



# VCU


## Conflict Resolution Day

16 October 2018

# Inspiring Conflict Competence:

## Building Cultures of Psychological Safety on Campus

*Donna Douglass Williams, Ombudsperson  
Green Climate Fund  
Presenter*



## VCU Core Values

- **Accountability** – committing to the efficient and transparent stewardship of our resources to achieve institutional excellence
- **Achievement** – ensuring distinction in learning, research and scholarly pursuits, service, and patient care
- **Collaboration** – fostering collegiality and cooperation to advance learning, entrepreneurship and inquiry
- **Freedom** – *striving for intellectual truth with responsibility and civility, respecting the dignity of all individuals*
- **Innovation** – cultivating discovery, creativity, originality, inventiveness and talent
- **Service** – engaging in the application of learning and discovery to improve the human condition and support the public good at home and abroad
- **Diversity** – ensuring a climate of trust, honesty and integrity where all people are valued and differences are recognized as an asset
- **Integrity** – adhering to the highest standards of honesty, respect and professional and scholarly ethics

# The campus “neighborhood”

- “The neighborhood was not a fantasy place where all these different people got together and everything was happily ever after. When you have diverse people together with their different opinions, you have conflict. And that’s what happens in the neighborhood – you have conflict. Real conflict.”

➤ Junlei Li, Co-Director, Fred Rogers Center



# Where is there conflict on campus?

- In academic departments – among faculty, staff, faculty/staff
- In administrative departments- among staff
- Between staff and managers; chairs and faculty
- Faculty senate; Staff senate
- Inter-department conflicts
- Executive leadership; leadership and faculty
- Research labs
- Students and faculty
- Medical faculty; staff; patients
- Between students (resident halls, classwork, student groups)
- Student government
- Athletic teams
- Vendors, parents, alumni, community





**Conflict** is inevitable, especially in large, complex, multicultural organizations. Some keys to positive resolution outcomes are:

- that the organizational culture provides **safety** and such that the members of the campus community (“neighborhood”) **trust** one another to engage in constructive resolution in good faith, and
- that the members have **conflict competence skills** to **respectfully engage** in dialogue and other effective resolution processes, and
- that there is a robust **conflict resolution framework** that offers policies, processes, and mechanisms that people understand and in which they have confidence, and
- that its members believe everyone will be held **accountable** to behave in accordance with institutional **core values**, and there are consequences for inappropriate behavior (**behavioral integrity**)



# Safety

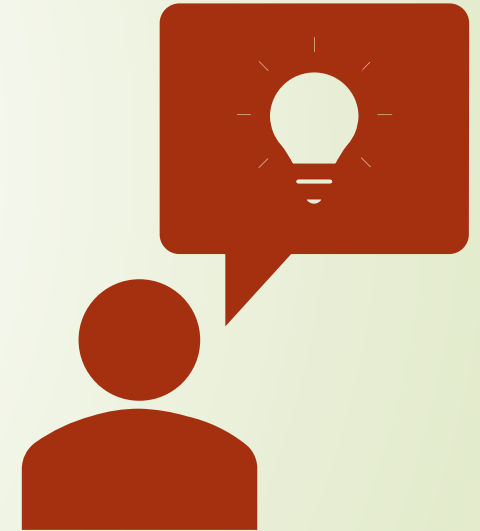
- Condition of being protected from, or unlikely to cause danger, risk or injury. Freedom from harm; state of being safe; state of not being dangerous or harmful; a place that is free from harm or danger

- [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

- [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)

## Initial thoughts about your team:

- ▶ Take a minute or so to think about how your team. Think about your department culture, climate, interpersonal dynamics-how your team interacts and works together. How would you describe the team? Write down the first few words that come to mind.

