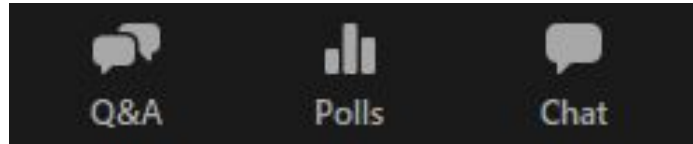# Creating Psychologically Safe Organizations

Megan Abman and Karyn Lu
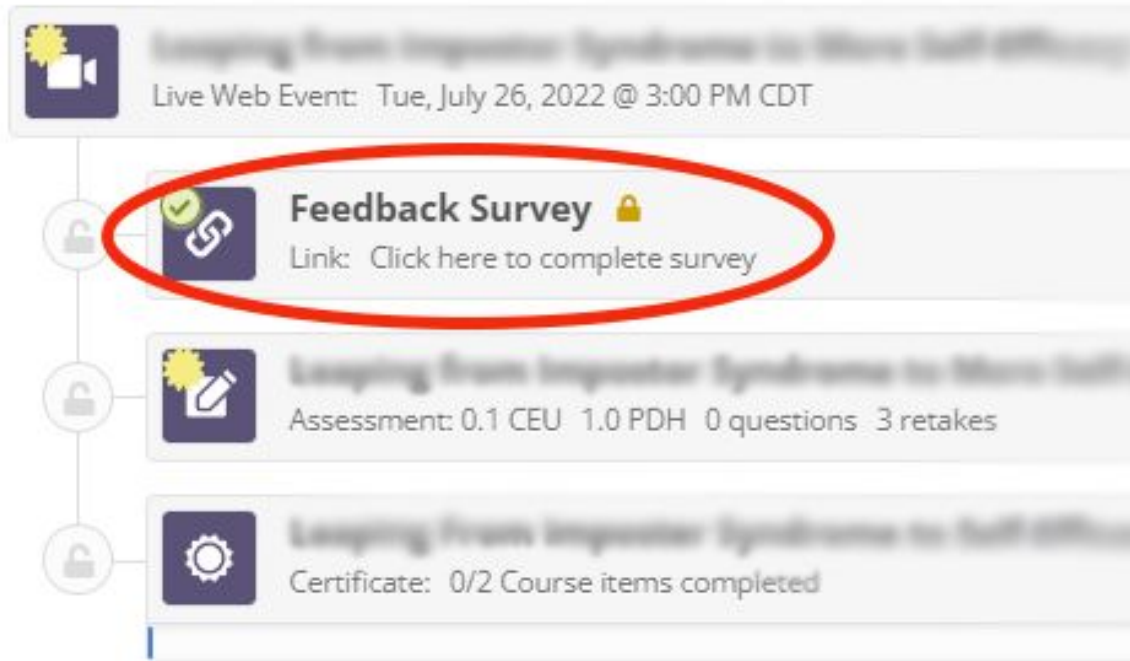
Co-Founders of Strata RMK, Fractional Chief Inclusion Officers

Housekeeping Notes:

Closed Captioning Available

Ask questions

Feedback Survey:

OR

https://tinyurl.com/programs23

This course offers 0.10 CEUs / 1.0 PDH.

To receive CEU/PDH, the course must be viewed in its entirety in addition to completing the knowledge check with an 80%.

SWE is accredited by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) and is accredited to issue the IACET CEU.

Hello!

Fractional Chief Inclusion Officers | Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEI&B) Consultants

Megan Abman
(they/she)
Neuroscience, I/O psychology, employee engagement

Karyn Lu
(she/her)
Human-centered design, product & innovation, organizational culture

Agenda

Introduction and language setting

Diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging

Psychological safety

What is psychological safety?

Why is it so valuable?

Taking action

Fostering psychological safety and activating allyship

Learning Outcomes

1. Define diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging ("DEI&B")

2. Understand what psychological safety is and why it fosters a more inclusive and equitable working experience

3. Implement actionable advice to foster greater psychological safety by activating the four levels of allyship

LANGUAGE SETTING

Diversity
Equity
Inclusion &
Belonging

The presence of differences, both **inherent** and **acquired.**

Acquired

2D Diversity

Inherent

Employees of firms with 2D diversity are **45%** likelier to report a growth in market share over the previous year and **70%** likelier to report that the firm captured a new market. ([Source](#))

Diverse teams (accounting for gender, age, and geographic diversity) make better decisions up to **87%** of the time. ([Source](#))

Diversity
Equity
Inclusion &
Belonging

Equality

Equity

© 2017 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
May be reproduced with attribution.

