

“As companies embrace a new commitment to diversity and inclusion, they must address an essential truth: BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of color) workers often face microaggressions in the workplace, and this makes it more difficult for them to experience psychological safety”, writes [Maya Hu-Chan](#) author and speaker on global leadership, cross-cultural management, and diversity and inclusion.

Ms Hu-Chan’s article on [Inc.](#) explores microaggressions’ impacts on psychological safety in the workplace. The term psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Amy Edmonson, the Harvard researcher who coined the phrase explains it in detail in a [3 minute video](#) which is well worth the watch.

I suspect if any board member whose presence is a minority was asked about psychological safety where their skills and talents are valued, they enjoy mutual respect and trust and there is safety in conflict might suggest that the boardroom is a hotbed of microaggressions and not a place for safe risk taking. Just the opposite of what a good board room needs!

Hu-Chan’s article continues with a number of possible solutions which need to be considered by every member of a board of directors.

- Consider your intent versus the impact of your words and acknowledge when harm is done
- Hold space for the speaker and listen without judgement
- Raise your personal awareness in order to identify and interrupt microaggressions
- Hold yourself and other directors accountable for inclusive practices

Great boards must face that microaggressions can and do occur frequently in the boardroom. Good leadership recognizes how the culture of the boardroom impacts the effectiveness of their decisions. Understanding that the social system of every board is unique based in part on its particular mix of competencies, personalities, diversity of voices and leadership style of the chair or President means that reducing microaggressions requires hard work and commitment.

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