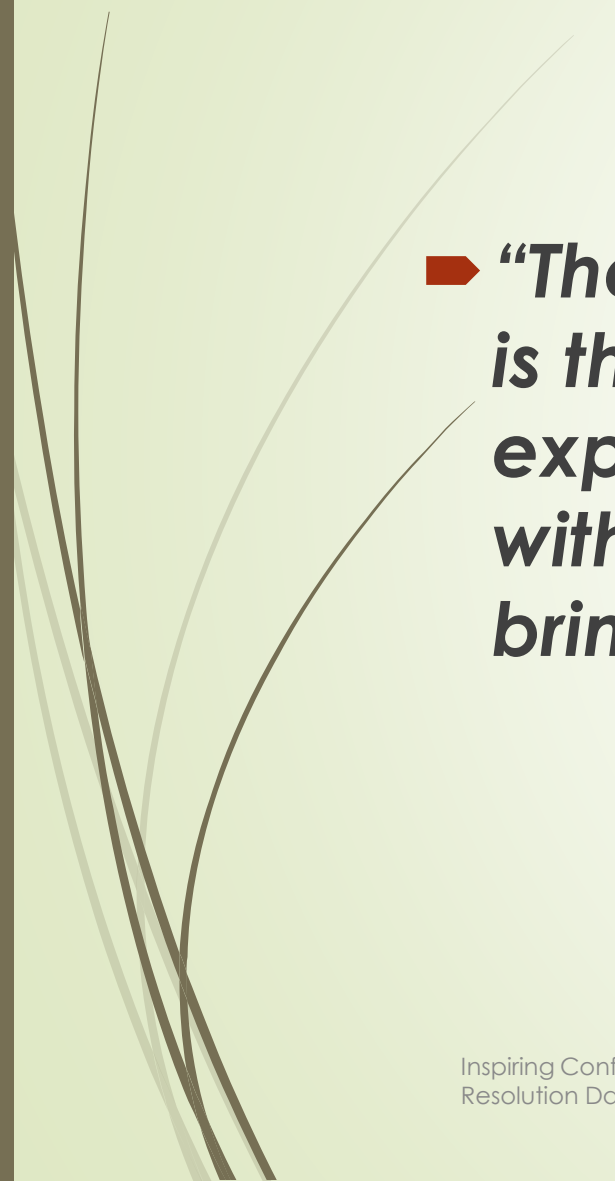





# *A Story about Ombudsperson case data....*

- Issues/cases from particular department
- Analyzing trends
- Reporting and perceptions
- Quantitative vs. qualitative data





➤ ***“The most important learning is the ability to accept and expect mistakes, and deal with the disappointment they bring.”***

➤ Fred Rogers





## Amy Edmondson's research

- Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School
- Study of hospital medical teams
- Which teams were better performers?
- Premise: Better performing teams make fewer medication errors
- Surprising finding that better performing teams seemed to making *more* errors

# Amy Edmondson's findings

- Best teams were *admitting* their errors and discussing them
- Psychological Safety- facilitated a climate of openness
- **Psychological Safety**: a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking

➤ (Edmondson, Tedx, 2014)



# Psychological Safety

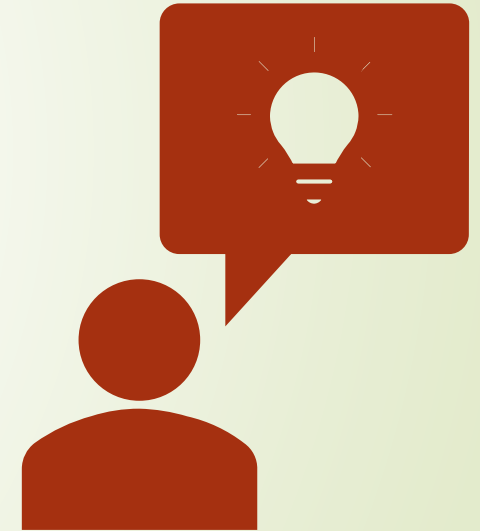
- ▶ The high performing teams worked in a climate of ***psychological safety***. They trusted their fellow team members, didn't believe they would be blamed or humiliated for mistakes, were willing to ask questions, propose new ideas, provide feedback, and constructively challenge one another.




# Psychological Safety

- A belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes

(Edmondson, Tedx, 2014)





➔ **What are things that come to mind that may interfere with psychological safety in teams? In the campus community?**



In many teams, members are reluctant to ask questions, raise issues of concerns, discuss mistakes, etc. because they don't want to appear **ignorant, incompetent, intrusive, or negative**

■ So they don't:

- **Ask questions**
- **Admit weaknesses or mistakes**
- **Offer ideas**
- **Criticize the status quo**
- **Bring forward problems**
- **Report conflicts**
- **Report inappropriate behavior**




## Safety leads to innovation and optimal performance

- ▶ *Amy Edmondson found that those teams with members who feel comfortable speaking authentically with each other, even when expressing contrarian perspectives, are the teams that are most likely to try new things and outperform others*







**“Psychological Safety”** drives effectiveness because it inspires a learning culture, which is beneficial to any organization.”

