

Psychological safety in Ignatian environments





Committee on Integrity
and Psychological Safety

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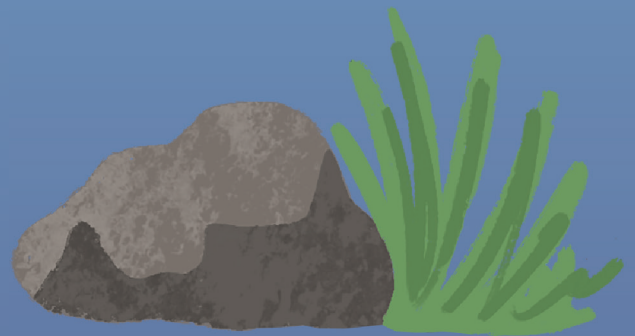
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*We share the responsibility to expose,
denounce and prevent abuse.*

*We want to learn from the mistakes we
have made in the past.*



1 Introduction

1.1.1 History

The reason for this document, 'Psychological safety in Ignatian Environments,' stems from several current developments.

Firstly, there is the policy of the General Curia of the Society of Jesus. From about the year 2000 in the United States and from 2010 in Europe, child sexual abuse scandals came to light. In response to this, the General Congregation placed increasing emphasis on prevention and 'safeguarding. This occurred partly under the influence of tightened regulations from the Vatican. In 2016, the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus asked Father General to initiate a trajectory 'to promote a consistent culture of protection and safety for minors,' abbreviated to PCCP. This PCCP pathway resulted in the report 'Commitment to Standards of Practice' in 2021.¹

These policy steps are based on the painful realization that abuse has also occurred within Ignatian communities and organizations. Both Jesuits and staff members have been guilty of abuse, and mistakes

have also sometimes been made administratively. Our organisations recognise that they have a responsibility in exposing, denouncing and preventing abuse. We want to learn from this. After all, sexual abuse causes lifelong trauma to victims. Moreover, it has an undermining effect on communities and organisations.

In addition, a broader social development is visible. This has a different background, but also emphasizes the importance of psychological safety. The concept of safety has broadened in recent decades. Whereas in the past it was mainly about physical safety in an industrial environment, it is now recognized that safety also includes psychological and social aspects. This plays an important role in contemporary work environments. This means that safety also embraces the extent to which employees can be themselves and feel free to express themselves.

Finally, there is an increasing focus on professional behaviour through codes of conduct. This trend, which has gained momentum since the beginning of the 21st century, began in large companies involved in public trading. Meanwhile, this tool has

1 More explanation of this PCCP report on the SJES (Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat) website: <https://www.sjesjesuits.global/safeguarding/about-pccp/>.

penetrated other sectors as well. For example, the Church in the Netherlands (Gedragscode Pastoraat, 2018) and Flanders (Gedragscode voor wie werkt in de Kerk, 2019) have both established codes of conduct to ensure professional behaviour.

1.1.2 Evolution

With this document, we aim to respond to the aforementioned developments. As such, this document has a very different character from the 2016 report '**BSE/NER Sexual Abuse Prevention Policy**'. Our insights have evolved. Whereas we first looked only at preventing sexual abuse, we now focus more broadly on preventing transgressive behaviour and promoting a psychologically safe environment. The target population to be protected has also broadened: from minors to vulnerable people and ultimately to all people.

This evolution is also reflected in the organizational structure. A **Safeguarding Delegate** was appointed by the Provincial for the first time in 2013. This role has been embedded in a broader structure since the beginning of 2024. An '**Integrity and Psychological safety Committee**' has been established (the author of this report) to develop and write policy. This committee is supported by an external professional with

extensive experience in psychological safety and organizations. In addition, the committee receives feedback from an '**expert committee**,' which meets twice a year.²

The developments we have described are not an end point. Reflecting on treating each other well within our organizations remains a dynamic process. It is an ongoing task that continues to evolve.

1.2 Objectives of this document

In accordance with PCCP Report ³ of the General Curia of the Society of Jesus, the members of the Integrity and Psychological safety Committee request a reflection from the Regional Curia and Ignatian organizations. This reflection should focus on a **consistent prevention** policy to protect each individual.

They also want a professionally developed **complaint and reporting system** and structural education and training initiatives around psychological safety.

