

OLGA ZOTOVA¹
ELENA ZLATEVA²

¹Liberal Arts University – University
for Humanities,

Faculty of Social Psychology

²International Slavic University “G.
R. Derzhavin”,
Faculty of Psychology

¹oiambusheva@mail.ru

²bear1972@inbox.ru

PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY AS A SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL RESOURCE FOR TEAMS UNDER STRESS

Abstract: *This study aims to show that prior to making new connections with those who are necessary to create a psychologically secure team, people must feel secure. The article shows the linkage between security and attachment. The role of psychological security in ontogeny is analyzed. The authors demonstrate that the state of security has a beneficial effect on the regulation of emotions, mental health, social adaptation, social relations and values, and maintaining a background sense of personal well-being, competence and mastery. People who are in a state of security have higher self-esteem, regard themselves as capable and efficient, describe themselves in a positive way, have small discrepancies between their real and ideal selves, and have a wide range of mechanisms to deal with stress. As a result, the need for psychological defenses that distort perception, limit maneuverability, and generate interpersonal conflicts decreases. The paper indicates that before people can create a psychologically safe environment and team., they need to satisfy their basic need for attachment.*

Key words: psychological security, attachment, ideas, need for security, defense mechanisms, team.

INTRODUCTION

A new level of technological advancement creates a new type of technological risks, one that is distinguished by its invisibility. The fact that one only starts looking for security when their life, health, or well-being is in danger demonstrates the latent nature of security.

There are increasing risks associated with people worrying about whether their plans will work, whether they can perform their jobs effectively, and whether they will get along with the new team during periods of major organizational change [1]. Workplace psychological security is closely tied up with the health, resilience, and well-being of each individual and team [2]. Lakhan with a group of researchers [3] found that anxiety, stress, and psychological disorders tend to intensify during periods of uncertainty, which leads to the need to invest in ways of supporting a company's employees in times of increased stress. According to Hebles et al. [4], without being exposed to interpersonal risks and feeling secure in the work environment, employees are likely to experience less stress, which lowers emotional and cognitive consequences. Psychological security, in particular, can become a valuable mechanism to reduce stress by establishing an atmosphere of trust and secure communication. Vast research has proven the impact of psychological security on team performance as well as the obvious need for psychological security when changing jobs [5]. Psychological security is connected with task completion, information exchange, commitment, loyalty to one's organization, and creative

activity. Although there have been plenty of studies looking into the advantages of psychological security and reasons why it is necessary, little is known about the specific features of its formation. This study aims to show that prior to making new connections with those who are necessary to create a psychologically secure team, people must feel secure.

The need for security is a basic human need – an anthropological constant of human existence. It emerges with the appearance of the person himself and accompanies him throughout his life. That is why a person needs to feel his connection with the outside world, with other people, belonging to certain social groups and social structures.

The research using the Adult Attachment Interview [6; 7] allowed scholars to expand on John Bowlby's theory and Mary Ainsworth's ideas. The data obtained by the authors made it possible to suggest that psychological security may be equivalent to a feeling of “invulnerability”. Of course, a person who is in a state of safety is not a bulletproof superman, however, such a person can cope with difficulties and disappointments more effectively, and he is sure that other people are able to help him and support him in a situation of danger.

The state of security makes people more open, they rely less on defensive mechanisms in order to maintain self-esteem.

Attachment theory, which is partly based on observations of primates, suggests that infants are born with a strong need for attachment and use various innate behavioral procedures to realize it (crying,

grabbing, clinging, following a person with their eyes, etc.). This can be seen as an innate set of “rules” related to intimacy and the search for safety. Thus, during infancy, caregivers (usually one or both parents, grandmothers, older siblings, and kindergarten workers) can serve as a source of attachment.

Research has shown that when a child is unwell, he will seek closeness from a caregiver [8], whose presence noticeably comforts him [9]. In later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, a wider variety of relationships with partners can serve as sources of attachment (relatives, familiar co-workers, teachers and coaches, close friends, and romantic partners). “The focus on informal ties allows them to build up more flexible strategies and a sense of security” [10, p. 108].

In addition, groups, organizations, and symbolic characters (such as God) can also be a source of security. There is evidence that many young children have imaginary friends [11]; that some adults who suffer from the death of a spouse continue to experience their presence and seek their help and support when needed [12]; and that many adults believe they can receive protection and comfort from gods, angels, saints, and the spirits of dead ancestors [13]. Thus, according to Alan Srouf and Everett Waters [14], the feeling of security is especially relevant when faced with actual or symbolic threats. When security is achieved, the desire for intimacy fades, and the person calmly returns to another type of activity.

In young children, the desire for safety can be expressed in the desire for closeness, in crying, as well as in active behaviors aimed at restoring and maintaining closeness, such as moving towards the caregiver and acts of “clinging” [15]. In adulthood, the need for security does not necessarily entail a search for physical intimacy. Instead, a sense of security can be achieved by activating mental representations of loved ones that provide care and protection [16]. Cognitive representations help people successfully cope with threats and enable them to continue their activities without having to interrupt them to maintain a sense of security. However, during illness, injury, or in the midst of traumatic events, these strategies are not sufficient.

