

# The Fearless Report

The Global State of  
Psychological Safety at Work

2025 Edition



# Setting the stage

**The first Fearless Report, published in 2024, drew on 11,143 responses globally. Its central finding was a surprise to many: psychological safety did not vary meaningfully by generation, personality type, or tenure. If individual characteristics do not explain differences in psychological safety, then organizational and team-level conditions must.**

The 2025 edition was designed to identify those conditions. The core assessment methodology remains Amy C. Edmondson's 7-item team-level psychological safety scale, developed in her original 1999 research and validated across hundreds of organizations since 2019. This year we added a 5-item organizational scale and a set of supplementary research questions, each testing a specific hypothesis about what shapes safety beyond team dynamics.

Amy C. Edmondson contributed a question on team expertise diversity. Connie Hadley and Sarah Wright provided a question on workplace loneliness drawn from their research on isolation in organizations. Julie Diamond's work on power dynamics informed a question about whether decisions are driven by ideas or status. And Mark Mortensen's research on distributed teams helped us examine how work environment structures shape safety.

The results were more differentiated than we expected. Loneliness, power dynamics, flexibility, team composition, and hierarchical level each showed strong associations with psychological safety. These are not peripheral factors. They are central to how safety is experienced, and they are within the reach of leaders who choose to act on them.

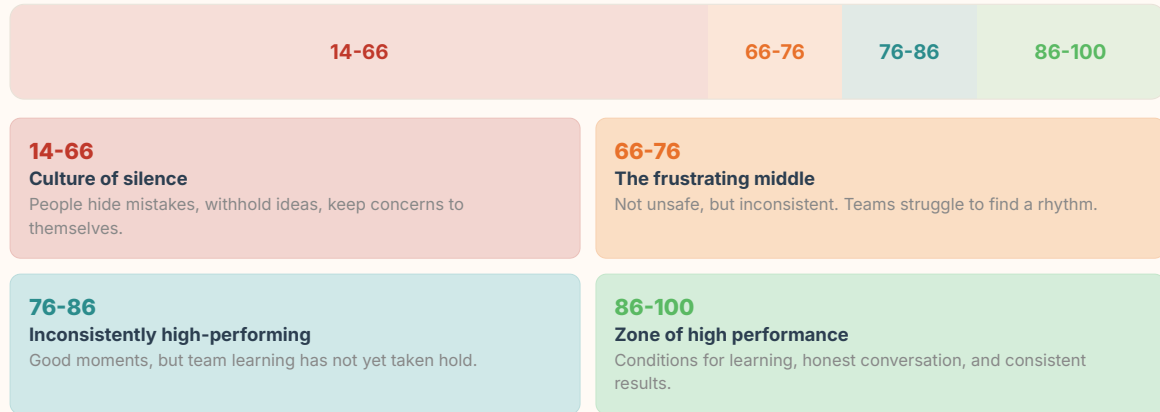
## Contributors

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Ph.D. Author of Power: A User's Guide

# Understanding the Scale

## How to read every number in this report.

All scores on a 14-100 Psychological Safety Index.



## What we heard from 5,530 voices

- 16,673 cumulative responses across 2024 and 2025
- 33 countries
- 21 industries

The four zones shown above are quartile benchmarks derived from data across hundreds of organizations using the Fearless Organization Scan. Scores range from 14 (lowest possible response on every item) to 100.

We report the median throughout, not the average. The reason matters. Open Conversation has a median of 86 but an average of 69. Most people score high. A significant minority scores far below, invisible in an average but visible in a median-average gap.

When that gap exceeds 10 points, we flag it. The group is more divided than the headline number suggests.

The overall Psychological Safety Index is composed of four domain scores.

- **Willingness to Help** captures whether team members support each other and value each other's contributions.
- **Inclusion & Diversity** measures whether people feel accepted regardless of their differences.
- **Attitude to Risk & Failure** reflects whether it is safe to make mistakes and take chances.
- **Open Conversation** measures whether the team can surface difficult issues.