Diversity
Equity
Inclusion &
Belonging

Inclusion

Knowledge

Making the invisible visible; gaining a common language
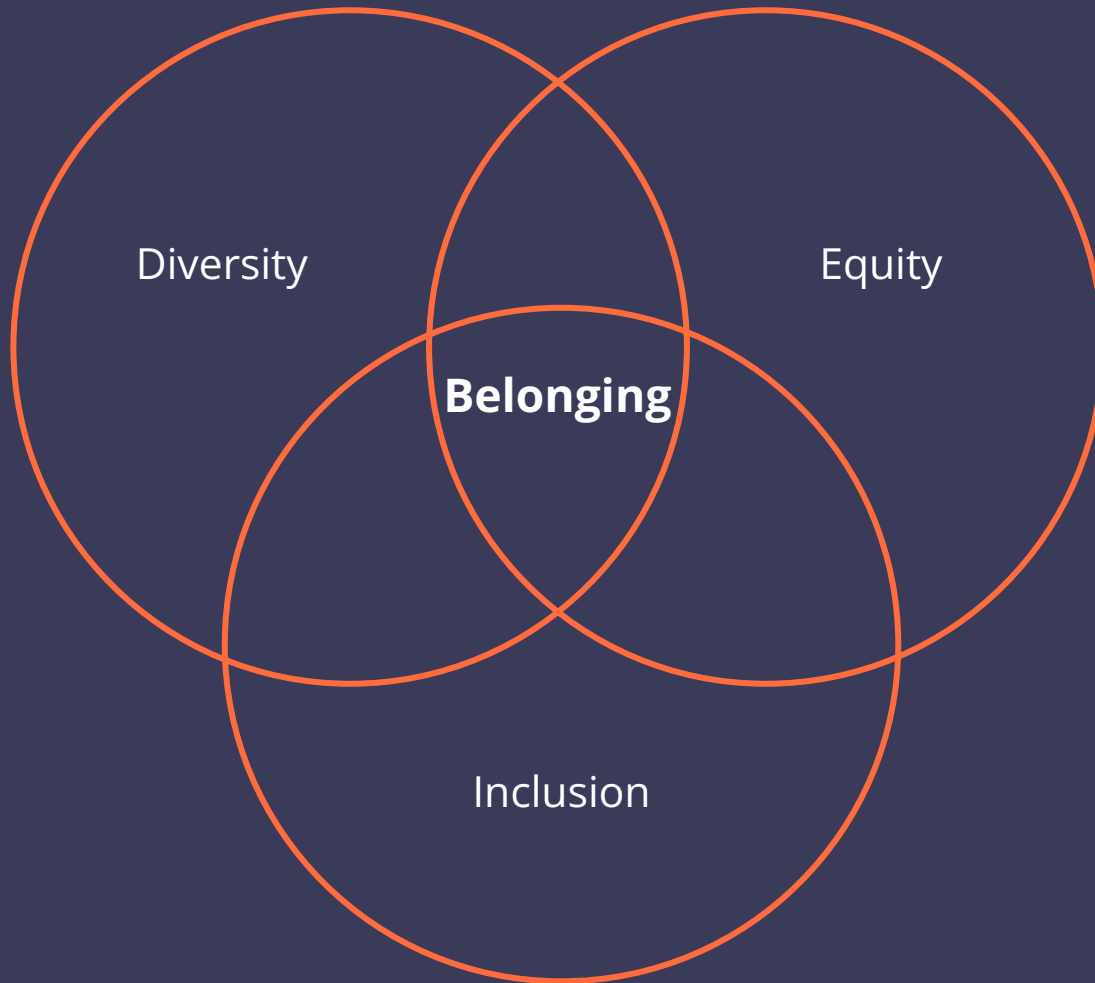(e.g., unconscious bias awareness; understanding why pronouns are important)

+

Action

Elevating awareness; spurring behavioral change
(e.g., psychological safety; modeling usage of pronouns)

Diversity
Equity
Inclusion &
Belonging

Diversity

Equity

Belonging

Inclusion

Seen for our unique contributions;
Connected to our coworkers;
Supported in our daily work and career development;
Proud of our organization's values and purpose.
(*Coqual*)