When the need for safety is not realized, defense mechanisms associated with anxiety and avoidance can be used [17]. Avoidance reflects the degree of distrust towards a partner, the desire to maintain independence of behavior and emotional distance from him. Anxiety is associated with a person's concern that their partner will not be available if necessary.

The state of security can be fairly stable over time and is typically the result of realized attachment with primary caregivers in early childhood [18], however, John Bowlby [19] has argued that lifelong interactions with others can change systems of operation. In fact, the state of security is rooted in a complex of cognitive and affective components that include multiple contexts [20]. Many studies show that security status can change

quite rapidly depending on context and recent experience [21].

Research findings over the past decades have demonstrated that the state of security has a beneficial effect on the regulation of emotions, mental health, social adaptation, as well as social attitudes and values that play a central role in behavior. A sense of security softens suffering and causes positive emotions (joy, satisfaction, gratitude).

Representations play a central role in maintaining emotional stability and psychological security. Two types of representations can be distinguished: the first type of representation concerns the perception of life's problems as easily manageable, which helps a person maintain optimism and hope for a successful outcome in critical situations. These representations are the result of a positive interaction in which people learn that distress is manageable, external obstacles can be overcome, and the course and outcome of most dangerous events are at least partially controllable. In particular, people who are in a state of psychological safety have a wider range of interpretations of stressful events and more optimistic expectations about their own ability to overcome obstacles [22].

The second kind concerns positive ideas about other people's intentions and traits. Thus, securely attached people have a relatively positive view of human nature [23]. When describing relationships with partners, such people use mostly positive terms [24], perceive partners as support [25], and feel trust in partners [23]. In addition, securely attached people have positive expectations about their partner's behavior [21] and tend to explain negative partner behavior in relatively positive terms [26].

Also, the state of security maintains an underlying sense of personal well-being, competence, and mastery. People see themselves as active, strong and competent individuals because they can effectively mobilize partner support and overcome threats.

Thus, people who are in a state of security have higher self-esteem [27], perceive themselves as competent and efficient [28], describe themselves in a positive way, and have little discrepancy between the real self and the self-ideal [29].

In general, the presence of psychological security can mitigate the emotional damage from traumatic experiences such as wars, terrorist attacks, rape, etc. Security also plays an important role in determining the extent to which PTSD symptoms develop after exposure to trauma.

CONCLUSION

Compared to previous research in the field of psychological security, this study has an added value since it considers psychological security in ontogeny. We assume that before people can create a psychologically secure environment and team, they need to satisfy their basic need for attachment.

Individuals use their coping resources when faced with a threat or situation of uncertainty, but the leader and organization are also responsible for creating an environment in which people can meet those needs, research suggests. In practice, the main focus in shaping psychological security has so far been on dyadic and group relationships. The study implies that this approach can be successfully complemented with an additional, individualistic view. It is a valuable supplement that can contribute to organizational training and coaching. It also clarifies the role of the organization in how it should provide an environment in which people have sufficient opportunities to meet their basic needs. All this broadens the scope of attention when developing measures aimed at eliminating the lack of psychological security in the organization.

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BIOGRAPHY of the first author

Olga Zotova was born in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 1973.

She holds PhD in psychological sciences and is a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Education, and an Associate Professor.

Her research interests include the psychology of security and the psychological well-being of the individual and society.

She is currently working as a professor at the faculty of social psychology at Liberal Arts University – University for Humanities, Yekaterinburg, Russia.



PSIHOLOŠKA SIGURNOST KAO ZNAČAJNI LIČNI RESURS ZA TIMOVE POD STRESOM

Olga Zotova, Elena Zlateva

Rezime: Ova studija ima za cilj da pokaže da pre uspostavljanja novih veza sa onima koji su neophodni za stvaranje psihološki bezbednog tima, ljudi moraju da se osećaju sigurno. Članak pokazuje vezu između sigurnosti i vezanosti. Analizirana je uloga psihološke sigurnosti u ontogenezi. Autori pokazuju da stanje bezbednosti blagotvorno utiče na regulaciju emocija, mentalno zdravlje, socijalnu adaptaciju, društvene odnose i vrednosti, održava pozadinski osećaj ličnog blagostanja, kompetentnosti i majstorstva. Ljudi koji su u stanju sigurnosti imaju veće samopoštovanje, sebe smatraju kompetentnim i efikasnim, opisuju se na pozitivan način, imaju male razlike između svog stvarnog i idealnog ja, imaju bogat repertoar resursa za suočavanje sa stresom, što dovodi do smanjenja potrebe za psihološkom odbranom koja iskrivljuje percepciju, ograničava manevrisanje i generiše međuljudske sukobe. U radu se ukazuje da pre nego što ljudi mogu da stvore psihološki bezbedno okruženje i tim, moraju da zadovolje svoju osnovnu potrebu za privrženošću.

Ključne reči: psihološka sigurnost, vezanost, ideje, potreba za bezbednošću, odbrambeni mehanizmi, tim.