

Application Guide

THE UNEXPECTED PERFORMANCE MULTIPLIER WITH CHARLES DUHIGG



BOTTOM LINE:

Forget talent or strategy—one of the most effective ways to drive high performance is by fostering psychological safety, which empowers teams to share ideas and energy more freely.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I. Psychological safety determines whether people speak up.

- A. Psychological safety is the freedom to share ideas, intuition, and concerns without fear of embarrassment, punishment, or dismissal.
- B. When people don't feel safe, they self-protect instead of contributing.
- C. The best ideas often don't get expressed in environments where people feel pressured to defend themselves rather than explore possibilities.

II. Every conversation falls into one of three categories.

- A. Practical conversations focus on tasks, plans, and problem-solving.
- B. Emotional conversations focus on feelings, fears, and hopes.
- C. Identity conversations focus on values, purpose, and what something says about who we are.

III. Equality in conversational turn-taking builds trust and engagement.

- A. Psychological safety increases when everyone in the room has a chance to speak.
- B. Leaders should intentionally invite quieter voices into the conversation.

IV. Overt listening sets the standard for the room.

- A. Repeating back what you heard—even without agreeing—communicates respect and understanding.
- B. Referencing earlier comments shows that people's contributions matter.

V. Looping for understanding creates safety in hard conversations.

- A. Step one: Ask an open-ended question instead of starting with your own opinion.
- B. Step two: Reflect back what you heard in your own words to show you are processing, not just hearing.
- C. Step three: Ask, "Did I get that right?" to invite confirmation and mutual listening.
- D. This process lowers defensiveness and increases openness, especially in high-stakes discussions.

VI. Trust is built by choosing generous explanations.

- A. When expectations and experiences don't match, leaders choose what to place in the gap.
- B. Trust assumes the best until proven otherwise; suspicion assumes the worst.
- C. A culture of generous explanations creates an environment where people feel safe to be honest and curious rather than defensive.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. Where in your organization do people feel most free to speak honestly? Where do they feel most guarded?
2. In your meetings, who tends to speak the least? What might that indicate about the level of safety in the room?

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3. When someone expresses emotion or concern, do you typically acknowledge it or move quickly back to the agenda?
4. What systems or channels exist in your organization for people to safely raise concerns or frustrations? Are they trusted and used?

RESOURCES MENTIONED

1. [Supercommunicators](#) by Charles Duhigg

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