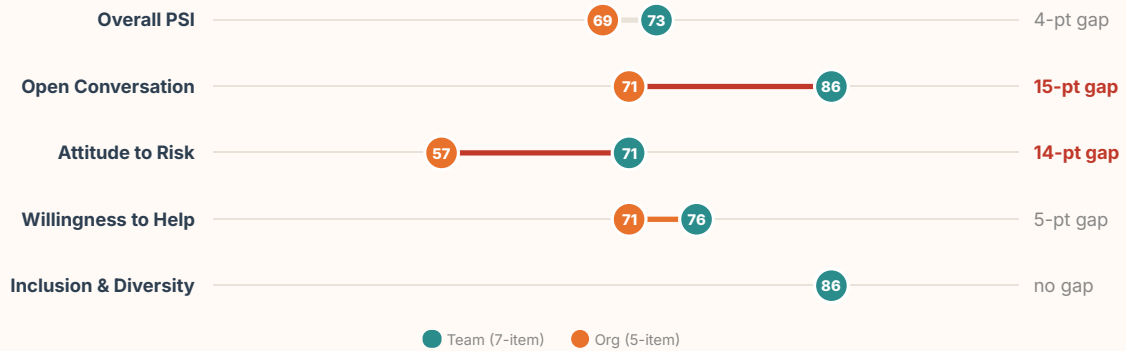
Each finding in this report connects to one or more of these domains.

A note on the instrument: the 7-item scale includes both first-person items ("my unique skills and talents are valued") and third-person items ("members of this team are able to bring up tough issues"). This distinction matters when interpreting scores across role levels, because the same item can be experienced differently depending on where you sit in the hierarchy.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Baseline

### People feel safer on their team than in their organization.



*Your best managers are building safety that the organization systematically undermines.*

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,530

**Before examining what shapes psychological safety, it helps to understand a pattern that appears in virtually every time we assess large organisations: people feel safer on their immediate team than in their organization as a whole. This is normal. The team is where relationships are closest, norms are clearest, and trust is most direct.**

Open Conversation shows the largest gap: 15 points between team and organization. Attitude to Risk shows 14. These are the dimensions most dependent on interpersonal courage, and courage is harder to sustain outside the familiarity of your immediate team. By contrast, Inclusion and Diversity shows no gap at all. People report they are equally included regardless of whether they are assessing their team or the broader organization.

This baseline matters for everything that follows. When we show that loneliness erodes the team advantage, or that team leads perceive safety differently than their direct reports, these findings should be read against this pattern: the team is normally a safer

space, and anything that narrows that gap deserves attention.

The median across this sample is 73, the same as the 2024 dataset despite a different respondent pool. The consistency suggests

2024  
**73** = **73**  
2025

**Different respondents. Different findings.  
Same result.**

the finding is stable.

But the value of this report is not in the topline number - it's in the variation underneath.

# Loneliness

**Loneliness cuts psychological safety nearly in half.**



**38 point gap** between never lonely and always lonely

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,383 | "How often do you feel lonely while working?" - Hadley & Wright

Most participants say “never” or “rarely” lonely, jointly more than 57% of responses. “Sometimes” accounts for 24%. Those who say “always” represent just under 4% of participants, but that is still roughly 1 in 25 people telling us they are always lonely at work.

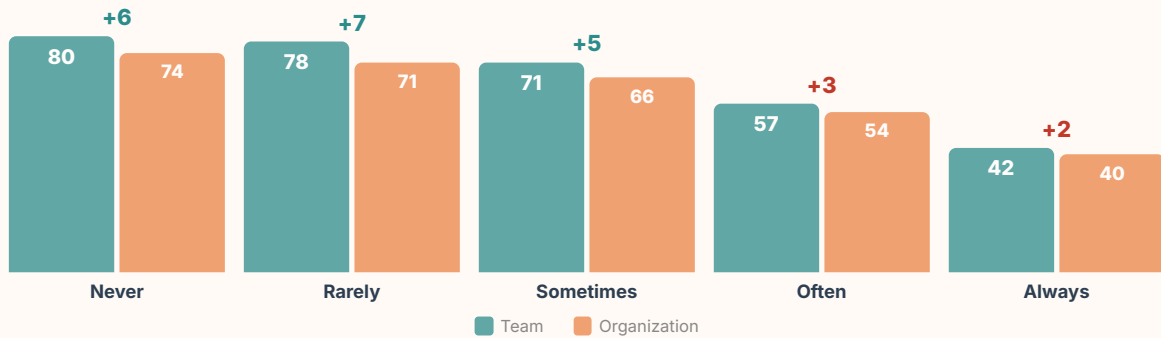
A person who “sometimes” feels lonely while working already scores at 71. One step further, to “often,” and they are in a culture of silence. The transition is not gradual. It is a cliff.