*High belonging is linked to a **56% increase in job performance**, a **50% drop in turnover risk**, and a **75% reduction in sick days**. Employees with higher workplace belonging also showed a 167% increase in their employer promoter score.*
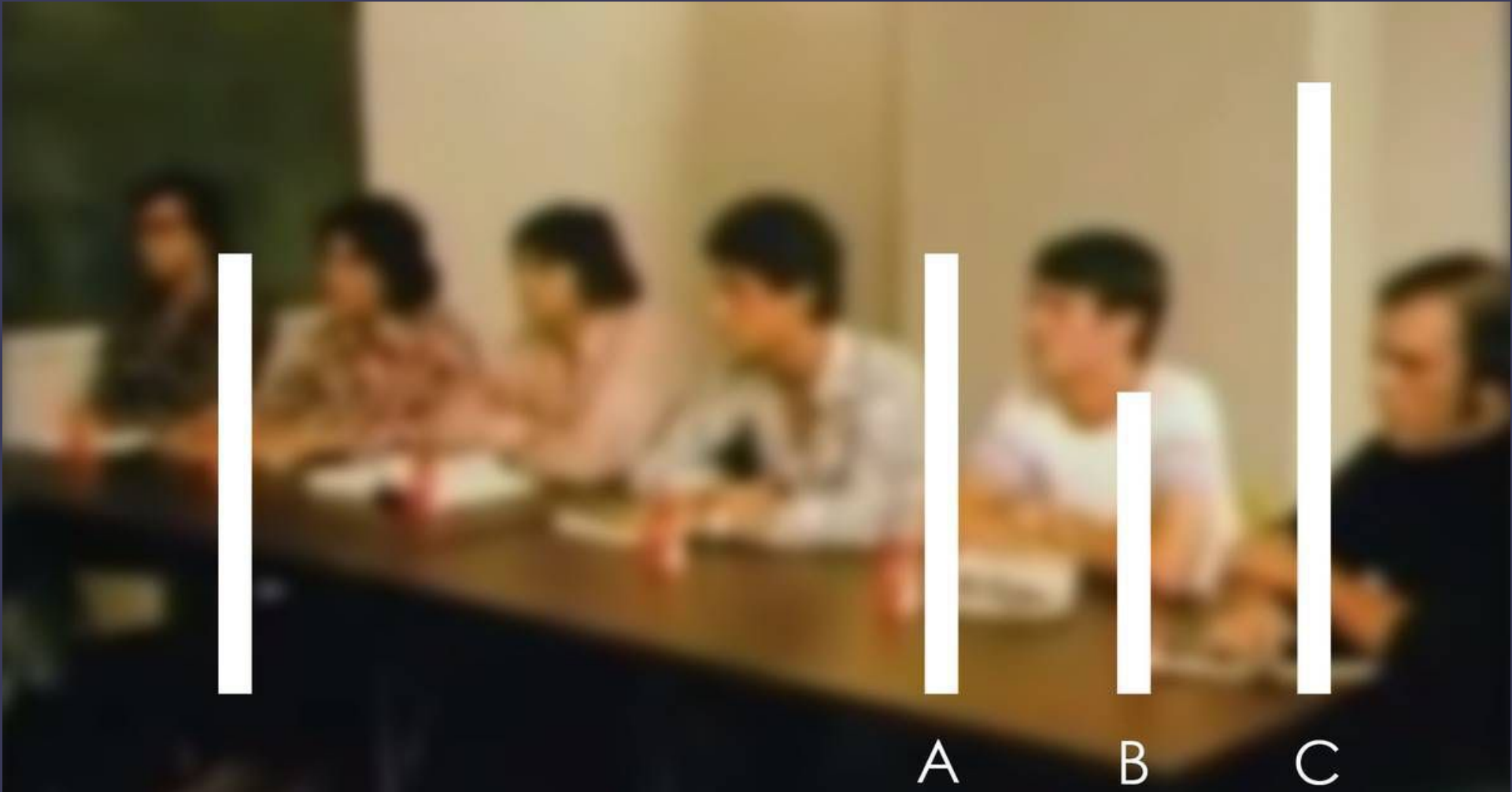(*HBR*)

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Impression management

The fear of appearing incompetent, ignorant, negative or intrusive in a workgroup situation.

Asch Experiment Video

Without a partner, yielding is

37%

With one partner, yielding drops to

5%

Without pressure to speak, conformity drops by

2/3

Psychological safety

A shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.

Psychological safety has been extensively studied

Dr. Amy Edmondson

Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management, Harvard Business School

Leading expert who extensively studies psychological safety, in healthcare settings and beyond.

[Follow along with her research](#) for continued thought leadership into the power and value of psychological safety.

Daniel Coyle

NYT bestselling author, *[The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups](#)*

Traveled the world observing great groups, searching for patterns. Visited Pixar, the San Antonio Spurs, the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team Six, Zappos, even a gang of jewelry thieves from Europe.

Compiled his 4-year journey into *The Culture Code*, which outlines the three biggest things these groups had in common.

Factor #1: psychological safety.

Google

[Project Aristotle](#)

Conducted a 5 year internal study to figure out the key to great teams. Researchers, statisticians, organizational psychologists, sociologists, and engineers analyzed the performance and makeup of nearly 200 groups within the company.

