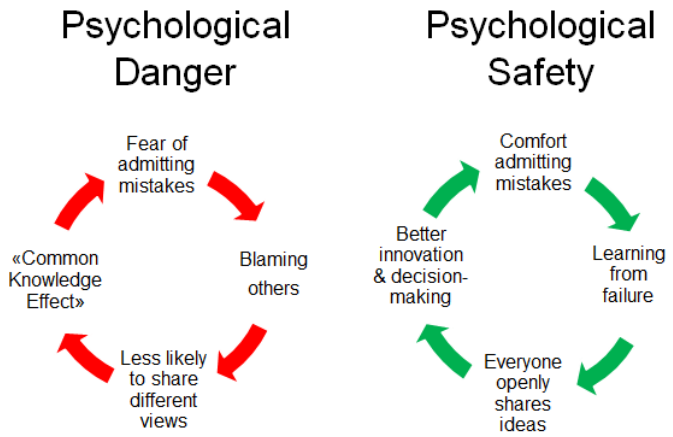
Psychological Safety

Mindfulness Minute: Incorporate safety into your workflow by considering the hazards and opportunities associated with your lab group's individual culture.

Psychological safety can be defined as the shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. This creates a learning posture where members of a team:

1. *Feel comfortable admitting mistakes, reporting incidents, asking for help, and bringing up difficult topics.*
2. *Learn from challenges, mistakes, and incidents together.*
3. *Collect and learn from data for better decision-making.*
4. *Share ideas openly with one another.*

Psychological safety and trust are strongly associated with effectiveness, safety performance, and a mature safety culture. Perception of how much a leader cares and a leader's integrity lead to increased trust and proactive safety climates. On the other hand, psychologically unsafe environments can lead to distraction, communication shutdowns, and burnout, which can allow for accidents or injuries to occur in the lab and for these incidents and issues to go unreported.



Cycles of psychological danger compared to psychological safety. The common knowledge effect is the hypothesis that an item of information or an idea's influence on group judgement is directly correlated with the number of group members who hold the information or idea before the group has a discussion. This can cause people not to mention new ideas or try new things.

Individual members of a team all typically share the same level of psychological safety, meaning that the entire group is impacted by the level of psychological safety. If you feel like you can't share your perspective or admit your mistakes, others in the lab most likely feel this way too.

The Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Development has published the following website describing UT's goals for psychological safety: https://research.utk.edu/research-integrity/safety/

Follow this list of dos and don'ts to foster psychological safety in your lab:

- **Do** listen carefully to understand what the source of feeling unsafe might be.
- **Do** ask open ended questions to demonstrate your interest in understanding and resolving problems.
- **Do** remove the threat to psychological safety by naming it and discussing it with all involved.
- **Do** seek measurements of psychological safety by asking lab members how they feel and what could be done to increase feelings of psychological safety. Send out surveys on a lab and departmental level.
- **Don't** place blame. If there is an issue or problematic circumstance, state it as an observation. Don't use sarcasm or emotive language.
- **Don't** encourage an environment of competitiveness. Instead, foster a culture of collaboration within your lab.

References:

[1] https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/07/career-healthy-lab

[2] https://ideas-in-action.lbl.gov/inclusion/psychological-safety

[3] Harvey, Sarah. Savvy Conversations, A practical Framework for Effective Workplace Relationships. Librotas; (9 Jan 2020)

[4] Lloyd, Clive. Next Generation Safety Leadership. *CRC Press*.