Participants who rate their loneliness higher also rate Open Conversation markedly lower in their teams. This is notable because Open Conversation is a third-person construct: “Members of this team are able to bring up

problems and tough issues.” Speaking up about what’s really going on is the most visible outcome of a psychologically safe team. It also appears to contribute to a sense of belonging, more than other items on the scale.

The connection between loneliness and voice may run in both directions.

## The team advantage **disappears** for the loneliest people.



### The group you can still reach

"Sometimes lonely" = 24% of sample. Moving them to "rarely" lifts scores 7 points.

### At "always lonely"

The team scores only 2 points above the org. The team's protective effect is gone.

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,383 | "How often do you feel lonely while working?" - Hadley & Wright

## The team advantage disappears for the loneliest people

As established in Chapter 1, team-level safety nearly always exceeds organizational safety. For most participants, that gap is 4-7 points. For the loneliest respondents, it shrinks to 2. The "home team" that provides connection and companionship for most people is not providing it for them.

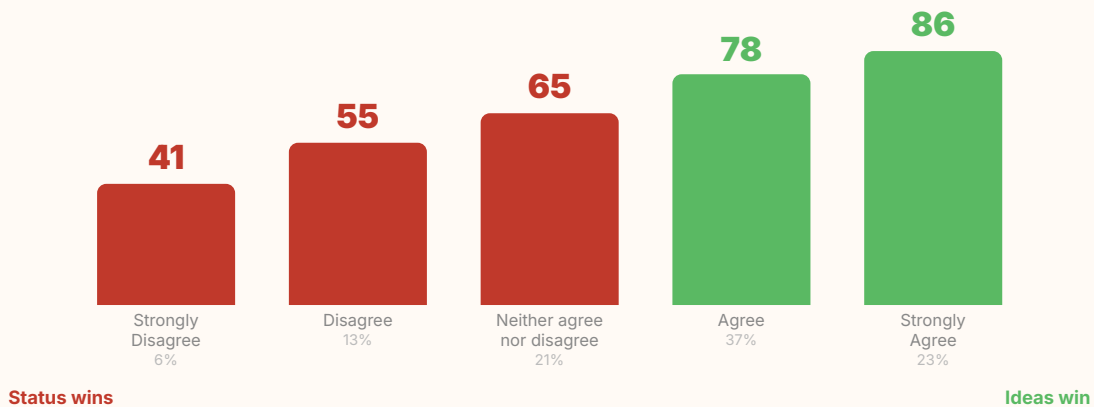
Put differently, if you have a great team in a lesser organization, you are less likely to identify as lonely. For those who do, the team advantage is largely gone.

The practical implication: the people who most need the safety your team provides are the least able to access it.

# The HIPPO Effect

**When ideas win, people speak up. When status wins, they go silent.**

*"In my team, decisions are based on the quality of ideas, not the status of the person who shares them" - Julie Diamond*



Nearly **4 in 10** respondents do not confidently say ideas win over status. The 21% answering "neither" score 65 - below the threshold of consistent safety.

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,385 | Power item by Julie Diamond

**HIPPO stands for "Highest Paid Person's Opinion." Julie Diamond's research on power dynamics informed the question behind this finding. It measures something specific: whether people believe the quality of an idea determines its influence, or whether the status of the speaker does.**

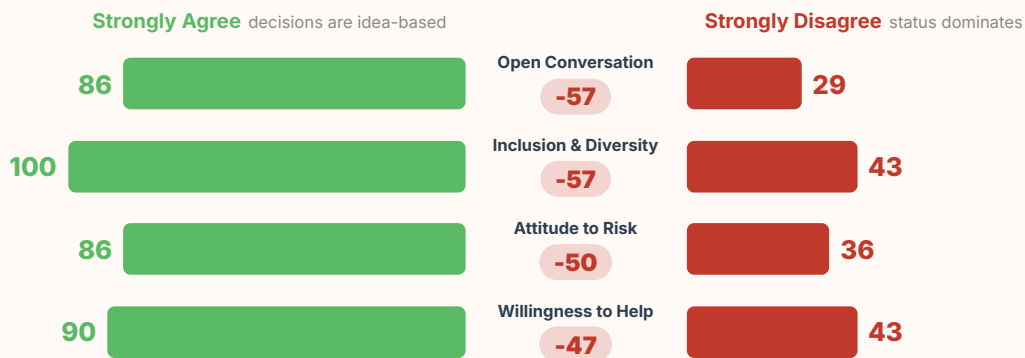
Of the 5,385 respondents, 60% agree or strongly agree that decisions are idea-based. But 19% disagree or strongly disagree, nearly 1 in 5 saying that status drives decisions on their team.