After years of dead ends the team finally understood: it wasn't about *who* was on the team, it was about *how* they worked together.

They identified the most important dynamic of effective teams: psychological safety.

Credit: [The Learner Lab](#)

The people who are on a team matter much less than how those people interact.

Equality in conversational turn-taking
+
Ostentatious listening

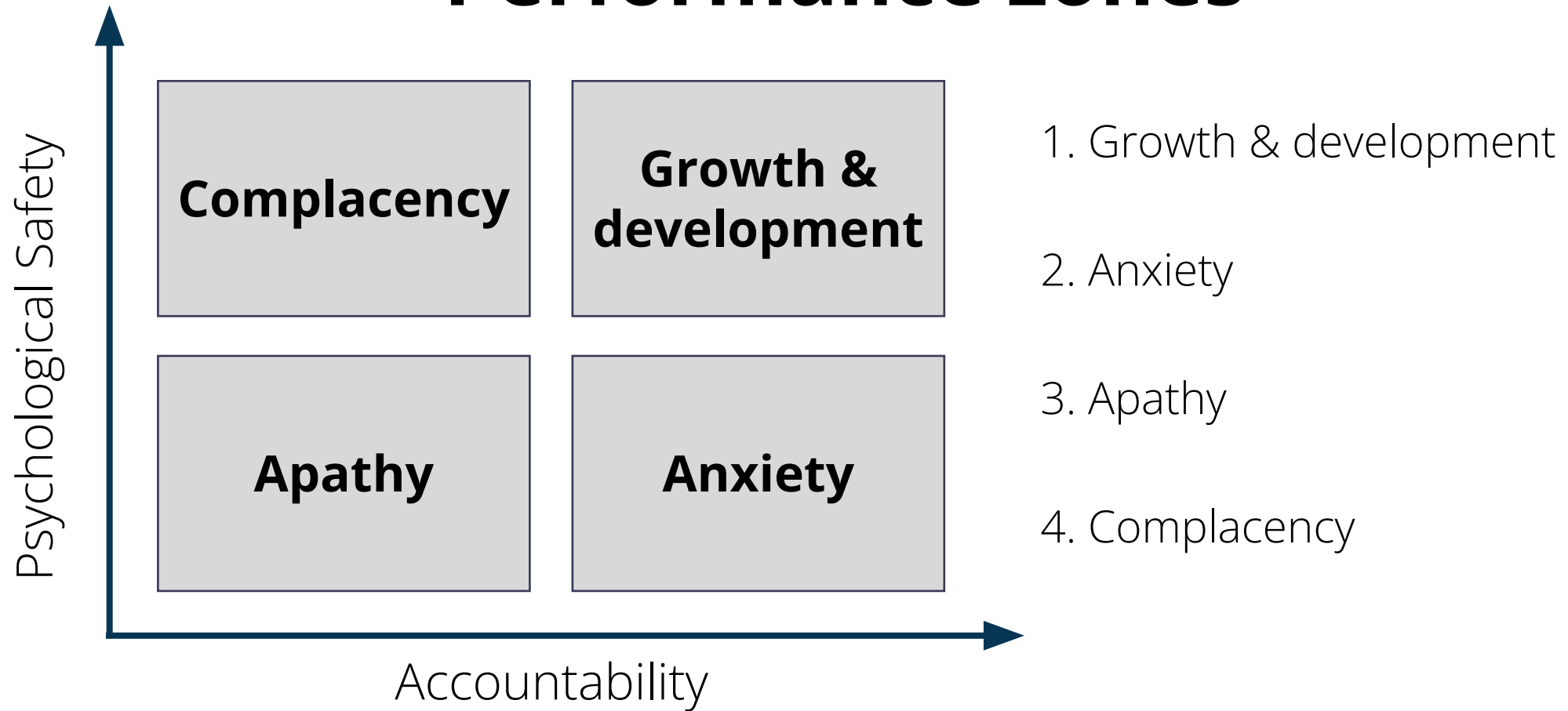*Source: Google's Project Aristotle*

"The single greatest correlate with a group's success."

