

THE SAFE FAILURE LOOP

Psychological Safety + Blameless Post-Mortems

1. The Two Frameworks Used:

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY	BLAMELESS POST-MORTEM
The shared belief that you can speak up, admit a mistake, or ask a stupid question without being punished or humiliated.	After a failure, you examine the system that allowed it — not the person who touched it last.

How the Two Connect (Fusion Logic)

Psychological safety is the belief; blameless post-mortems are the ritual that proves the belief is real. One without the other collapses: safety without a ritual is just a slogan, and a ritual without safety becomes a polite witch-hunt.

2. Application: **GOOGLE (USA)**

Background — What Happened and Why

- Google's Project Aristotle studied what made teams effective and found that **who** was on the team mattered less than **how** the team behaved.
- The single strongest factor was psychological safety.
- In engineering, hiding a mistake is far more dangerous than making one — the fault repeats and grows.
- But people hide mistakes when they expect blame, which is the natural instinct in most organisations.

What They Did

- Made psychological safety an explicit, measured team norm rather than a vague value.
- Ran blameless post-mortems after outages: the question is 'what in the system allowed this?', never 'whose fault?'
- Published incident write-ups internally so others learned from them.
- Rewarded early disclosure of problems rather than punishing it.

Applying the Fusion — Step by Step

1

Set the rule before the review

No failure review may end at 'human error.' If a person could cause the failure, the system allowed it — so the question becomes what made the mistake possible.

2

Let the person closest tell the full story

Because the review is genuinely blame-free, the person involved can describe everything honestly, including the embarrassing parts where the real fix usually hides.

3

Turn honesty into real fixes

Each review ends in system changes — guardrails, alerts, safer tools — not vague promises to 'be more careful,' which only sets up the next identical failure.

4

Let the loop build on itself

Safety leads to honest reports, honest reports lead to real fixes, and real fixes prove that speaking up works — which deepens safety further.

The Result

Mistakes surface early, get fixed at the system level, and don't repeat. The team gets faster precisely because it is safe to be honest about failure.

3. Key Takeaways

- 'Human error' as a conclusion is where learning goes to die.
- Safety is built by how leaders respond to the next bad news, not by posters.
- Near-miss reporting volume is the truest safety metric — silence is the danger sign.
- Use in engineering, hospitals, aviation, finance ops — anywhere failures teach or repeat.