When you cannot predict whether ideas or status will carry the day, the rational response is to say less.

The 21% who selected "neither agree nor disagree" deserve attention. Their score of 65 places them below the threshold of consistent safety. Inconsistency may be harder to navigate than a consistently hierarchical culture, because it removes the ability to calibrate risk.

## What the HIPPO effect does to each dimension.

Strongly Agree: n=1,231 (23%) | Strongly Disagree: n=309 (6%)



*Unlike psychological safety as a whole, the HIPPO dynamic is something a leader can begin to shift through their own behavior. Who gets heard first? Whose suggestions get taken up?*

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,385 | Power item by Julie Diamond

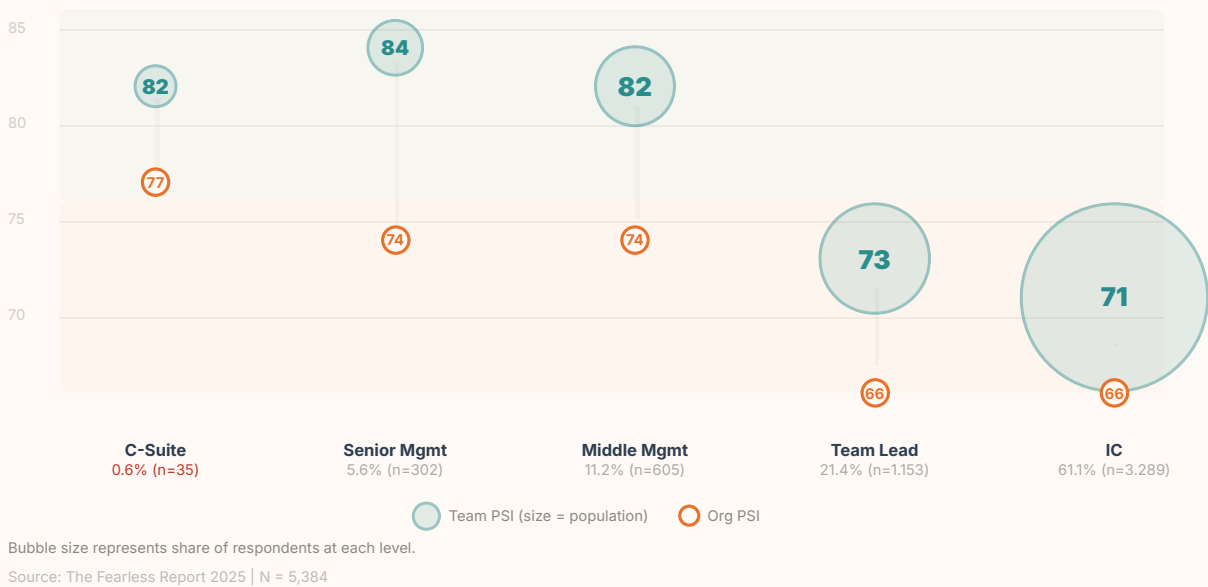
### What HIPPO does to each dimension

The butterfly chart reveals that HIPPO is not a general dampener. It has a negative impact on two key domains. Open Conversation and Inclusion suffer the largest drops because these dimensions depend on whether junior voices feel authorized to participate.

Risk and Help are more robust because they can operate through private action, not public speech.