We also expect this prevention policy to be part of creating a **psychologically safe environment**. In this document we would like to share some insights on psychological safety and also formulate expectati-

² See section 7.1 for contact information..

³ PCCP stands for "to Promote a Consistent Culture of Protection". See section 1.1.1.

ons regarding it for the Regional Curia itself and the IgnAN organizations. These insights are consistent with the mission of the Society of Jesus, and thus with our Ignatian spirituality.

1.3 Target audience of this document.

This document calls upon superiors and administrators, people in positions of responsibility and directors to review their policies with regard to

all areas of psychological safety in the light of this document. In addition, this document also seeks to inform all members, staff and/or volunteers, of the Regional Curia's policy on psychological safety and integrity.



2

Psychological safety as a framework

2.1 VUCA - challenges call for solidarity, resilience and agility

Today's society is volatile, uncertain, complex and at times ambiguous. We experience this in our daily (online) contacts, our family or community life, work environments, sports clubs, friendship circles, and so on. Navigating this VUCA - world steadfastly requires solidarity, resilience as well as agility so that we are not hindered in anticipating, evolving and intervening in the challenges we encounter on the way.

'VUCA' was first used as a term in the 1980s and 1990s. It is an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity and describes the unpredictable nature of challenges in our society today. The four elements of the acronym help describe how much you know about a given situation and how well you can predict the outcome of an action.



V Volatility

The challenge involves a rapid, unexpected change in dynamics, environmental factors, nature... These changes create instability. How long the challenge will last is unknown, but facts and data are available that make the challenge understandable to some extent. We feel time pressure, we "must" act quickly.

e.g. sudden increase in demand for face masks

U Uncertainty

A lack of information presents us with surprises. The impact of what we do is unknown. We feel indecisive, there is a need to gather information.

e.g., the beginning of a pandemic

C Complexity

Lots of elements are tied together, there is an overwhelming amount of information and there are many variables. We make mistakes because of too much information and we learn by doing.

e.g. addressing climate issues also requires addressing socio-economic, political, legal, theological ... issues

A Ambiguity

There is a lack of clarity which is needed to interpret the situation, there are no precedents, there is chaos. We doubt, distrust, lack self-confidence.

e.g. extending operations to a new domain

Poorly addressed VUCA-challenges can make people fearful and distrustful, and drive communities apart.

Poorly addressed VUCA - challenges can make people fearful and distrustful, and drive communities apart. This brokenness runs counter to the deeply human, divine desire to be reconciled with ourselves, each other and nature.⁴

Indeed, the Society of Jesus believes that God is present in this VUCA world, despite this brokenness, and that He is at work in every person and community. Ignatian spirituality helps us discern how, where

and when, in what considerations and inner movements God is present in our lives and in our community. It gives us the push we need to become reconciled with ourselves, with each other and with God, and thus awakens in us the desire for solidarity.⁵

The Ignatian compass helps us navigate this VUCA - world: it calls us to inclusive responsibility for each other and for nature. It sharpens our ability to reflect which gives us insight into context, and it encourages thoughtful adaptability to see VUCA - challenges not as a threat but as an opportunity.⁶

2.2 Psychological safety as a trigger for trust in a team

The many turns and manoeuvres in this VUCA world can only lead to resilient solidarity and reconciliation when those involved feel safe in their living and working environments. After all, an individual can

4 'To reconcile' is to bring back together what is broken. The Latin 're-con-ciliare' expresses this pure meaning clearly in French (réconciliation) and English (reconciliation).

5 From this mission of the Society of Jesus, many Jesuits, also in the ELC region, founded various organizations in various fields of activity or apostolates. By uniting in IgnAN (= the Ignatian Apostolic Network), these organizations today want to keep the original spark alight and continue to strengthen the work of and with the Jesuits. IgnAN does this by organizing regular meetings between the organizations, facilitating collaborations and offering moments of inspiration and formation to employees, leaders, directors and administrators.

6 Living as a matter of course is no longer possible today. We have exchanged certainties for a lot of 'on the one hand this', 'on the other hand that' and a great many contradictions. But whether that ends in the flatness of not making a choice or, on the contrary, allows us to fully embrace the complexity of life, is a decision we must each make individually.' (Adriaenssens, 2018, p. 19)

Psychological safety is the degree to which people feel free and protected so that they can be themselves and express themselves.

only be fully human, and an organization can only reach maturity when they can grow and learn in an open and safe environment. For proper understanding, we define more precisely what we mean by psychological safety.

