effectiveness. The shift to hybrid work presented challenges for maintaining psychological safety. Respondents noted that remote work can dilute the perception of *leaders' transparency and competence* due to the reduced physical presence and interaction. This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that when being remote, people tend to remain in listening mode, receiving less feedback and asking less questions. Working remotely can also lead people to feel alienated and excluded from office discussions (Tkalich et al. 2022).

While *work relationships* are still proven to be a facilitator for psychological safety in a hybrid environment, the hybrid work presents some challenges to maintaining these, as noted in the empirical data. The result displayed difficulties in building relationships remotely due to less frequent outreach, similar to findings by Tkalich et al. (2022). This observation could be concerning as it suggests that remote work environments might slow down the development of the supportive and trusting relationships that help facilitate psychological safety. Despite these challenges however, the result also showed that strong established relationships could still exist in a hybrid work environment, and thus, still facilitate a higher psychological safety, as seen in the respondents' answers and the measured team psychological safety.

The challenges posed by remote work, as shown in the empirical findings, reflect the difficulties in maintaining and leveraging *social capital* in a virtual setting. Further, the difficulty in building social capital remotely may be due to limited interactions with colleagues and highlights the structural dimension of social capital discussed by Gu et al. (2013). This structural aspect has been shown to be crucial in forming the networks that enable psychological safety. Further, the findings about team isolation in a remote work setting, along with the potential for strong team bonds to mitigate this isolation, aligns with relational dimensions of social capital. Gu et al. (2013) reflected on the relational dimension of social capital and found a strong correlation to psychological safety, emphasising the importance of maintaining high-quality relationships even in remote settings. The notion that remote work alters the size and accessibility of social capital, is also agreed upon in the empirical findings, which highlights the dynamic nature of social capital in different work contexts. Lackie et al. (2023) supported this by indicating that social capital significantly impacts an individual's capacity to navigate and contribute to psychological safety. Furthermore, the infrequency of meetings leading to a sense of detachment reinforces the

importance of continuous social interactions to sustain psychological safety, according to the results.

Lastly, the empirical findings revealed the need for clearer communication and quicker information dissemination in hybrid and remote work settings. This need for explicit communication supports Edmondson's (2004) idea that a well-informed team is more likely to be a psychologically safe team. Dieckman et al. (2022) also highlighted that these contextual factors are a cornerstone of a supportive organisational context, crucial for psychological safety, especially when physical presence is lacking.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to increase knowledge of barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. The study aimed to investigate whether the barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety, as identified through a literature review, are experienced in a hybrid work environment. Additionally, the study explored and uncovered any new barriers and facilitators specific to hybrid work teams. This investigation was conducted within two organisational work teams that operate in a hybrid environment and that have both demonstrated high levels of psychological safety. Furthermore, the identified barriers and facilitators have been shown to coexist within the given teams.

The new barriers that have been found to be hybrid-specific are the following; loss of informal conversations, loneliness, varying locations and lack of body language. *Loss of informal conversations* is experienced as a barrier due to the fact that remote work diminishes social interactions and reduces information flow. This absence hinders the development and maintenance of strong work relationships, posing a challenge to creating and maintaining psychological safety. Additionally, *loneliness* undermines psychological safety in a hybrid organisational work team by causing isolation, overthinking, and reduced spontaneous interactions. This isolation hinders employees' sense of connection and inclusion, crucial for creating and maintaining psychological safety. This study also concludes that *varying locations* of organisational team members in a hybrid work environment hinder psychological safety by disrupting meeting dynamics and creating disparities in social cohesion and participation. Remote workers often feel excluded and less able to share opinions, which reduces their sense of psychological safety compared to their on-site colleagues. Lastly, it is concluded that the *lack of body language* in remote work undermines psychological safety by removing valuable contextual clues and increasing uncertainty about responses. This lack of non-verbal communication makes organisational work team members more hesitant to speak up, thereby reducing their psychological safety. Furthermore, the experiences of these new barriers pose different challenges to maintaining and creating psychological safety in a hybrid environment, additional to the ones found in traditional on-site settings.