# The View from the Top

**The higher you sit, the less you see.**



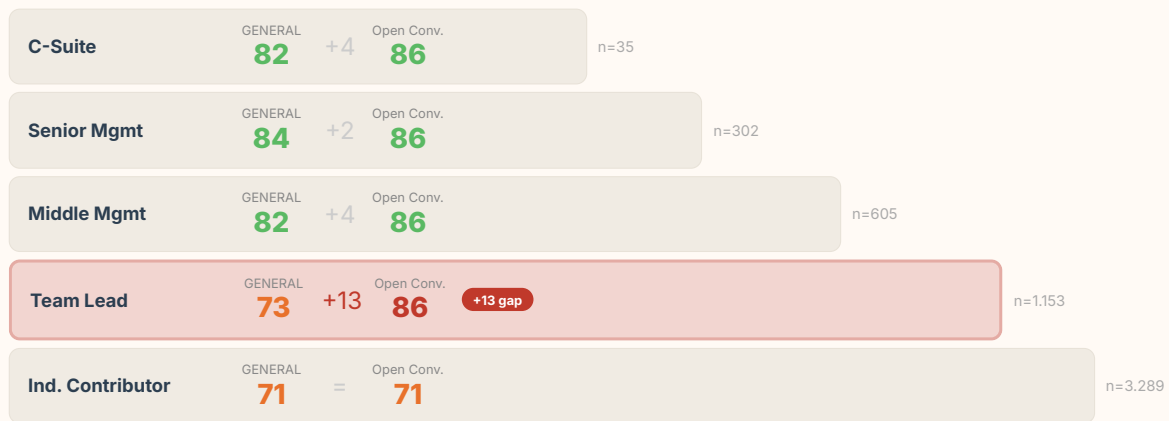
**People at higher levels rate psychological safety more favorably. The more helpful finding is the cliff. Between Middle Management and Team Lead, team PSI drops 9 points. This is where authority to shape the environment ends and the requirement to operate within it begins.**

This pattern is notable because the scale is measured predominantly through third person and neutral items i.e. we are not asking if “I feel able to bring up tough issues” or “I am included”, but rather do I notice that others are comfortable bringing up tough issues or we all welcome and include the voices of others. As a result, leaders have an equal capacity to note this and therefore should not be rating it higher simply because of their position.

The organizational scores tell a sharper story. Senior management reports a 10-point gap between the psychological safety of their team (84) and their organization (74). Suggesting a significantly different experience in their own team than within the wider organization.

Individual contributors see a 5-point gap, the same gap as C-Suite. Although from a lower organizational score. This tells us they do not experience the same dramatic distinction between their team and the rest of the company.

## The blind spot at the first rung of leadership.



### Why this happens

Team leads are recipients of upward communication. They see problems arriving and rate Open Conversation high. Their direct reports rate it at 71.

*Never show a team lead their Open Conversation score of 86 without also presenting the individual contributor score of 71.*

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,384

## The blind spot at the first rung of leadership

The Open Conversation item reads: “Members of this team are able to bring up tough issues.” When a team lead answers this, they are rating a flow of communication that arrives at their desk.

Their direct reports are answering a different question entirely: when each team member rates this item, they are giving their individual read on whether raising something difficult is actually possible in this team.

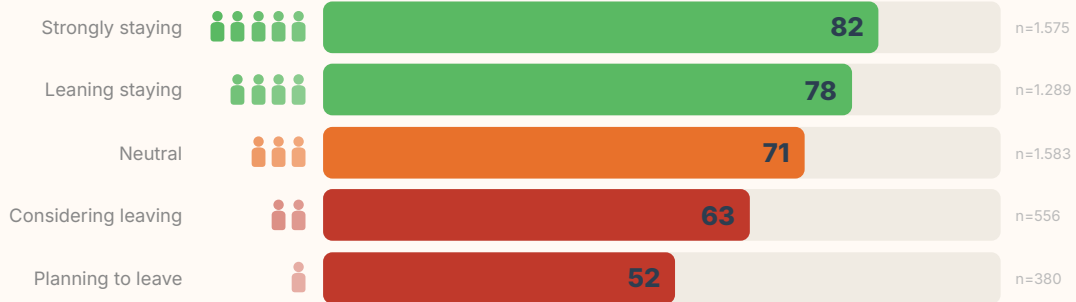
This is not a criticism of team leads. The position you are in influences the way you answer the survey items.

The median gap is 13 points, though the mean scores are likely closer due to a ceiling effect on this item.

The recommendation: help a team lead by understanding their score in relation to their aggregated team’s Open Conversation score.

# Turnover Intention

**By the time they're planning to leave, the psychological exit already happened.**



**30 point gap**  
staying vs searching

*Don't wait for exit interviews to learn what a safety survey would have told you 12 months earlier.*

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,383 | "I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months"

**The 30-point gap between those planning to stay and those planning to search for a new job is striking, but expected.**

The actionable insight is in the middle. 1,583 people selected “neutral” on the turnover question. They have not decided to leave. They also have not decided to stay. And they are already scoring at 71. By the time someone is ambivalent, their experience of safety has already eroded.