*Wisdom and Wi, “Cultivating Great Teams: What Health Care Can Learn from Google.”  
NEJM Catalyst Blog Post, 2/21/2017*

Psychological Safety

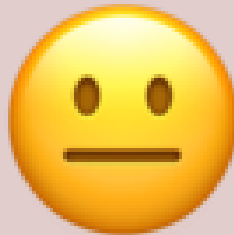
Comfort Zone



Learning Zone/High Performance Zone



Apathy Zone

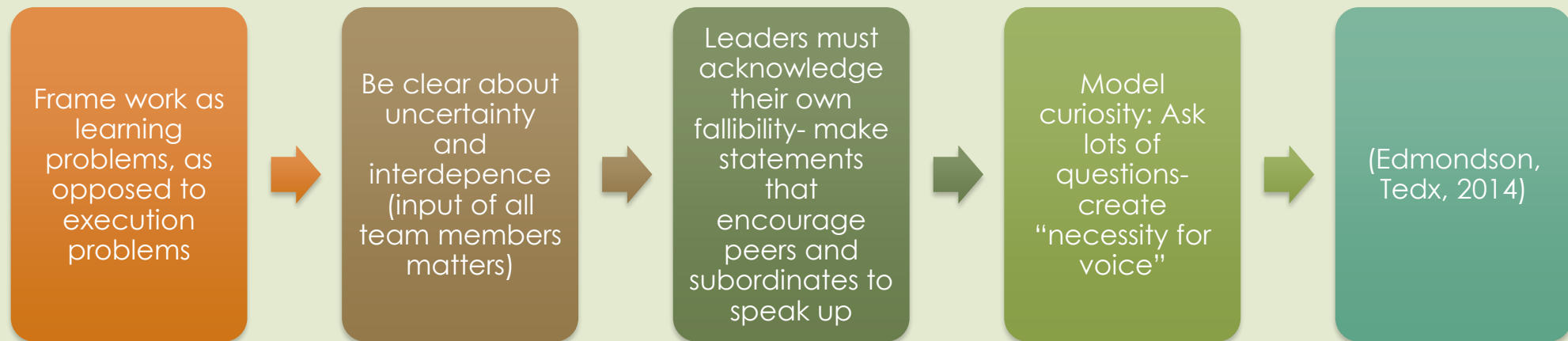


Anxiety Zone



Motivation and Accountability  
(Edmondson, Tedx, 2014)

# How leaders can create psychological safety in their organizations:



# Thomas Malone's research (MIT) studied groups that were exceptional at problem solving

Not just high aggregate intelligence, but three key qualities:

- First, they gave one another roughly **equal time to talk**. Everyone contributed, and viewpoint was considered, and no one in these high-achieving groups dominated or was a passenger.
- The second quality of the successful groups was **social sensitivity**: these individuals were more tuned in to one another, to subtle shifts in mood and demeanor. Socially alert to one another's needs, and tested high on tests that measured **empathy**.
- The best groups included **more women** (more diverse, and women tend to score higher on empathy tests)

Heffernan, Margaret. "The secret ingredient that makes some teams better than others." *Ideas.Ted.com*, May 5, 2015, [ideas.ted.com/the-secret-ingredient-that-makes-some-teams-better-than-others/](https://ideas.ted.com/the-secret-ingredient-that-makes-some-teams-better-than-others/)



# Empathy

- Ability to genuinely ability genuinely to imagine how the world looks through the eyes of others
- Feeling “with” others

# Social capital

- Mutual reliance; a **sense of connectedness** that builds trust
- In organizations/communities/"neighborhoods" with high social capital, people get to know one another; **trust each other**, and **find value in one another**
- Social connectedness plays a critical role in making individuals and organizations more resilient, better able to adapt to stress and change, and the **manage and resolve conflict well**