Psychological safety is the degree to which people feel free and protected so that they can be themselves and express themselves. Scientific research confirms here what we feel deeply: a psychologically safe environment is a fundamental building block for effective, healthy and meaningful work. It enhances the quality of service and the learning capacity of any organization.⁷

In a psychologically safe environment, every effort is made to eliminate social threats such as bullying, harassment or discrimination. The focus on creating a psychologically safe environment is also taken on board by those involved. This means that dishonest

actions (e.g., a possible bullying incident or abuse of power) have little or no effect on the environment, because those involved are more likely to raise the alarm. Those involved feel valued and respected. In this environment, there are usually also protocols that address these behaviours (e.g., the presence of a psychological safety coordinator, confidential advisor...). Psychological safety requires responsible leadership in the first place from the manager, but equally from the other people involved in the Ignatian environment.

For an Ignatian environment aware of its roots,⁸ this psychological safety is the starting point of an open and learning environment. Psychological security has to come first before trust can grow. That trust is the first stepping stone in fulfilling the ultimate raison d'être (i.e. purpose) of any organization.



⁷ (van Dijk & Stevenson, 2022)

⁸ See further section 2.3.



Figure 1: Lencioni's triangle for effective teamwork, supported by psychological safety

The other stepping stones on the way to achieving the desired outcome are outlined in Lencioni's pyramid of good teamwork (Lencioni, 2002). In Patrick Lencioni's framework, 'trust' within a team is defined as the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there's no need to be guarded or protective around the group. This 'vulnerability-based trust' goes beyond simply believing someone is competent and reliable; it means team members feel safe to be open, honest, and even vulnerable with one another about their weaknesses and mistakes. (...) It is necessary for team members to be confident that their own vulnerability will not be used against them. The vulnerability I am referring to refers to weaknesses, lack of skills, social shortcomings, mistakes and requests for help. This may sound soft, but only when members of a team feel truly comfortable with each other can they respond without having to be wary. This in turn has the effect of allowing them to focus

their energy and attention entirely on the matter at hand; they do not feel compelled to be strategic or political with each other.⁹

Basic trust thus leads to a culture of open contact. After all, in an (ideal) environment, those involved take each other's imperfections into account and dare to enter into productive conflicts, also with the manager/superior or director, by expressing their (possibly unexpected) opinions. Because of the basic trust which has been built up, they dare to be vulnerable without fear of negative consequences for their self-image, status or career. They are willing to learn from past and present mistakes, dare to ask for help, put thorny issues on the table, listen actively, suggest innovative ideas early on.¹⁰

9 (Lencioni, 2002, pp. 175-176)

10 In the Netherlands and Flanders, the term social safety is more common and has many similarities. The concept of psychological safety was introduced by Amy C. Edmondson. Her research and findings are compiled in The Fearless Organization (2019): 'Psychological safety describes the belief that neither official nor unofficial consequences of interpersonal risks, such as asking for help or admitting a mistake, will be punished. In a psychologically safe environment, people are convinced that if they make a mistake or ask for help, others will not react badly to it. On the contrary, candour is both allowed and expected. Psychological safety exists when people feel that their workplace is an environment in which they can speak freely, express their ideas and ask questions without fear that they will be punished or embarrassed.'

2.3 Psychological safety as part of an organization's culture

In any organization, but in our view pre-eminently in an Ignatian environment, a sense of psychological safety is necessary. This allows trust to grow, which in turn encourages living and working together, with and for others. Further building a socially safe environment lies largely in the hands of the organization itself, because psychological safety is a very dynamic phenomenon: environments can change from unsafe into safe environments, and vice versa. This (further) transformation lies primarily in the hands of the manager/superior and administrators, but other stakeholders can also contribute.¹¹

'The leader of the future is someone who serves and is helpful. He or she is first and foremost faithful to the mission of the organization. His or her own agenda is subordinate to this mission. A leader who 'lives' the mission of his organization will find long-term direction and strategy in a natural way.'

