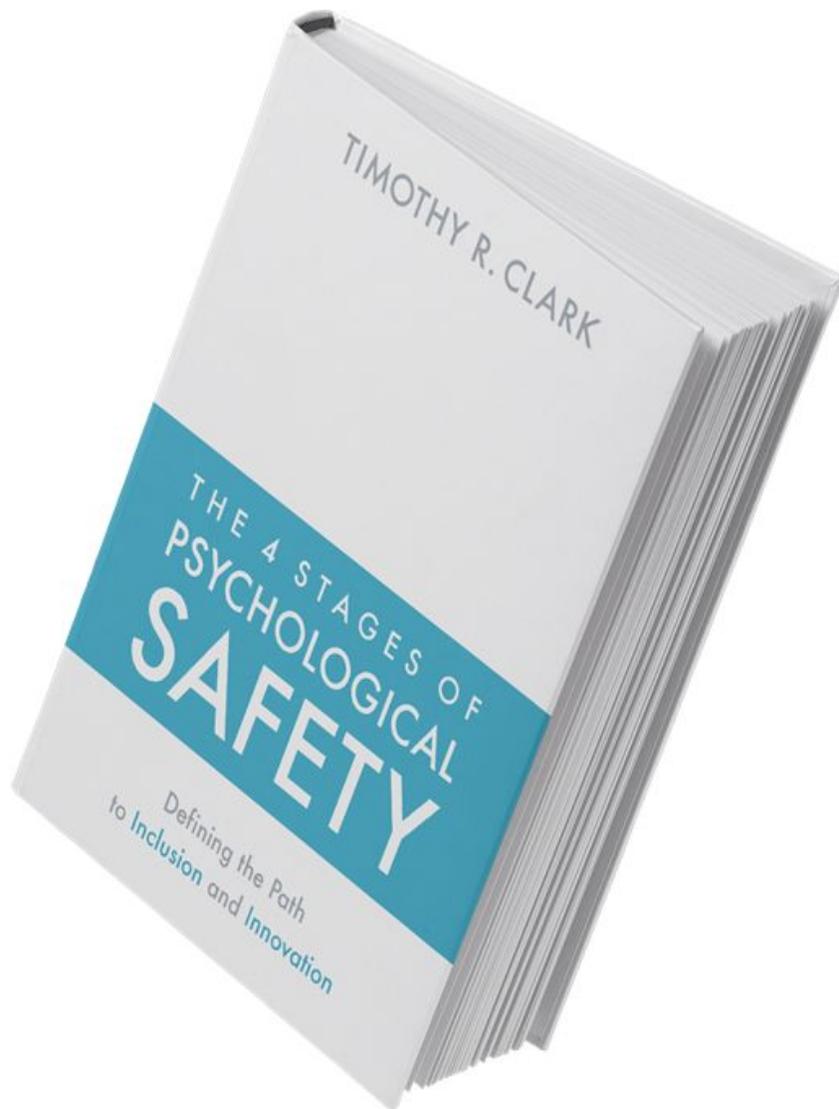


The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety Summary



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Psychological safety is a condition in which human beings feel (1) included, (2) safe to learn, (3) safe to contribute, and (4) safe to challenge the status quo—all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished in some way. The 4 stages of psychological safety is a universal pattern that reflects the natural progression of human needs in social settings. When teams, organizations, and social units of all kinds progress through the four stages, they create deeply inclusive environments, accelerate learning, increase contribution, and stimulate innovation.

Stage 1: Inclusion Safety



Inclusion safety satisfies the basic human need to connect and belong. Whether at work, school, home, or in other social settings, everyone wants to be accepted. In fact, the need to be accepted precedes the need to be heard. When others invite us into their society, we develop a sense of shared identity and a conviction that we matter. Inclusion safety allows us to gain membership within a social unit and interact with its members without fear of rejection or humiliation, boosting confidence, resilience, and independence. But what if you're deprived of that basic acceptance and validation as a human being? In short, it's debilitating. It activates the pain centers of the brain. Granting inclusion safety to another person is a moral imperative. Indeed, only the threat of harm can excuse us from this responsibility. When we create inclusion safety for others, regardless of our differences, we acknowledge our common humanity and reject false theories of superiority and arrogant strains of elitism.

