



# Highlights

*The Fearless Organization*  
by Amy Edmondson



As a first-year doctoral student in the process of clarifying my research interests for my eventual dissertation, I had been fortunate to join a large team studying medical errors in several hospitals...My role in the research was to **examine the effects of teamwork on medical error rates.**



The team had numerous experts, including **physicians** who could judge whether human error had occurred and **trained nurse investigators** who would review medical charts and interview frontline caregivers in patient care units in two hospitals to obtain error rates for each of these teams...The nurse investigators **collected error data over a six-month period**.

Error rates across teams were strikingly different; indeed, there was a **10-fold difference** in the number of human errors per thousand patient days (a standard measure) from the best to worst unit...**Better teams were apparently making *more* – not fewer – mistakes than less strong teams.**

Worse, the correlation was **statistically significant.**



Did better  
teams *really*  
make more  
mistakes?



What if the better teams had a climate of openness that made it easier to report and discuss error?

The good teams, I suddenly thought, don't *make* more mistakes; they *report* more.



I decided to hire a research assistant to go out and study these patient care teams carefully, with no preconceptions... Through quiet observation and open-ended interviews about all aspects of the work environment, he discovered that the teams varied wildly in whether people felt able to talk about mistakes. And **these differences were almost perfectly correlated with the detected error rates.**





In short, people in the better teams (as measured by my survey, but unbeknownst to the research assistant) talked openly about the risks of errors, often trying to find new ways to catch and prevent them.

It would be another couple of years before I labeled this climate difference **psychological safety**.





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