~ "Social capital," Wikipedia



# Social capital leads to constructive conflict resolution

- IQ alone doesn't lead to productive teams and well managed conflict; there also must support, safety, candor, connections and trust;
- Without high degrees of social capital, you don't get the vigor of debate and exchange that hard problems demand;
- In organizations with high degrees of social capital, disagreement doesn't feel dangerous; ideas are built on conflicting opinions;
- Conflict, debate and discussion are the means by which ideas gets better

[Beyond Measure: The Big Impact of Small Changes](#) by Margaret Heffernan (TED Books/Simon & Schuster)

# Google's Project "Aristotle"

- Google researchers sought to discover the secrets of effective teams at Google
- Code-named Project Aristotle - a tribute to Aristotle's quote, **"the whole is greater than the sum of its parts"** (as the Google researchers believed employees can do more working together than alone)
- The goal was to answer the question: "What makes a team effective at Google?"
- Rozovsky, J. (November 17, 2015). The Five Keys to a Successful Google Team, ReWork blog post. Retrieved from <https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/>





# Google's study of teams- Project "Aristotle"

- 200+ interviews/looked at 180+ teams
- Premise: Best mix of individual team members make the highest performing teams
- **Finding: Who was on the team matters less than how the team members interact, structure their work, and view their contributions**
- Rozovsky, J. (November 17, 2015). The Five Keys to a Successful Google Team, ReWork blog post. Retrieved from <https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/>





# Google's study of teams- Five key dynamics that set apart successful teams:

- Dependability
- Structure and Clarity
- Meaning of Work
- Impact of Work

Rozovsky, J. (November 17, 2015). The Five Keys to a Successful Google Team, ReWork blog post. Retrieved from <https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/>




## #5: **Psychological Safety**

- **Psychological Safety** was deemed the most important of the five dynamics, and considered the underpinning of the other four





**Go back to your individual  
exercise about your team.  
Which of the five pillars do you  
believe your team should focus  
on as a priority?**



Adam Leonard,  
“Psychological  
Safety Pro” at  
Google

## 5 Ways to Create Psychological Safety on Your Team

- Embrace Conflict
- Distribute Decision-making
- Encourage Diversity of Thought
- Experiment
- Practice Vulnerability

Hall, Shannon Arviza. (2018) **Psychological Safety: The #1 Factor That Matters Most for Your Team.** Retrieved from <https://epicteams.co/blog/psychological-safety-the-1-factor-that-matters-most-for-your-team>



## Creating cultures of psychological safety

### ➤ ***Embrace conflict***

- Engage in productive conflict; Seek to understand the perspective of others without getting defensive or attached to specific ideas



# Creating cultures of psychological safety

## *Distributed decision making*

- Leaders are transparent with information; encouragement of open and transparent communication flows;
- Leaders don't try to convince team that they have all the answers
- Teams work together to coordinate action; drive learning and value together





# Creating Psychological Safety

- **Diversity of Thought**
- Encourage team members to share unique opinions, based on their vantage point and experience.
- Explore ideas through multiple lenses
- Embrace experimentation and failure (acknowledge that not all experiments work; make room for failure- learn from it and use insights for further improvement)



# Creating Psychological Safety

- **Experiment**
- Effective teams embrace experimentation and failure. They recognize that not all experiments work. If you're engaging in 10x thinking, like Google does, then you need to make room for failure. Effective teams acknowledge and accept failure - as long as they learn from them and use these insights for further improvement.



# Creating Psychological Safety

- **Vulnerability of the Leader**
- Leaders are open to being vulnerable; build and maintain trust well
- Open up; admit mistakes; ask for help; encourage others to do the same




## ***Barriers to team success***

- What are some things that challenge positive team dynamics and success?
- How do team “dysfunctions” impede safety, productivity, trust, and collaboration?
- What are the best ways to assess how to improve?

# Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team

	DESCRIPTION
<b>Inattention to Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The pursuit of individual goals and personal status erodes the focus on collective success.</li></ul>
<b>Avoidance of Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The need to avoid interpersonal discomfort prevents team members from holding one another accountable.</li></ul>
<b>Lack of Commitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The lack of clarity or buy-in prevents team members from making decisions they will stick to.</li></ul>
<b>Fear of Conflict</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The desire to preserve artificial harmony stifles the occurrence of productive ideological conflict.</li></ul>
<b>Absence of Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The fear of being vulnerable with team members prevents the building of trust within the team.</li></ul>

Source: Patrick Lencioni



➤ “If you really want to communicate,  
the most important thing to do is to  
listen.”