Wouter Torfs, CEO Schoenen Torfs, cited in (Broeckaert, 2016, p. 229)

Psychological safety and the resulting trust increase the involvement of the members of an organization or community especially when there is clarity about the direction being taken and the ultimate mission. Building psychological safety has in this sense a positive influence on the implementation of the mission: in our particular case, the mission of the Society of Jesus. In other words, a good psychological safety policy begins with clarity about the mission and assignments of the organization. Reflection on this can be done using the following three fundamental points of consideration.¹²

1 Clarity about the mission and assignments of the Ignatian environment begins with the description and perception of our roots. These roots explain **why** an organization or community exists and **for what purpose**. We can consider Ignatian foundational texts and traditions, values, norms, stories of the past, history and rituals. These core values provide us with words to describe the reason for our existence (i.e. the *raison d'être* or purpose) of our Ignatian environment. They are logically an extension of the core values and mission of the Society of Jesus.

¹¹ See further 2.4.

¹² Model of the Golden Circle: why-how-what (Sinek, 2019 (transl.))

Figuur 2: Psychological safety affects all parts of an organization.



open feedback culture

high-quality services

creative tensions

joy at work

healthy social relationships

innovation

commitment

low staff turnover

energy input

sphere of influence

structure policy frameworks

narratives

history

trust

values

norms

rituals

rich soil for psychological safety

2 It must not remain just a dream. **How** that dream, that idealistic vision of the future, is realized, depends on concrete frameworks, policies and structures. In developing these we also reflect on which structures could make our organization weak, and what could possibly threaten them.

3 Finally, one recognizes the tree by its fruits. By looking at behaviours and achievements you are able to see **what** is happening in the field of work. In a psychologically safe environment we see (by way of example) an open approach culture among employees, low absenteeism, innovative thrust, high efficiency, an increasing number of participants or members, less staff turnover, high commitment, etc....

Even though there is a certain constancy in this description of psychological safety, the VUCA world demands that we remain in dialogue with reality, and that we regularly review and update the description of what psychological safety means for our own organization.

Psychological safety concerns all areas of an organization. It has a subtle yet direct impact at every level within an organization (which, by the way, is equally true of a lack of psychological safety). To illustrate this, we use the figure of a tree (see Figure 2, p. 15). The tree takes firm root in a rich soil of psychological safety and trust. Thanks to the sun's energy supply, the tree grows a broad canopy that provides shade for its surroundings and generates oxygen for the surrounding ecosystem. The healthy tree also produces healthy, ripe fruit: job satisfaction, creative conflict, low staff turnover and absenteeism, quality service, an open culture of contact, innovative strength, commitment... As a result, the sphere of influence of the healthy tree extends far beyond the apostolic fields... This healthy tree (read: organization) is also more resilient when faced with complicated social developments.



2.4 With kind of leadership is needed to promote psychological safety?

Ignatian executives/superiors and administrators adopt a style of leadership based on Discernment in Common. Discernment in Common is inspired by the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola and is stems from the fundamental belief that God leads not only individuals but also groups. The Spirit speaks to each member of the group. Everyone's input is therefore important and enriches the group as a whole: 'By listening together God's Spirit is brought forth.' ¹³

The willingness to discern communally is an important element in creating psychological safety. For example: openness, dissent and the sharing of knowledge can prevent transgressive behaviour from going unmentioned ¹⁴. In this piece, we will explore the kind of leadership needed for this.

2.4.1 The manager/superior and director facilitate psychological safety

In her book 'Dare to Lead,' Brené Brown advocates courageous leadership based on vulnerability.

Vulnerability is having the courage to stand up and be seen, even when you cannot control the outcome. To show vulnerability requires trust, and at the same time, trust requires daring to show vulnerability. So, vulnerability and trust grow together, as an accumulation of words and actions over time. If you harm either, you destroy both. It is desirable for every executive to practise this. The culture Brown is talking about in the following quotation is another way of describing a psychologically safe environment:

*We must cultivate a culture where we expect courageous work, tough conversations and an open heart, and where armour is neither necessary nor rewarded. If we want people to truly show themselves fully, with all their unarmoured hearts - so that we can innovate, solve problems and serve people - we must be vigilant about creating a culture where people feel safe, seen, heard and respected. Courageous leaders must care about and connect with the people they lead.*¹⁵

¹³ More info at Platform Ignatian Spirituality:

<https://platform-ignatiaanse-spiritualiteit.org/ons-aanbod/gemeenschappelijke-onderscheiding>

¹⁴ See sections 4.2 and 4.3.