Stage 2: Learner Safety



Learner safety satisfies the basic human need to learn and grow. It allows us to feel safe as we engage in all aspects of the learning process—asking questions, giving and receiving feedback, experimenting, and even making mistakes, not if but when we make them. We all bring some level of inhibition and anxiety to the learning process. We all have insecurities. Who hasn't hesitated to raise their hand to ask a question in a group setting for fear of feeling dumb? Learning is both intellectual and emotional. It's an interplay of the head and the heart. When we

sense learner safety, we're more willing to be vulnerable, take risks, and develop resilience in the learning process. Conversely, a lack of learner safety triggers the self-censoring instinct, causing us to shut down, retrench and manage personal risk. When we create learner safety for others, we give encouragement to learn in exchange for a willingness to learn.

Stage 3: Contributor Safety



Contributor safety satisfies the basic human need to contribute and make a difference. When contributor safety is present, we feel safe to contribute as a full member of the team, using our skills and abilities to participate in the value-creation process. We lean in to what we're doing with energy and enthusiasm. We have a natural desire to apply what we've learned to make a meaningful contribution. Why do we dislike micromanagers? Because they don't give us the freedom and discretion to reach our potential. Why do we like empowering bosses? Because they encourage us and draw out our best efforts. The more we contribute, the more confidence and competence we develop. When we create contributor safety for others, we empower them with autonomy, guidance, and encouragement in exchange for effort and results.

Stage 4: Challenger Safety



Challenger safety satisfies the basic human need to make things better. It's the support and confidence we need to ask questions such as, "Why do we do it this way?" "What if we tried this?" or "May I suggest a better way?" It allows us to feel safe to challenge the status quo without retaliation or the risk of damaging our personal standing or reputation. Challenger safety provides respect and permission to dissent and disagree when we think something needs to change and it's time to say so. It allows us to overcome the pressure to conform and gives us a license to innovate and be creative. As the highest level of psychological safety, it matches the increased vulnerability and personal risk associated with challenging the status quo. When we create challenger safety, we give air cover in exchange for candor.

We thrive in environments that respect us and allow us to (1) feel included, (2) feel safe to learn, (3) feel safe to contribute, and (4) feel safe to challenge the status quo. If we can't do these things, if it's emotionally expensive, fear shuts us down. We're not happy and we're not reaching our potential. But when the environment nurtures psychological safety, there's an explosion of confidence, engagement, and performance. Ask yourself if you feel included, safe to learn, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo. Finally, ask yourself if you're creating an environment where others can do these four things. In the process, look around and see others

with respect and fresh amazement, find deeper communion in your relationships, and more happiness and satisfaction in your own life.

Source: Timothy R. Clark, *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation*, (Berrett-Koehler, March 2020).

What People are Saying

“This is not just a book; it’s an urgent invitation to the kind of rigorous self-examination that will lead to breakthroughs in every relationship of your life. Clark offers us a case for and path to creating the healthy social systems we crave and modern corporate flourishing demands.”

—**Joseph Grenny, *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *Crucial Conversations***

“As a person responsible for the development of employees in 65 countries, I can tell you that this book outlines a must-have culture. A safe space is table stakes for any organization looking to attract and retain talent and innovate from every chair. A powerful call to action.”

—**Simone Ciafardini, Vice President, Clinique Global Education**

“The 4 stages framework is exceptionally insightful and perfectly logical. With the ongoing diversification of the workplace, Clark’s defined path to inclusion and innovation can’t be ignored. This book showed me how to improve my performance as both a team member and leader. The analysis and recommendations are insightful and inspiring.”

—**Martin Shell, Vice president and chief external relations officer, Stanford University**

“Many leaders talk about wanting the ‘truth’ but don’t model a social contract that protects employees in the vulnerability that comes with candor. Clark shows us how to create a safe environment where dissent and challenging the status quo are the norm, not the exception.”

—**Angela O’Dorisio, Director, Talent Development, VMware Carbon Black**