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## Context to the nugget conversation

Amy teases out some of the nuances involved in the way Psychological safety applies in different contexts. One end being the relatively predictable, repetitive work in the shopfloor of an organization like Walmart, the other end being Google X that works on moonshots. She also speaks about the similarity of human beings across some of these very different situations.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Amy, you also talk about psychological safety in a variety of settings. One end of the spectrum we have high volume repetitive work, like in an assembly plant, a fast-food restaurant, kidney dialysis center and so on where we need to watch out for a lapse in quality or attention. And on the other end of the spectrum, we have creative pursuits, right, Google X, Pixar and the like. When I say creative, I mean, innovative more creative pursuits. What are the nuances in driving psychological safety in these different types of situations?

Amy Edmondson (Amy): Such an important question and nuance is the right word because fundamentally psychological safety matters across the spectrum. Whether you are doing high volume or recurring work or whether you are doing one-off crazy innovative projects but it matters in different ways. And I guess the simplest way to put it is that in relatively routine work the reason it matters is for continuous improvement and for catching and correcting small deviations, small errors that slip in because we are tired or maybe someone isn't yet up to speed on their training and so if you want to make a perfect automobile, for example, everybody's got to be paying exquisite attention to the work and so if they, if someone sees something that's not quite right, or if someone needs help to execute their task, if there isn't psychological safety, neither one of those two things will happen, right? They are not going to speak up about a possible imperfection or error, they are not going to ask for help when they are in over their head and the quality will suffer. So, you need psychological safety for the routine tasks of continuous improvement and of beautiful execution to spec. Whereas on the other end of the spectrum, let's say Google X or a scientific laboratory, you need psychological safety to be willing to take big bets, to be willing to do things that might not work out as planned and in the middle and I will describe the middle as the reasonably well understood activities that you might do in a supply chain or in a hospital emergency room that are still subjected to some uncertainty and some customization so it's a sort of a nice combination of routine and judgment that's required. And there, psychological safety plays a crucial role in people's willingness to speak up when they think that's the wrong judgment or wait a minute, maybe we should try this and to sort of intervene in a way that prevents the work from falling into the routine when it's not really fully routine or in a way that allows people to discover a better process. So, I guess the main point here is that psychological safety always matters. But and the research has shown this, it matters more when there's higher uncertainty. So, when there's higher uncertainty the performance

difference from having psychological safety versus not having it is greater than when the work is more certain and more routine.

DJ: Hmm. And also, I am thinking in terms of the profile of the people let's say driving psychological safety on the shop floor in a Walmart or a Home Depot and let's say Google X, the profiles of the people are different if you know what I mean.

Amy: Oh, yes.

DJ: In your research is there a nuance in the way we drive it given the different clusters of people we might be working with?

Amy: You know, you would think that the differences would be bigger than they probably are. In the following way the people are very different, their skills are very different, their work environments are of course different, but the human being is quite similar. The psychology of being human we all share and part of the psychology of being human is that we don't like our imperfection, right? Whether you are a worker on an assembly line or a CEO, you have this very deep desire to be seen well by others and sometimes you mistake that desire with a need to feel like people think you are perfect and of course none of us are perfect. And it's that human reluctance to ever be wrong or to ever be less than that gets in the way of doing excellent work in a fast-changing complex world. So... I guess because my emphasis is on human psychology and interpersonal dynamics, I see more similarities than differences but I do appreciate that the differences matter.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more, please visit [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com).

## End of nugget transcription

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### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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Podcast Transcript [78.09 Amy Edmondson - Nuances in application - Google-X vs Walmart](#)

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