¹⁵ (Brown, 2019, p. 35)

The qualities which the Superior General of the Society of Jesus must possess are listed in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. In addition to an intimate union with God through familiarity with prayer, these qualities include: the leader of the Society should be someone whose example in the field of all virtues is a stimulus to the other members of the Society (i.e., *humble and inwardly free, just and rigorous, mild and kind, generous and spirited*). He should also possess the very necessary *magnanimity and strength of mind*. (...) He should be richly endowed with intellect and insight. (...) From him is required wisdom and adeptness in discerning the various spirits in spiritual and internal and external matters. In addition, vigilance and diligence are also mentioned, along with the ability to bring matters to a successful conclusion. [Constitutions, IX.2, 723-735]

Many people will more easily come to love virtue when it is recommended to them by someone they esteem highly than they would for the sake of virtue itself.

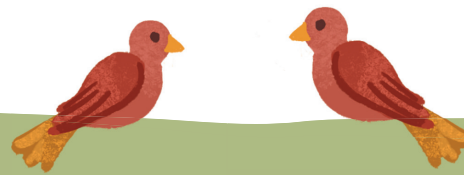
Ignatius of Loyola, cited in (Sintobin, Ignatius van Loyola: Levenswijsheden, 2022, p. 35)

Even though the bar is set very high here, these characteristics of the Superior General of the Society can also offer directional guidance to other Ignatian leaders who are striving towards a style of leadership which wishes to serve: to serve both the Society and the particular organization, the executive commits himself/herself in a wise way to create a caring, safe environment in which there can be cooperation in trust, in sincerity and connection to the mission of the particular organization. The virtuous and authentic way of behaving shown by the leader/superior and director is close to who he/she is as a person and reflects inner freedom.

In order for these qualities to develop, it is necessary for the Ignatian leader/manager to practise an observant gaze, thus familiarising himself/herself with the daily reflection and the **desire to gain insight into his/her own actions and behaviour**. This can be done by using a number of Ignatian tools such as the review of the day (also known as 'life prayer' or 'mindful inquiry'), a review of personal reflection and prayer time, and of one's own life.¹⁶

In addition, we also consider spiritual conversations within teams, regular opportunities for (communal or personal) retreats, meeting and exchanging ideas with other Ignatian leaders... We encourage the Ignatian leader to take advantage of the wide range of opportunities on offer, for example, the IgnAN partners in the relevant subject area.¹⁷

A self-critical attitude is equally demonstrated by the manager/superior when mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn.¹⁸ This includes consciously inquiring into the experiences of employees and Jesuits regarding the conduct of the manager or superior. For example, the manager or superior can create opportunities where employees are able to speak freely about (the behaviour of) the manager or superior. It is therefore important that the manager or superior be someone who first and foremost can listen well and show empathy to the employees and Jesuits.¹⁹



*Experience shows that where
there is the most contradiction
or conflict, we can expect
the greatest fruitfulness.*

Ignatius of Loyola, cited in (Sintobin,

Ignatius van Loyola: Levenswijsheden, 2022, p. 26)

16 "Life prayer can be compared to (re)listening to a piece of music. The practised ear hears what does not exist for an untrained ear, as it were. Hearing, however, can be practised by listening to music again and again. Only then do you begin to hear the piece properly: you begin to discover instruments and themes that you had not noticed at first. Moreover, when you learn this for one piece of music, it will also help you to fathom other pieces of music more quickly. Similarly, life prayer helps you notice facts, lines and layers in your life that would otherwise pass you by. And practice breeds prayer: the more you look back in the evening, the more perceptive you become during the day. (Standaert & Desmet, 1990, p. 70)"

17 We refer for this to the offerings of the Oude Abdij Drogen (Spirituality Center), Platform Ignatian Spirituality Amsterdam, and numerous Ignatian retreats and Ignatian leadership forms in their own networks (e.g. for leaders in education: JECSE - Ignatian Leadership Program)

18 Amy C. Edmondson provides a typology of failures in "Right kind of wrong". She calls errors avoidable when they are made from a lack of attention or aberrant behaviour. We usually reduce these errors by providing appropriate education and training. Intelligent errors that explore a hypothesis we encourage because something new and meaningful can emerge from them. Complex failures arise from a lack of skills, from a flawed or complicated process, or because the task is too difficult or unclear. We anticipate these complex failures by creating awareness and vigilance. The challenge lies in making "intelligent failures" an opportunity to grow and learn (Amsterdam, 2023).