The new facilitators found to be experienced in a hybrid organisational work team are as follows; established on-site relationships and experience. This study concludes that

*established on-site relationships* facilitate psychological safety in a hybrid work environment by providing a foundation of trust and connection. These pre-existing relationships make remote work easier and contribute to high psychological safety, whereas building such relationships remotely, especially for new hires, is more challenging and time-consuming. Further, the study concludes that long *experience* is a facilitator of psychological safety in hybrid work environments. Extensive experience within the organisation enhances comfort, confidence, and willingness to share insights, contributing to a sense of safety and stability even in uncertain situations. Furthermore, the experiences of these new facilitators help create and maintain psychological safety in a hybrid organisational work team in addition to the found facilitators in traditional on-site settings.

Furthermore, the study concludes that inclusive leadership practices, leader humility and work relationships are facilitators of team members' psychological safety independent of work setting. The result shows the importance of *inclusive leadership practices*. Leaders who foster an inclusive environment and encourage team participation increase organisational work team members' feelings of psychological safety, promoting openness, feedback exchanges and a strong team culture. Additionally, *leader humility* is concluded to foster trust and support risk taking, creating a culture where it is safe to make mistakes which increases members' psychological safety. This study further concludes that having strong *work relationships* are crucial for creating and maintaining psychological safety. Shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect lay the foundations for these relationships, allowing team members to express themselves without fearing negative consequences, which has been found to be essential for promoting psychological safety.

It is also concluded that hybrid organisational work teams who exhibit high psychological safety, do not have extensive experiences of the established barriers found in previous research. However, the barriers *abusive supervision, hierarchy, uncertain environments, lack of knowledge, job insecurity, faultlines, high stakes environments* and *self-consciousness* are concluded to be barriers independent of context. Nevertheless, these are rarely experienced within hybrid work teams with high psychological safety. Further, the following are not experienced as barriers in a hybrid work environment for teams who have high psychological safety; *enforced leadership decisions* and *being monitored*.

Lastly, hybrid organisational work teams with high psychological safety experience that the following are facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety; *Active listening, leader transparency, leader competence, social capital, and supportive organisational context*. However, due to the nature of hybrid work, they are not as visible and pronounced in said context. The remote aspect, and the barriers to which it brings, creates challenges in experiencing these facilitators.

In conclusion, with these findings, we were able to contribute with knowledge regarding creating and maintaining psychological safety in hybrid organisational work teams. Giving a compilation of which barriers and facilitators to psychological safety exist in a hybrid work environment, and how they are experienced.

### 6.1. Practical Implications

This study offers a deeper understanding of the key barriers and facilitators necessary to create and maintain a psychologically safe environment in hybrid work settings. By understanding these barriers and facilitators, managers can more effectively foster a psychologically safe atmosphere even when team members are not on-site. Managers and team leaders can use the results of this study to refine their leadership strategies. For instance, they can implement structured opportunities for team interaction, ensure transparency in decision-making processes, and create safe spaces for team members to express concerns and share ideas. By prioritising these strategies, leaders can sustain a high level of psychological safety, thereby enhancing team cohesion, creativity, and overall performance. This, in turn, can lead to more resilient and adaptive teams that are better equipped to navigate the complexities of hybrid work environments. As the two organisational work teams both measured high psychological safety, organisations can use the findings as a benchmark for assessing their current practices and identifying areas for improvement.

### 6.2. Research Limitations

The study was conducted with only two organisational work teams. This narrow focus restricts our ability to generalise the findings to a broader range of teams or organisational contexts. Consequently, we cannot draw comprehensive conclusions about barriers and facilitators to creating and maintaining psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. Further, the teams examined in this study were characterised by high levels of psychological

safety. While this allowed for an in-depth exploration of teams with high psychological safety, it also limited the diversity of perspectives. Teams with lower levels of psychological safety might face different challenges and barriers, which were not captured in this research. This bias may result in a limited portrayal of the barriers and facilitators influencing psychological safety and overlook critical issues faced by less psychologically safe teams. Lastly, the theoretical foundation of this paper is heavily based on Amy Edmondson's work on psychological safety. While Edmondson's framework is highly influential and widely respected and accepted, relying predominantly on a single theoretical perspective may limit the scope of the analysis.