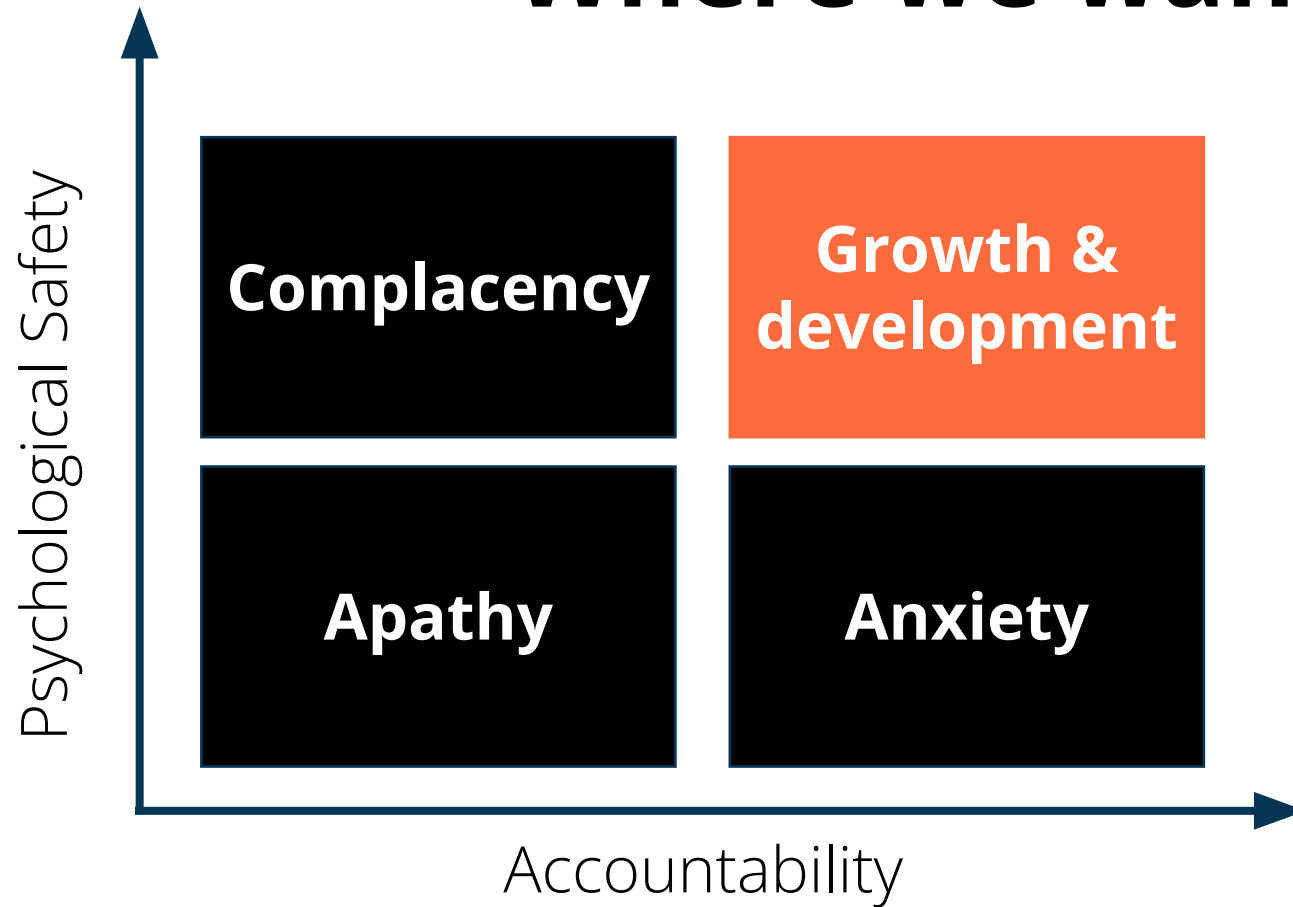*Source: Google's Project Aristotle*

"So… are you telling me that I have to coddle my team? How will they perform if I cannot demand excellence?"

Performance zones

Psychological Safety (vertical axis)
Accountability (horizontal axis)

| Complacency | Growth & development |
| Apathy | Anxiety |

1. Growth & development

2. Anxiety

3. Apathy

4. Complacency

Adapted from: Amy Edmondson

Where we want to be

Psychological Safety (y-axis) / Accountability (x-axis)

Complacency	**Growth & development**
Apathy	**Anxiety**

Benefits
- Engagement
- Retention
- Enhanced performance
- Innovation
- Empathy
- Collaboration

Costs
- Disengagement
- Attrition
- Stifled performance
- Conformity
- Impatience
- Fear

Adapted from: Amy Edmondson

TAKING ACTION

Levels of allyship

Individual
Pursuing your own personal learning and growth.

Interpersonal
Deterring inequitable behaviors & language; supporting marginalized people.

Structural
Changing the processes and practices that reproduce inequity.

Cultural
Shifting inequitable ideas, norms, and beliefs within a shared team or organizational culture.

Adapted from: Lily Zheng

Equity pause

We are not in control of our first thought, but we are responsible for our second thought and our first action.

(Adapted from Joe Gertandt)

Activating individual allyship

Example equity pause questions:

- What blindspots and biases might be showing up right now?
- Why do I have a preference for this person?