19 To actively work on psychological safety in the organization in addition to this internalization, we refer to "Part III: How to Create a Fearless Organization" in (Edmondson, The Fearless Organization, 2019) where she describes in a number of steps how a leader can do this. We refer to the (IgnAN) training initiatives around this for more depth.

In addition, we would like to draw attention to the annually recurring conversation that the regional superior has with each Jesuit and, in recent times, also with many co-workers who are not Jesuits. During this conversation the mission of the Jesuit, or the co-worker, is discussed openly. What do you see as your calling? What calls you to act? What propels you forward, what successes have you achieved and what gives you joy. But equally what frustrations, limitations and failures do you notice in yourself? We encourage every Ignatian manager/superior to incorporate such an examination of conscience at regular intervals.

Furthermore, managers and superiors must be **fully aware of the actual power relationships** within their organization. The greater the dependence between two people, the greater the likelihood of abuse of power and the more difficult it is to address a lack of psychological safety. Promoting psychological safety results in reducing the likelihood of an abuse of power. Power relationships arise when one person has more resources (means, information, data, knowledge, network) than the other. These relationships exist in different forms: between employees and employers, between persons with and without information, between persons with and without a network, between those who are proficient in the language of the country and those who are not, between people exempt of

tasks and volunteers, between Jesuits and non-Jesuits, between adults and the youth, between teachers and students, between a supervisor and a person being supervised... We speak of an abuse of power when the person in power uses this power, or their associated position and role of authority, in an intimidating, manipulative or (verbally) aggressive manner at the expense of, or to the detriment of, those who are in a relationship of trust or authority with him or her.²⁰

An Ignatian leader will pick up on **subtle movements** within the organization or community by listening actively and intentionally. In this way, he/she will succeed in mobilizing people, starting processes that lead to people growing by being allowed to learn from their mistakes, and allowing problems to be seen as challenges from which we, as an organization, can learn.

We fully realize that the manager/superior and the director must be courageous, not to mention slightly heroic and resourceful, in order to continue to hold onto the Ignatian compass. Beyond that, they must possess a MAGIS-driven spirit and a healthy dose of self-awareness in order to see a hopeful future. But above all, Ignatian-inspired leaders are driven by (God's) love rather than by fear. That source of energy makes those involved want to work together towards a common goal.

²⁰ For KU Leuven's view of "psychological safety" and the description of abuse of power used here, please refer to <https://admin.kuleuven.be/thema/socialeveiligheid>.

The real payoff is the energy and loyalty catalyzed by environments of greater love than fear. (...) Teams cemented by such mutual respect effortlessly outdo most organizations. (...) Environments where there is more love than fear generate energy. Team members in such environments are supported by colleagues who want them to succeed and help them succeed. Individuals perform best when they are respected, valued, and trusted by those who genuinely care for their well-being. Loyola was wise enough to perceive this bundle of winning attitudes as the essence of 'love,' secure enough to call it such, and eager to tap its energizing, unifying power for the Jesuit team.²¹

influences others in positive ways. And it turns out that anyone of us can exercise leadership at any point. The kind of leadership that you can exercise as merely a team member to make a difference in your team, is quite profound.²²

A psychologically safe Ignatian environment is characterized by employees who strive to exercise the leadership described in Amy Edmondson's quotation above. They remind themselves and their colleagues of the organization's dream for the future, they dare to name tensions and address them creatively, they show respect for each other's input, and they dare to roll up their sleeves when facing complex challenges. In other words, they take ownership of their own actions and speech, and their part in the organization.

Promoting psychological safety simultaneously requires an understanding of one's own behaviour: how it comes about and how it is shaped by the environment. It is important to be aware that we are all to some extent **blind** to our own behaviour. Think of situations where we judge our own behaviour more positively than that of others, or where our own intentions are not problematized, and those of others are.