➤ Fred Rogers





# Surveys and Tools

Lencioni's Five Questions

gTeams Tool

Team Effectiveness Discussion Guide (Google)

Self-assessment questions

Google Manager Behaviors (Project Oxygen)

Personal Histories Exercise (Lencioni)

Team Effectiveness Exercise (Lencioni)



## Patrick Lencioni's ***Five Dysfunctions of a Team*** – Start with these questions:

- *Do your team members openly and readily disclose their opinions?*
- *Are your team meetings compelling and productive?*
- *Does your team come to decisions quickly and avoid getting bogged down by consensus?*
- *Do your team members confront one another about their shortcomings?*
- *Do you team members sacrifice their own interests for the good of the team?*



# Creating **psychological safety** in teams

- 10 minute pulse check on the five dynamics (gTeams tool)
- Ask: “Are we really a team?” (common goals, mutual accountability and interdependence, small)
- Watch team meetings- what are people doing well? What could be done better?
- Look for warning signs (Fear of asking for or delivering constructive feedback? Presence of a few strong voices that marginalize others’ perspectives?)

# Creating **psychological safety** in teams

- Ask team members and leaders their perceptions of psychological safety (Comfortable brainstorming? Is their trust? How is conflict managed?)
- Act to increase psychological safety in your team (Try to reach out to those not in the “in crowd,” praise another team member’s contribution in front of the group, summarize perspectives of others to make sure you understand, and so they feel heard)
- Transform the meeting paradigm for your teams (consider huddles, daily meetings, empower people to question and comment without fear of reprisal)

## Execution-as-Efficiency vs. Execution-as-Learning

Leaders provide answers.

Employees follow directions.

Optimal work processes are designed and set up in advance.

New work processes are developed infrequently; implementing change is a huge undertaking.

Feedback is typically one-way (from boss to employee) and corrective ("You're not doing it right.")

Problem solving is rarely required; judgment is not expected; employees ask managers when they're unsure.

Fear (of the boss or of consequences) is often part of the work environment and generally does not appreciably harm the quality of execution; it may even motivate effort and attentiveness in those facing an otherwise dull task.

Leaders set direction and articulate the mission.

Employees (usually in teams) discover answers.

Tentative work processes are set up as a starting point.

Work processes keep developing; small changes—experiments and improvements—are a way of life.

Feedback is always two-way: The boss gives feedback in the form of coaching and advice; team members give feedback about what they're learning from doing the (ever-changing) work.

Problem solving is constantly needed, so valuable information is provided to guide employees' judgment.

Fear cripples the learning process: It inhibits experimentation, lowers awareness of options, and discourages people from sharing and analyzing insights, questions, and problems.

Edmondson, A. *The Competitive Imperative of Learning*, (2008, July-August). Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2008/07/the-competitive-imperative-of-learning>

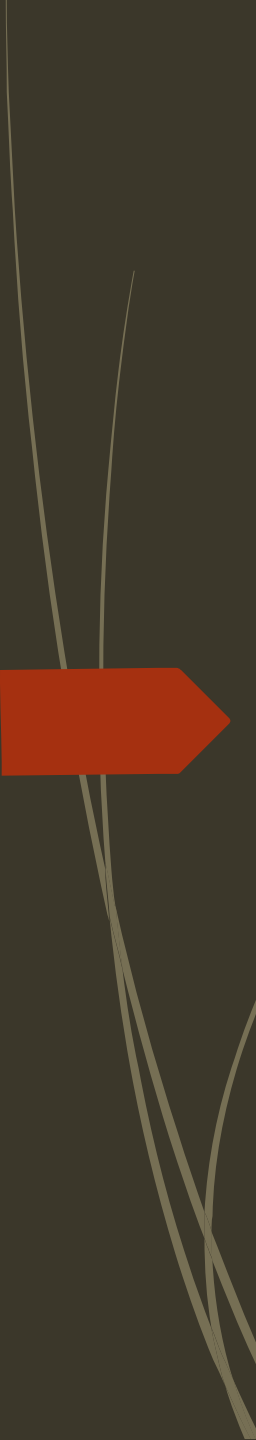
# Psychological Safety

- The safer team members feel with one another, the more likely they are to admit mistakes, to collaborate, and to take on new responsibilities and roles
- **Team members that felt psychologically safe were also more likely to remain in the organization, more likely to create momentum around diverse ideas, bring in more revenue, and rated effective twice as often by executive leadership**
- Rozovsky, J. (November 17, 2015). The Five Keys to a Successful Google Team, ReWork blog post. Retrieved from <https://rework.withgoogle.com/blog/five-keys-to-a-successful-google-team/>