Actions:

- Challenge your own biases and assumptions (take a few of Harvard's [Implicit Associations Tests)](#)
- Let go of being comfortable as a requirement. Show up imperfectly.
- Prioritize repeated exposure to different cultures and ideas.
- Pursue your own personal learning – and unlearning – and growth (e.g., inclusive design practices, upstander intervention training).

Empathy mapping

Contributor type: The "Only"	
SAYING	**THINKING**
DOING	**FEELING**

Contributor type: The HiPPO	
SAYING	**THINKING**
DOING	**FEELING**

Activating interpersonal allyship

Example equity pause questions:

- Is there a power dynamic here to account for?
- How much psychological safety currency do I have?
- Am I ready to have this conversation with vulnerability (putting aside any masking or code switching)? What do I need to set myself up for success?
- Who are we not hearing from? Why?

Actions:

- Invite an ally at work to watch a recording of this session, and have a conversation about it.
- Practice **ostentatious listening** & **equality in conversational turn-taking** in every interaction.
- **Make space for everyone to contribute:**
  - Invite expertise
  - Give credit
  - 7 second rule
  - Be the partner in the room
- Avoid slang with multicultural groups.
- Combat microaggressions with **microcompassions.**
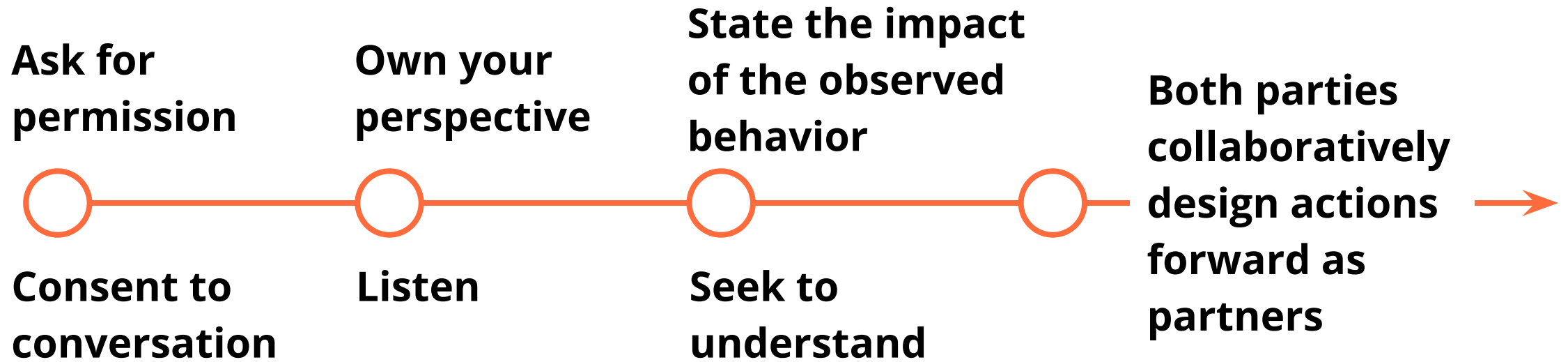
Psychological safety: How to say it

- This is totally new territory for us, so I'm going to need everyone's input.
- There are many unknowns/things are changing fast/this is complex stuff. So we will make mistakes.
- Okay, that's one side. Let's hear some dissent/who's got something to add/let's have some give-and-take.
- Lucy, you look concerned. Gilles, you haven't said much. Adrian, what are you hearing in the warehouse/on the phones/on the road?
- What assumptions are we making? What else could this be/could we investigate/have we left out?
- What are you up against? What help do you need? What's in your way?
- Did everything go as smoothly as you would have liked? What were the friction points? Are there systems we should retool?
- If you've got something to add, just... (mention a few channels of communication, including ones suitable for difficult conversations).
- Thank you for that clear line of sight.
- I really appreciate your bringing this to me. I'm sure it wasn't easy.

©Amy Edmondson.

Inclusionary feedback

Ask for permission

Own your perspective

State the impact of the observed behavior

Both parties collaboratively design actions forward as partners

Consent to conversation

Listen

Seek to understand

Psychological safety fuels the efficacy of the entire feedback process

swe

37

Activating structural allyship

Example equity pause questions:

- Is it performative?
- Do we have the right people in this room? Do we have all the perspectives we need?
- What does success look like? Who gets to define that?
- What cultural context might we be overlooking?

Actions:

- Practice equity pauses together often.
- Establish DEI&B goals and metrics.
- Regularly revisit organizational processes, policies, and procedures with a DEI&B lens.
- Measure and assess employee working experience & create data-driven equitable action plans.
- Align expectations on how to give and receive inclusive feedback.
- Document unsaid cultural norms.