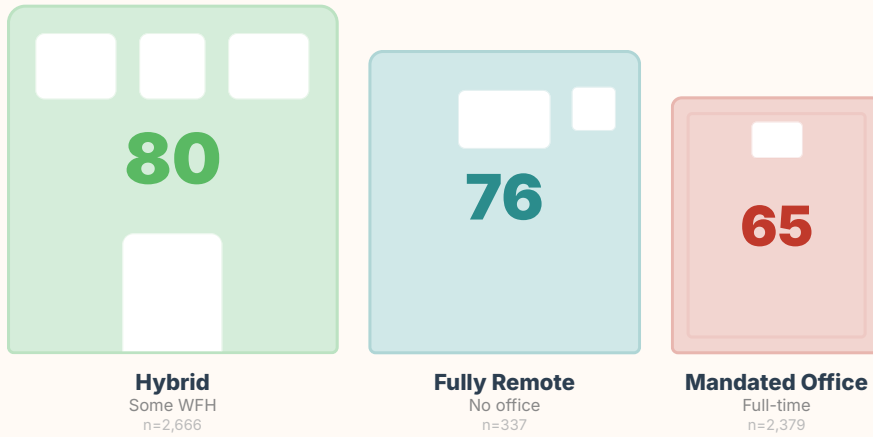
Most organizations detect turnover risk through resignation letters and exit interviews. This data suggests the signal was available much earlier, in a safety survey that no one administered, or that no one acted on.

Throughout this report, a pattern emerges: psychological safety scores decrease most significantly not for the extremes, but for people in the middle. The “sometimes lonely,” the “neither agree nor disagree” on HIPPO, the “neutral” on turnover.

This represents a much larger audience than the extreme bottom, and improving the scores at the middle may have more combined impact than focusing on the outliers alone.

# Flexibility and Team Composition

**Flexibility creates space. Mandates constrain it.**



**15** point gap

*The debate shouldn't be where people work. It should be whether they feel free to speak up wherever they are.*

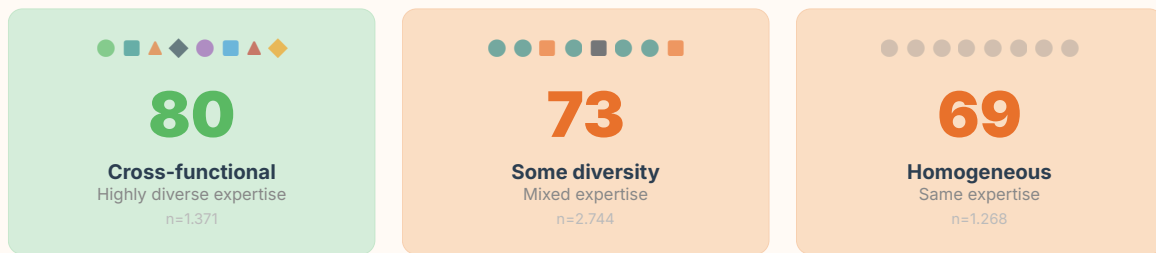
Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,382 | Work environment item by Mark Mortensen

**Fifteen points separate hybrid workers from those in mandated office environments. This is among the largest gaps in the dataset.**

It would be a mistake to read this as an argument for remote work. Fully remote workers score 76, not 80. The highest scores belong to people with flexibility, not people who are never in an office.

The mechanism is likely not location but autonomy. When an organization mandates presence, it communicates something about trust.

## Diverse teams are safer teams.



**11** point gap between cross-functional and homogeneous

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,383 | Team expertise diversity item by Amy C. Edmondson

### Diverse teams are safer teams

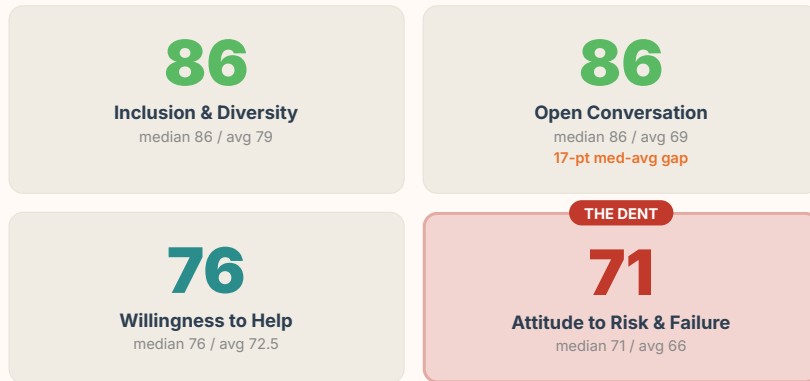
Teams composed of people with different professional backgrounds score 80. Teams where everyone shares the same expertise score 69.