# Self-reflection and awareness

- What kind of team player am I?
- Am I dependable? Can I be trusted?
- Am I competent? Continuing to develop my skills?
- Is this the right fit for me? Do I believe my contribution matters?
- Do I understand how my work fits into the mission of the team? The organization?
- How/when do I ask questions?
- What kind of listener am I?
- How open am I to the concerns of others?
- How do I frame concerns?
- How competent am I at tolerating, managing, and resolving conflict?





## The campus “neighborhood” as a place of safety

- “A neighborhood was a place that where at times you felt worried or scared or unsafe, would take care of you- would provide understanding and safety. That’s what the neighborhood was for Fred.”

➤ ~ Max King (Fred Rogers biographer)



# Recommendations

- Take the pulse of teams in all population groups to assess the levels of psychological safety on campus
- Take active steps to raise the levels of trust and social capital across campus: unifying events; encourage dialogue; be deliberate about bringing people together
- Training, academic and professional development that help campus community build conflict competence skills so they embrace conflict and not fear it
- Seek out input of members of campus. Listen to how they would like to make it safer on small and large scales
- **Empathy, Empathy, Empathy**
- **Role of bystander**
- **Behavioral Integrity- Ensure people are held accountable for codes of conduct and behavior in accordance with core values**
- Consider and acknowledge the reason why people don't come forward and develop mechanisms that provide safety (OO, hotlines, Title IX resource, respectful workplace units, Faculty resources, patient OO, protections for those coming forward)
- Equity and parity when it comes to listening as well as accountability
- Leaders: practice being the last to speak

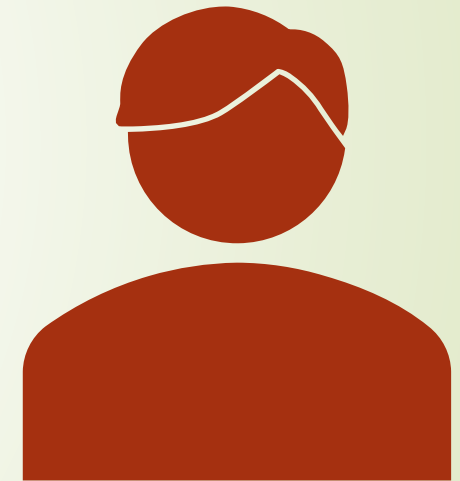
# Some Final Observations and Suggestions

- **Tread carefully**; take this one step at a time. Focus on one thing as a priority, and then move to other pillars
- If no psychological safety, you must work on **building trust** before people will be forthcoming about honest feedback and be vulnerable
- **Allow time**. Current dynamics didn't develop overnight, and they won't be made perfect overnight with a model or two
- **Don't "weaponize" the learning**. Don't point blame, or diagnose others as needing to change. This is a team exercise and group must collaborate towards improvement
- **Model civility**. Take responsibility as a individual member of the team and/or its leader. Ask questions. Offer suggestions diplomatically. Be clear about the basis for suggestions. Listen.
- Leaders- Go beyond listening. Incorporate ways to hear the voice of everyone on the team. **Practice being the last to speak**



# Consideration of why people don't come forward

- Fear they will not be believed
- Fear that claims will not be taken seriously
- Power imbalance
- Fear they will be labeled a troublemaker
- Lack of confidence in procedures; mechanisms
- Fear of retaliation
- Fear that their own imperfection will be raised
- Challenges of sorting through their emotions; conflicted about feelings toward job and organization
- General feelings of disempowerment, lack of support/assistance insider or outside the organization



# Questions, Suggestions, Resources

- Activeness increase awareness (try to see more “Fs”)
- Assess levels of social capital of team members (connectedness, trust)
- Do managers engage in high trust behaviors? (Covey material)
- Is there “safety” in coming forward?
- Assess the levels of social and emotional intelligence in the team- awareness of own emotions and others? Empathy? (Goleman)
- What’s happening in vertical and horizontal relationships?
- Do students feel safe speaking up in classroom environments?
- Is behavior in accordance with core values? Does it align with respecting dignity of every person?