Greater intentionality in meetings

Conduct a meeting audit
Make a note of the meeting attendees. During the meeting, make a check mark whenever that individual speaks up. Notice the following:
- Who speaks the most? Who doesn't speak at all? Why might that be?
- How might I make space for everyone to contribute?

Practice dissent
Make a rule that someone must disagree & everyone else has to consider it seriously. Elevate the value of disagreement.

Enable live transcription in meetings

Run pre-mortems and post-mortems

Try reverse brainstorming
- How can we devise policies and practices that only work for a select few?
- How can we design a product or service no one will use?
- How can we make sure we keep doing the same things with the same people while asking for different results?

Try silent brainstorming
Mitigate the loudest voice(s) by brainstorming silently, then build upon each other's ideas.
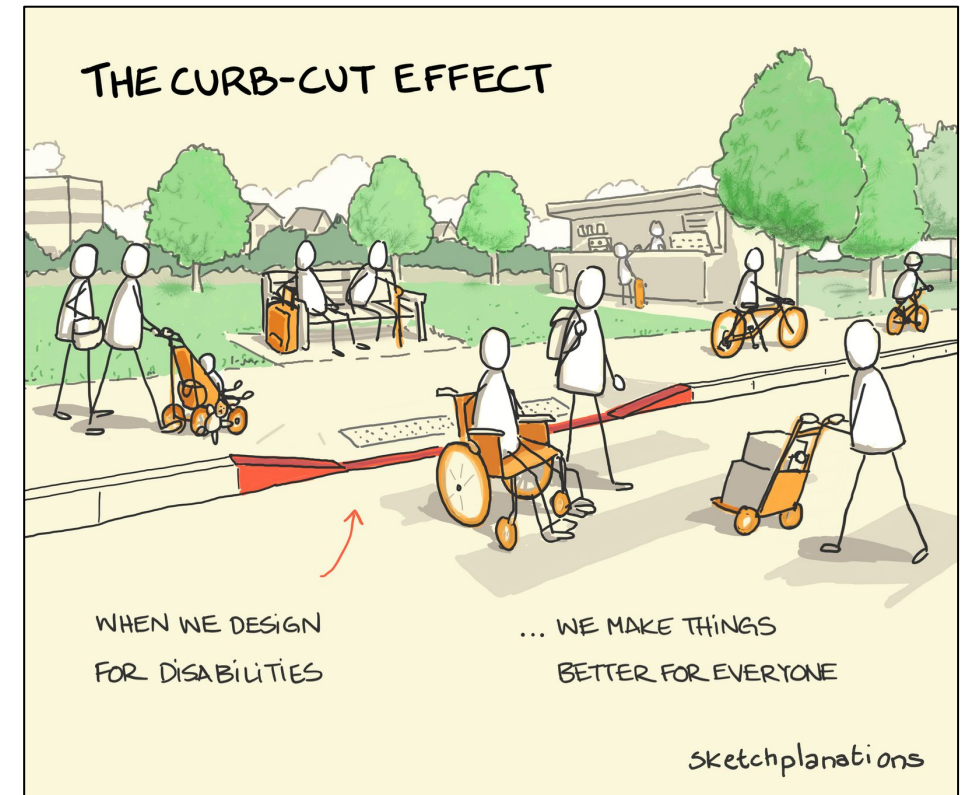
Activating cultural allyship

Example equity pause questions:

- Are we moving constantly towards improved equity and inclusion practices? Or are we in a cycle of reactive bursts of progress followed by periods of inactivity?

Actions:

- Uphold a **"do with, not for"** culture.
- Resist "culture fit" → embrace **"culture add"**
- Recognize that conflict can be valuable in the process of fostering belonging.
- Replace "we failed" → celebrate **"we learned..."**
- Give plenty of grace to one another.
- Be playful together!

THE CURB-CUT EFFECT

WHEN WE DESIGN FOR DISABILITIES

... WE MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR EVERYONE

sketchplanations

Curb-cut effect: *Laws, programs, and policies designed to benefit vulnerable groups often end up benefiting all of society. When we design for marginalized populations, we remove barriers for everyone.*

Levels of allyship

Example: Gender Inclusivity

Individual
Pursuing your own personal learning and growth.

Individual
Practicing they/them pronouns with your pets.

Interpersonal
Deterring inequitable behaviors & language; supporting marginalized people.

Interpersonal
Modeling behavior around pronouns by introducing yourself in meetings with your pronouns.

Structural
Changing the processes and practices that reproduce inequity.

Structural
Adding space for pronouns to visitor badges; creating gender-neutral bathrooms.