One interpretation: diverse teams develop stronger norms of perspective-taking because they must.

When your colleague's expertise is fundamentally different from yours, you cannot assume shared context. You have to ask. You have to explain. You have to listen. These behaviors are also the building blocks of psychological safety.

# The Risk Deficit

**People feel included and supported. They don't feel safe enough to take risks.**



*The most common archetype: a team that is inclusive and supportive but risk-averse - pleasant to work in, but resistant to the discomfort required for learning and growth.*

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,530 | Team PSI

**We call it “the dent” because it appears in over 90% of measured segments. Inclusion is strong. Help-seeking is healthy. Open Conversation scores well. And then Risk drops.**

What does a score of 71 on Attitude to Risk and Failure actually look like?

It looks like the engineer who notices a flaw in the design but waits for a more senior person to raise it first. The product manager who has a bold idea but pitches the incremental version instead. The new hire who sees a broken process on day three but assumes there must be a reason for it.

These are not acts of cowardice. They are rational responses to what Dr. Edmondson’s original research identified as impression management: the desire to appear competent, knowledgeable, and supportive.

In an environment that has not yet made it safe to be wrong, the cost of a mistake still outweighs the perceived benefit of speaking up. The team is pleasant to work in. It is also resistant to the discomfort that learning requires.

# Industry and Function

## Psychological safety by industry.

Industries with n >= 50. A 20-point spread.



Industry data reflects participating organizations, not the industry as a whole.

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,385 | Team PSI

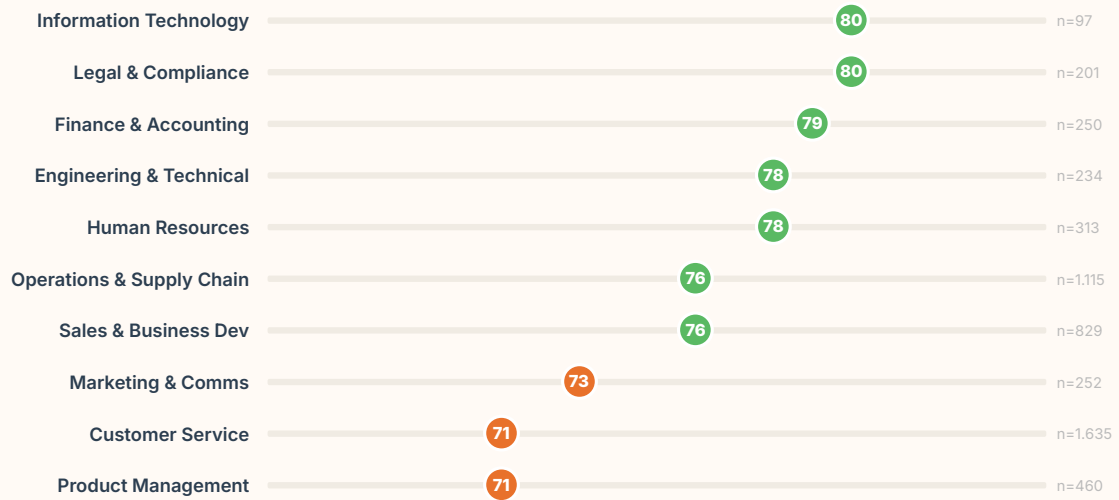
**A 20-point spread separates the highest-scoring industries from the lowest. Non-profits score highest. Retail, our most measured industry at nearly 2,700 respondents, scores lowest at 67.**

These are not industry benchmarks. Our dataset is not yet large or representative enough to paint a complete picture of any single industry. The scores reflect the organizations that chose to participate.

The real benchmarks are the ones your organization creates for itself by measuring year over year.

## Psychological safety by function.

A 9-point range from 71 to 80.