# Core of Psychological Safety

**Connectedness  
and Trust**

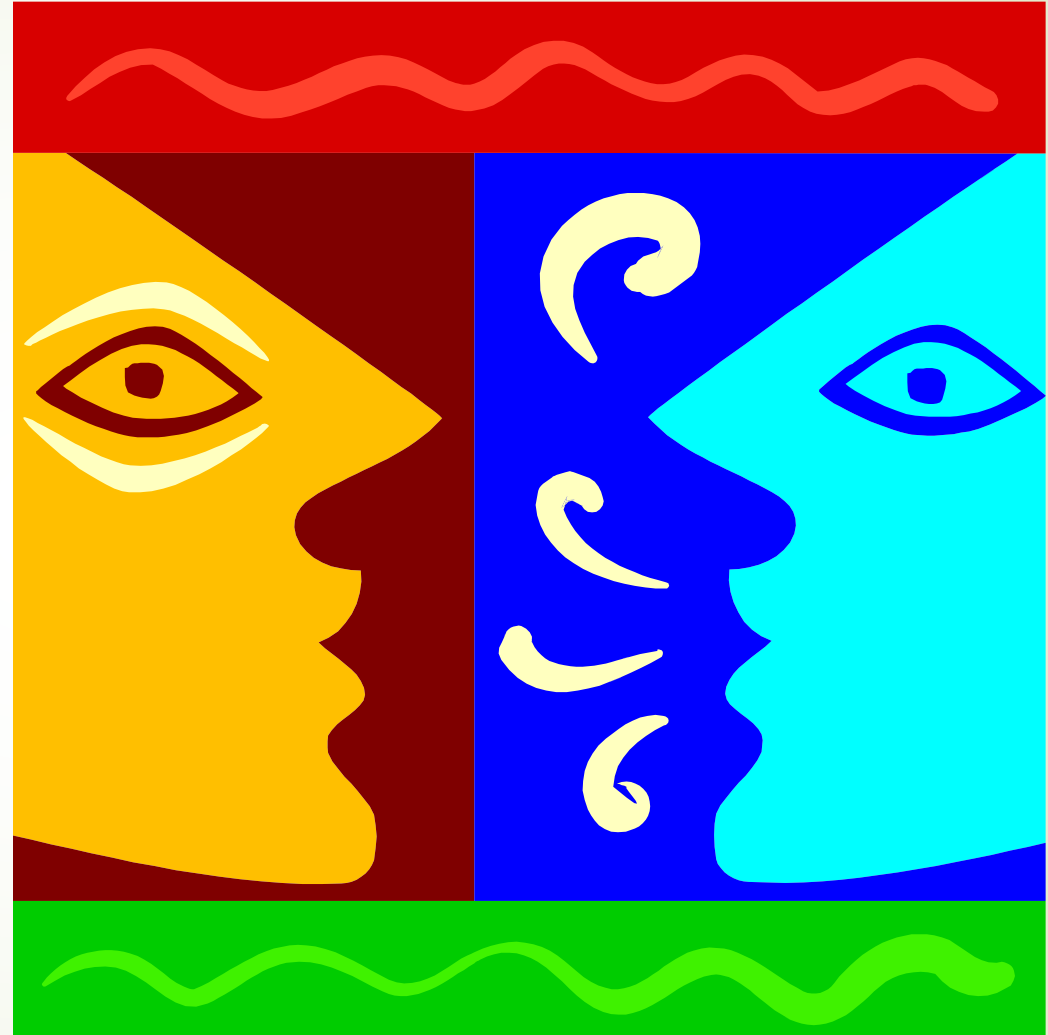
**Dignity and  
Respect**

## 5/5/5 Exercise

- What could be done in **5 minutes** that would impact psychological safety in your teams?
- What could be done that would impact psychological safety in **5 months**?
- What significant commitments and programming could be made and implemented such that in **5 years** meaningful strides could be made in improving the levels of psychological safety in your department teams, and in the campus community as a whole?



Questions?







# “Freedom” at VCU

- Striving for intellectual truth with responsibility and civility, respecting the dignity of all individuals