### 6.3. Future Research

Despite the growing prevalence of flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid work, there remains a significant gap in the research on psychological safety within these contexts. Given the critical impact that psychological safety has on creativity, innovation, team performance and overall organisational success, it is suggested to conduct more extensive studies in this area. Future research could explore teams that exhibit low levels of psychological safety to understand the challenges they face compared to teams with high psychological safety. Additionally, a further investigation into the newly identified barriers and facilitators is important to develop more nuanced strategies for fostering a psychologically safe environment in hybrid teams. Such research will provide valuable insights and practical solutions to enhance psychological safety, and consequently team performance in increasingly flexible and remote work settings.

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# Appendix 1 - Interview Guide

## **Introductory questions:**

- How long have you been working at Company X?
  - A regular week - how many times are you at the office?
    - a. From your impression, is that the same for other team members?
  - We know that your team structure has changed, but if you consider your last team (either under X or X, how long did you work in it?
  - According to you, what are the benefits of working within a hybrid team?
  - What are the downsides of working within a hybrid team?
- 

## **Facilitator questions:**

### **Inclusion:**

1. How do inclusive practices such as being encouraged to speak up or share your opinions, affect your likelihood of doing so?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience a difference in encouragement when working at the office or remotely?

### **Positive leadership behaviours:**

2. If your team leader is comfortable with making mistakes and showing vulnerability, how does that affect your psychological safety?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience a difference in leader humility when working at the office or remotely?
3. When your leader is actively listening to you, how do you feel about speaking up and sharing your ideas?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience a difference in how leaders listen to you when working at the office or remotely?
4. In what way does your leader's transparency affect your likelihood of risk taking such as questioning and voicing opinions?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience a difference in leader transparency when working at the office or remotely?
5. If you perceive your leader as being competent, how does that affect your psychological safety?
  - a. Follow-up: How apparent is your leader's competence when you are working in a hybrid environment?

### **Relationships & Social Capital:**

6. How does your relationships at work affect your likelihood of speaking up and asking questions?
  - a. Follow-up: How does hybrid work affect your relationships?
7. How does the size of your social capital influence willingness to express yourself and take risks?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience that your social capital changes when working hybridly?

**Supportive organisational context:**

8. How do you experience that organisational support affects your psychological safety, for example that you have enough resources and information?
    - a. Follow up: Do you experience any differences in having access to support when working in a hybrid environment?
- 

**Barrier questions:****Authoritarian leadership:**

9. If you have experienced enforced leadership decisions, how did it affect your willingness to speak up and contribute ideas or feedback?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience any differences in enforced leadership decisions when working in a hybrid environment?

**Abusive Supervision:**

10. If you have perceived leadership behaviours as hostile, did it affect your willingness to speak up and contribute ideas?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you perceive that it is easier or harder for people to be hostile when working hybridly?

**Hierarchy:**

11. Do you experience any hierarchical structures in your team and if so, how do these affect your feelings of valuable contributions?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience any differences in power distance between team members when working in a hybrid environment?
  - b. Follow-up: Do you experience any differences in the amount of conflicts due to hierarchy when working in a hybrid environment?

**Being monitored:**

12. Have you ever felt particularly monitored or evaluated when working hybridly?
  - a. Follow-up: How did this impact your likelihood to share your ideas or admit mistakes?

**Uncertainty:**

13. If you have experienced uncertain organisational situations, how does it affect your willingness to raise issues and ask questions?
  - a. Follow-up: In situations where you are lacking in knowledge, are you more or less likely to speak up?
  - b. Follow-up: If you have ever felt worried about losing your job, did that affect your willingness to ask for help or admit mistakes?
  - c. Does working hybridly increase or decrease uncertainty?

**High-stakes environment:**

14. When the stakes are high at work, how does it affect your likelihood to speak up, and ask questions?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you experience more or less pressure when working hybridly?



**Personality:**

15. In what way does your self-consciousness affect your likelihood of asking questions, speaking up and admitting mistakes?
  - a. Follow-up: Do you feel more or less confident when working hybridly?

**Faultlines:**

16. Do you experience the formation of sub-groups when working hybridly?
    - a. Follow-up: If yes, how does the formation of sub-groups affect your likelihood to give and ask for feedback from everyone in the team?
- 

**Concluding questions:**

17. Is there anything else that comes to mind when working hybridly that helps you feel more psychologically safe?
18. Is there anything else that negatively affects your feelings of psychological safety when working hybridly?
19. Is there anything you would like to add?