*Customer-facing functions may experience lower safety not because of poor management, but because of the structural demands of their roles.*

Source: The Fearless Report 2025 | N = 5,385 | Team PSI

## Psychological safety by function

The functional data tells a quieter story. Nine points separate the highest-scoring function (IT, at 80) from the lowest (Customer Service, at 71). Customer-facing functions may experience lower safety not because their managers are worse, but because the structural demands of their work create a baseline of interpersonal strain that internal functions do not face.

# What the data is telling us

## Five findings. One story.

**People who feel lonely stop speaking up. People who believe status outweighs ideas stop contributing them. People who have already decided to leave were psychologically unsafe long before they started looking. People who lack flexibility lack trust. People who feel included and supported still do not feel psychologically safe enough to fail.**

These are not five separate problems. They are five views of the same condition: an environment that has not yet made it safe to be honest about what is not working.

The 2024 report established that psychological safety is not a function of age, gender, or personality. The 2025 data identifies the specific conditions that suppress it: HIPPO dynamics, loneliness, mandated presence, and risk intolerance. These are not abstractions. They are variables a leadership team can name, measure, and address.

The median across this sample is the same as last year, despite a different respondent pool. The state of psychological safety in the organizations that measure it is stable. The question is whether or not stable is acceptable.

# Join The Fearless Report 2026

## Be part of it

The data gets stronger with every organization that participates. The 2026 edition will explore how artificial intelligence is reshaping the experience of psychological safety at work.

## What you receive

- Your organization's Psychological Safety Index with benchmarks against the global dataset.
- Dimension-level scores across all four domains.
- Breakdowns by role level, function, and team.
- Early access to The Fearless Report 2026 before public release.

## What it involves

- A brief, validated survey administered to your teams.
- Most organizations complete data collection in 2-3 weeks.
- Minimum sample: 60 respondents.
- Data collection opens Q2 2026.

[fearlessorganizationscan.com/report](https://fearlessorganizationscan.com/report)



# Methodology

## How we measured

### Instruments

Respondents completed two validated psychological safety scales. The primary instrument is the Edmondson 7-item team-level scale, which measures psychological safety across four domains: Willingness to Help (3 items), Inclusion and Diversity (1 item), Attitude to Risk and Failure (2 items), and Open Conversation (1 item). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with three items reverse-scored. The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency across multiple studies (Cronbach's Alpha > .82).

A second 5-item scale measures psychological safety at the organizational level. It shares three conceptual domains with the team scale but omits items on mistake tolerance and help-seeking. This methodological difference should be considered when interpreting team-organization gaps reported in Chapter 1.

### Supplementary Research Questions

Five single-item questions were included to explore factors beyond the core psychological safety construct. As single-item measures, they carry lower reliability than multi-item scales and should be interpreted as indicators of association rather than diagnostic instruments.

- ① HIPPO: "In my team, decisions are based on the quality of ideas, not the status of the person who shares them" (5-point agreement scale). Item developed from the work of Julie Diamond on power dynamics.
- ① Loneliness: "How often do you feel lonely while working?" (5-level frequency scale). Item adapted from the work of Connie Hadley and Sarah Wright on workplace loneliness.
- ① Turnover intent: "I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months" (5-point agreement scale).
- ① Work environment: Self-reported as fully remote, hybrid, or mandated in-office.
- ① Team expertise diversity: Self-reported as cross-functional, some diversity, or homogeneous. Contributed by Amy Edmondson.

## Scoring

All scores are reported on a 14-100 scale, where 14 represents the lowest possible response on every item and 100 represents the highest. The primary measure of central tendency is the median. When the gap between median and average exceeds 10 points, it is flagged as an indicator of hidden polarization within the group. The largest such gap in the dataset is Open Conversation, with a median of 86 and an average of 69.

## Sample

The 2025 dataset comprises 5,530 respondents from 33 countries, 21 industries, 10 functions, and 5 role levels. Southern European retail organizations account for approximately 51% of the sample. Cross-cutting findings reported in this document are consistent across geographic and industry segments.

## Limitations

This is a cross-sectional, correlational study. Causal inference is not supported. The sample is self-selected, consisting of organizations that chose to measure psychological safety through the Fearless Organization Scan platform. Inclusion and Diversity and Open Conversation are each measured by a single item, which limits their reliability relative to multi-item domains. C-Suite respondents total 35 and should be interpreted with caution. The team lead Open Conversation finding reflects a positional bias in how the survey item is interpreted at different organizational levels.

## References

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