Psychological Safety

An open access professional development module for simulationists

How to use this module

Module progresses from foundational concepts to advanced practice. Self direct how deep you want to go!

Exercises are designed to work on your own or to discuss with a friend over coffee.

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This module is a collaboration with :

SIMULCAST
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Psychological Safety
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Overview :

If there's one concept that simulation educators often treasure dearly it's the concept of "psychological safety". First popularised by the author Amy Edmondson and translated into simulation work by Jenny Rudolph et al, psychological safety describes the "shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking."[1,2].

Simulation participants are often asked to take a leap of faith in pursuit of higher learning : to perform in front of their peers and potentially receive judgment in order to become stronger health professionals. As such, it's pretty logical that being able to facilitate a sense of psychological safety is a powerful skill to have in sim : if your learners trust you, they're more likely to embrace experiential learning.

In this module we look at what generates psychological safety and then gradually move towards understand just how complex it really is, and the ways in which we continuously build, maintain and repair psychological safety in teams.

Exercise 1 : Foundational Principles

Read the article :

- [Establishing a Safe Container for Learning in Simulation : The Role of the Presimulation Briefing'[3]](#)

Ask yourself :

- How does this article impact your understanding of a pre-brief during simulation exercises?
- What do the authors mean by the following statement : "Importantly, psychological safety may not completely mitigate feelings of interpersonal risk. Rather, it tends to create a setting where learners feel safe enough to embrace being uncomfortable.".
- Having read this article, how would you change your pre-brief?
    - What would you add?
    - What might you remove?

Retrieval practice :

- Share with a colleague what the authors propose are potential barriers to engagement in simulation, and what steps assist in establishing psychological safety prior to the simulation starting?
- Discuss with a colleague what things you might always include in a pre-brief, and what things you might change depending on the group.

Thorny questions :

- Does your opinion differ to the ones espoused here?
    - What have you adapted with time, and what would you change after re-reading the article?
- The metaphor of a safe container for learning has proved a resilient and powerful one in the sim community, but have facilitators taken on the perspective that they are responsible for generating psychological safety alone?

Exercise 2 : Explore these concepts through a podcast

Listen to the podcast 'Simulcast Episode 8 : The Safe Container for Simulation'.[4]

Within this podcast, Prof Jenny Rudolph explores the fundamental principles of establishing a safe container, but also explores some additional techniques not emphasised in the original article.

Ask yourself or discuss with a colleague :

- What additional techniques do you think you've picked up from the podcast that you might incorporate into your repertoire?
- Can you think of a story that you can share that allows you to demonstrate some 'shared vulnerability'?
- What do you think of Prof Rudolph's idea to play a team building game at the start of a workshop?

Exercise 3 : Deepen your understanding

Read the article "Managing psychological safety in debriefings: a dynamic balancing act"[5].

Things start getting more complicated now, as the authors elaborate that Psych Safety isn't only formed during a solid pre-brief, it's in fact a dynamic force influenced by individual, group and organisational factors that might be sometimes out of our control!

Ask yourself or discuss with a colleague :

- How has the concept of 'build, maintain and repair' changed your perspective on managing psychological safety during education?

Roleplay with a colleague :

- You have been facilitating a simulation where the team responds to a planned resident prescribing error. One resident appears slightly offended by the sim design during the debrief, stating quietly, "We're not the only ones who can make mistakes.". Their body posture changes to being somewhat more closed off.
- How would you respond in a debrief to try and repair psychological safety for that participant?

Exercise 4 : Safe Container or Leaky Tea Strainer?

Read the article :

- Taking simulation out of its "safe container"—exploring the bidirectional impacts of psychological safety and simulation in an emergency department[6].

Listen to the associated podcast :

- Lifting the lid on the Safe Container of Healthcare Simulation[7]

Discuss with a colleague :

- Did this article change your perspective on psychological safety?
- What do you think of the authors challenge to 'stop saying what happens in sim stays in sim'?

Watch Eve Purdy's presentation :

- "Psychological safety is no accident – better team performance in emergency medicine[8]
- What thoughts did Eve's work prompt about your own In Situ program?
    - Is your program as safe as you think it is?
    - What are you going to do about it?

Exercise 5 : Summarise and Teach

- Explain to a colleague what you understand Psychological Safety to be.
  - How has your understanding of psychological safety changed as you've worked through these articles?

Additional Resources

- Amy Edmondson's TedX Talk "How do you build psychological safety?"[9]
- Ben Symon's YouTube Talk "Educational Theories to Change Your Life"[10]

References :

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Ben is a PEM Physician and Simulationist with a passion for translating clinical and educational research to front line health care workers. He is co-producer of the podcast 'Simulcast' and faculty for the Debriefing Academy. His original degree in Animation has proved surprisingly useful in his career in medical education.