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# Psychological Safety in the Workplace

## Insights and Actions from a Cross-Industry Survey

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White Paper: Psychological  
Safety in the Workplace

## Introduction

Psychological safety, the belief that one can speak up without fear of punishment or humiliation, is a growing area of focus for organizations committed to safety, employee well-being, and high performance.

To assess the current state of psychological safety across industries, the Veriforce Strategic Advisory Board surveyed over 200 professionals representing a wide range of roles, company sizes, and sectors. This research, led by James Junkin and Dr. Logan Martin, provides evidence-based insights leading to actionable strategies to help organizations strengthen psychological safety across their workforce.



## Purpose

Psychological safety initiatives offer tangible benefits that can significantly reduce incident rates and cultivate genuinely proactive safety cultures. A direct relationship has been observed between an employee's perceived psychological safety and their propensity for experiencing a work-related injury (Dera, Adedokun & Iyiola, 2025). Research by the National Safety Council (NSC, 2023) indicates that workers reporting psychologically unsafe work environments were 80% more likely to have sustained a work-related injury requiring medical attention or resulting in missed workdays.

This statistic underscores the interconnected nature of mental and physical well-being within the occupational context.

By emphasizing mental well-being and open communication, psychological safety can indirectly mitigate physical risks associated with stress, anxiety, and disengagement (Bennouna, Boughaba, Djabou & Mouda, 2025). Supported and heard employees are less susceptible to burnout and exhibit higher levels of job engagement, which can lead to increased attentiveness and adherence to safety protocols (Dera, Adedokun & Iyiola, 2025).



When emotional and mental burdens are alleviated, workers can focus better on their job's physical demands, contributing to a healthier and safer work environment for all. Therefore, the ascendance of psychological safety signifies not merely a human resources trend but a fundamental paradigm shift towards building more resilient, transparent, and inherently safer global workplaces.

## Participant Snapshot

A total of 212 respondents contributed to the survey, representing diverse organizational roles and sectors:



### ROLES

Department Managers/Team Leads (35%), Senior Leadership (25%), Safety Professionals (20%), Human Resources (10%), and others.



### INDUSTRIES

Manufacturing (30%), Healthcare/Pharmaceuticals (25%), Construction (15%), Retail (10%), and Oil & Gas sectors.



### COMPANY SIZE

Ranged from fewer than 10 to more than 1,000 employees.



### GEOGRAPHY

35% of organizations operated internationally; 45% were U.S. domestic-only.



## Results and Interpretation

The results of Veriforce's cross-industry research on psychological safety offer meaningful insights into how the concept is understood, implemented, and experienced within organizations today. The data reveals an evolving awareness of psychological safety, while also highlighting critical gaps in policy, training, and leadership modeling.

Together, these findings underscore both the urgency and opportunity for organizations to take decisive action in embedding psychological safety into their culture and operations.

### Awareness and Familiarity

The concept of psychological safety is gaining traction, with 58% of respondents indicating at least some familiarity, including 31% who consider themselves “very familiar.” However, 9% of respondents reported no familiarity at all, signaling that awareness is not yet universal.

While promising overall, the data suggests that psychological safety remains in the early stages of mainstream understanding, particularly among frontline workers or in sectors without formal organizational safety programs.



**9% of workers**  
are completely unfamiliar with the **concept of psychological safety** in their workplace.

### Formalization Through Policies and Definitions

Despite growing conceptual awareness, the formalization of psychological safety in organizations remains limited. When asked whether their company has a formal definition of psychological safety communicated to employees:

- Only 36% responded yes,
- 47% indicated no, and
- 17% were unsure.



**47% of workers**  
report their company does NOT have a **formal definition** of psychological safety.



**Over half**  
of the companies polled  
do not have a **written policy** for  
psychological health and safety.

### This uncertainty is further reflected in policy adoption:

- Just 16% reported the presence of a written policy on psychological safety,
- 51% said no policy exists, and
- 22% stated that one is currently in development.

These findings indicate a disconnect between theoretical understanding and practical integration. Organizations may recognize the importance of psychological safety but have yet to institutionalize it through written documentation or policy frameworks.

This presents a strategic risk, as informal or inconsistent approaches may fail to provide the clarity and structure necessary to support employee trust and accountability.



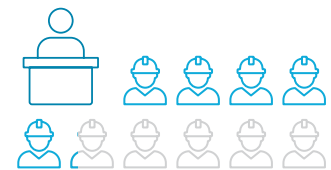
## Training and Capacity Building

Training represents another critical gap. A full 52% of respondents reported that no formal training or workshops on psychological safety are currently offered at their organization. Only:

- 19% provide training to all employees,
- 2% to specific teams, and
- 2% to leaders only.
- 18% stated training is in development, and
- 7% were unsure.

The scarcity of structured educational efforts signals a missed opportunity to empower employees with the tools and language necessary for psychologically safe behaviors. Formal training is a recognized enabler of interpersonal risk-taking, encouraging employees to raise concerns, report errors, and share their viewpoints.

Organizations that neglect this development risk leaving employees unsupported, even if leadership has good intentions.