Cultural
Shifting inequitable ideas, norms, and beliefs within a shared team or organizational culture.

Cultural
Practicing gender inclusivity at every level is a part of your company's DNA.

Adapted from: Lily Zheng

Calling out

Calling in

Publicly shaming another person for behavior deemed unacceptable

Alienating

"Do better" without the how

Assumes the worst

Erodes psychological safety

Private and respectful conversation

Focused on reflection, not reaction

Pause and make sure you're in the right mindset for creating a learning moment

Creates a culture of compassion and context

Builds psychological safety

Don't aim for perfection; Instead, strive for connection.

(Adapted from Vernā Myers)

SUMMARY & ACTION ITEMS

Summary & Action Items

After participating in this presentation, you should now be able to:

1. *Define diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging ("DEI&B")*

2. *Understand what psychological safety is and why it fosters a more inclusive and equitable working experience*

3. *Implement actionable advice to foster greater psychological safety by activating the four levels of allyship*

Psychological safety toolkit

- Equality in conversational turn-taking
- Ostentatious listening
- Equity pause
- Empathy mapping
- 7 second rule
- Inviting expertise
- Giving credit
- Be the partner in the room
- Practice dissent
- Document unsaid norms
- Keep an empty chair in the room

- Conduct a meeting audit
- Run pre-mortems and post-mortems
- Written vs. verbal responses
- Prep folks ahead of time so no one feels put on the spot
- Normalize saying "I don't know"
- "We failed" → "we learned"
- Cultivate a culture of inclusive feedback
- Be playful together
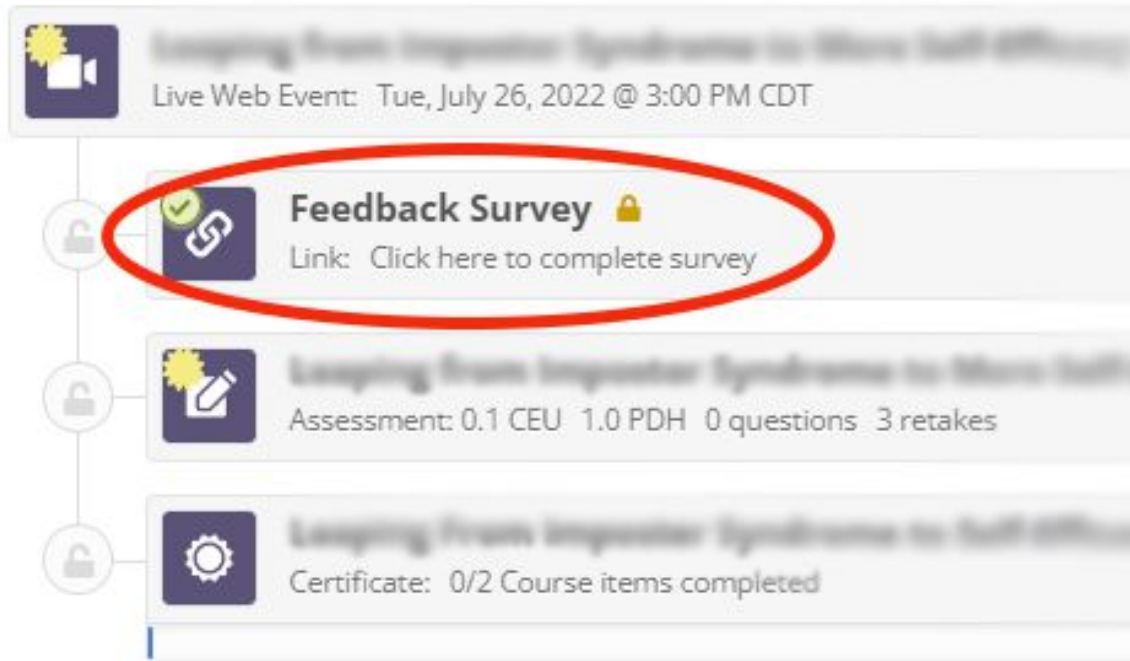- Practice microcompassions

Levels of allyship: individual, interpersonal, structural, cultural.

Thank you!

hello@strata-rmk.com

Feedback Survey:

OR

https://tinyurl.com/programs23

Questions?

This course offers 0.10 CEUs / 1.0 PDH.

To receive CEU/PDH, the course must be viewed in its entirety in addition to completing the knowledge check with an 80%.

SWE is accredited by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) and is accredited to issue the IACET CEU.

![Advance - SWE Learning for Career and Life]

Thank you!

If you have questions for the speaker, or need any support

for this webinar, please email: **learning@swe.org**

swe

For further information on other educational events, please visit the Advance Learning Center at:
advancelearning.swe.org.