**Over half**  
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## Leadership Behavior and Influence

Leadership emerged as a powerful determinant of psychological safety perceptions. When asked how well their organization's leadership promotes and models psychologically safe behaviors:

- 33% said "very well,"
- 48% said "moderately well," and
- 19% said "not at all well."

The correlation between leadership behavior and employee comfort in speaking up is particularly significant. Among respondents, 63% reported feeling "very comfortable" expressing opinions or concerns, and another 29% felt "somewhat comfortable." Only 6% indicated discomfort.

These findings align closely with Edmondson & Bransby's (2023) research, which identifies leadership as the primary driver of team-level psychological safety. Tangible leadership behaviors, such as active listening, admitting mistakes, and responding non-punitively, can create the conditions necessary for psychological safety to thrive.



**19% of workers**  
report their leaders do  
not **actively promote**  
psychologically safe behaviors.





## Strategic Value of Psychological Safety

Respondents recognized the broader impact of psychological safety. When asked whether they believed there was a correlation between psychological safety and employee engagement/satisfaction:

- 30% perceived a strong correlation,
- 38% perceived a moderate correlation,
- 19% were unsure, and
- Only 13% reported little to no correlation.



**30% of workers**  
believe there is a strong link between a focus on **psychological safety** and **employee engagement**.

This demonstrates that psychological safety is seen not only as a safety imperative but as a strategic asset for talent engagement and organizational health. Organizations that invest in psychological safety are likely to see dividends in productivity, collaboration, and retention.

## Direction, Clarity, and Feedback

Several supplementary items explored how well employees understand organizational direction and expectations, factors that indirectly influence psychological safety:



**93% of respondents**  
agreed or strongly agreed that they have a **clear sense of where their unit is going**.



**95% of respondents**  
agreed or strongly agreed that they know where they want their **unit to be in five years**.



**78% of respondents**  
agreed or strongly agreed that they **clearly communicate tasks and reward criteria**.

These results suggest that, in many organizations, there is a strong foundation of clarity and goal alignment. However, these benefits may not fully translate to psychological safety unless supported by targeted behaviors and systems that allow employees to act on this clarity without fear of reprisal.



## Persistent Barriers to Psychological Safety

Despite promising levels of comfort and clarity, the findings also revealed common structural and cultural barriers. Fear of retribution, inconsistent leadership behavior, and production pressure were repeatedly cited in open-text responses and are well-documented in safety literature. These challenges reflect enduring tensions between operational efficiency and employee well-being.

Notably, organizations with high production demands may inadvertently discourage employees from reporting hazards or slowing down workflows to prioritize safety. This dynamic can significantly undermine psychological safety, even when leadership intends otherwise.

## Summary of Key Insights

- 01 Psychological safety is increasingly recognized but not yet universally understood or implemented.
- 02 Leadership behavior has the most substantial influence on psychological safety perceptions.
- 03 Formal policies and training significantly improve employee comfort and familiarity.
- 04 Psychological safety is positively correlated with employee engagement and satisfaction.
- 05 Operational pressures and cultural inertia remain formidable barriers.



These findings confirm that while awareness is increasing, intentional strategy, consistent leadership behavior, and structural investment are necessary to embed psychological safety as a core organizational value.



# Proposed Solutions for Organizations

To translate these findings into organizational change, we recommend the following evidence-based actions:

## 1 Targeted Leadership Development

Implement training across all leadership levels focused on:

- Active listening and empathetic feedback
- Constructive handling of disagreement
- Modeling vulnerability (e.g., admitting mistakes)
- Non-punitive responses to employee input
- Include 360-degree feedback loops to assess leaders on psychological safety behaviors.

## 2 Reinforce Non-Punitive Reporting Systems

- Clearly define and communicate non-retaliation policies.
- Reframe incident investigations as learning opportunities.
- Remove biases from performance evaluations that may penalize issue reporting.
- Celebrate examples of employees speaking up constructively.

## 3 Align Production and Safety Objectives

- Reassess performance targets to ensure they don't compromise safety.
- Adjust incentive systems to reward safe behaviors and open communication.
- Reinforce the message: taking time for safety is performance.

## 4 Enhance Policy Accessibility and Communication

- Move beyond policy creation to active implementation of psychological safety principles.
- Use digital campaigns, intranet modules, and team meetings to reinforce messaging.
- Provide relatable, real-world examples of psychological safety in action.

## 5 Implement Continuous Monitoring

- Deploy anonymous pulse surveys and digital suggestion platforms to track psychological safety.
- Integrate psychological safety indicators into existing safety observation programs.
- Use data for adaptive strategy adjustments and transparent communication.





## Conclusion

Psychological safety is not just an ethical imperative; rather, it's a strategic advantage. The evidence is clear: when leaders model safe behaviors and when organizations invest in training and supportive structures, employees respond with increased openness, engagement, and proactive risk identification. On the other hand, when fear, pressure, or inconsistency reign, the cost is not only silence but missed opportunities to prevent harm.

By adopting the targeted actions outlined above, organizations can build a foundation of trust, transparency, and collaboration that supports both people and performance. Psychological safety is more than a buzzword; it's a cultural asset that, when nurtured, unlocks the full potential of your workforce.

**Contact us today and discover how Veriforce can help you implement innovative, customized solutions to meet your business needs.**





## About the Authors



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