2.4.2 All stakeholders take leadership

If you're not the boss or the team leader, many people say "There's nothing I can do, I have to wait for the leader to do something. And the truth is that leaders do have an outsized influence on the psychological safety of the team or an organization. But you have to distinguish between 'leader,' which is a role, and 'leadership,' which is a behaviour. And leadership is the behaviour that

²¹ (Lowney, 2003, p. 199)

²² Amy Edmondson, "Leading Up & Creating Psychological Safety," available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cy8Gj9rr-iE> (1:56).

In addition, it is important to be aware that a group helps establish social norms and the explicit or implicit rules that legitimize what is acceptable behaviour. A fear of rejection results in the fact that every person tends to conform to those social group norms and so it happens that unwanted or transgressive behaviour goes unreported. Understanding these group dynamics and mechanisms of **peer pressure** can increase awareness and attention to them.

2.5 Components of policies around psychological safety

We include in psychological safety policy all forms of policies that guide employee behaviour and aim for the well-being of all members of the organization. The components listed below once again demonstrate the many different aspects of psychological safety. At the same time, the components listed also show the risks of neglecting to follow all these facets of psychological safety. Attention to these components of psychological safety will, in any case, be very fruitful leading to beautiful and valuable results.²³

We also touch on the importance of keeping an overview of all policy texts around the various components of psychological safety in a specific place so that all involved can easily access them.

These are the components which constitute the policy on psychological safety:

- **WELFARE:** We are thinking here of respectful dealings with one another, a clearly expressed standing policy against bullying, the presence of a confidential counsellor for staff members, students, volunteers....
- **PHYSICAL SAFETY:** All employees, visitors, volunteers, managers, etc. feel physically safe (e.g. ergonomics, fire safety, food safety ...).
- An organization protects the **DATA** of all those involved in the organization and its operation according to the legal provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (= GDPR).
- A psychologically safe environment is characterized by a healthy **DIVERSITY** ²⁴ and **INCLUSION**. In an inclusive environment, all stakeholders are respected

²³ See p. 15, Figure 2.

²⁴ Diversity is about all the ways we are different from each other (Hudson Jordan, 2011; Kramer, 2019). We are born with some of those differences. We cannot change those. For example, think about the colour of your eyes or culture. Other differences arise later in our lives and are changeable. For example, your clothing style or interests. In the different definitions of diversity, besides visible characteristics, such as gender, age, skin color, invisible elements are also mentioned, such as sexual preference, culture, economic status, etc. (Akaïouar, 2020). (Kastelein, Inclusion and diversity: what, why and how?, 2021, p. 3)

and the diversity of views and perspectives promotes the achievement of the goals of the Regional Curia and the organization as a whole.

- **INTEGRITY** also touches on psychological safety.

Integrity refers to behaviour that conforms to prevailing (i.e. Ignatian) values, norms and rules within a specific social context (related to time and place).²⁵ It involves being able to do the right thing even when not observed by others.

The integrity policy consists of a set of policy instruments aimed at promoting the integrity of the organization as a whole and of the employee as an individual.²⁶

Those who act with integrity act with care and consideration, honestly and reliably. He/she fulfils agreements and is willing to question those agreements if necessary, is transparent about what is going on in the organization, does not misuse (both online and offline) authority, insider information or personal information, does not allow himself/herself to be influenced and does not engage in outside activities that are incompatible with the assignment received, keeps his/her word, says what he/she is doing and does what he/she says.

As mentioned above in 2.3, a description of what psychological safety for one's organization is, begins with clarity about the organization's purpose and direction. This clarity increases commitment and can only grow from trust and a psychologically safe environment. The descriptions of what the organization stands for, why it exists and what its guiding values are, are compiled into a **code of ethics**. From an Ignatian environment, we expect a culture in which that code of ethics is held in high regard. In addition, inadmissible and transgressive behaviour²⁷ should also be named in a **code of conduct**, including opportunities to report such behaviour and the seriousness with which the report is handled.

Thus, the psychological safety policy of the Regional Curia and Ignatian organizations contains not only general principles (code of ethics) but also clear organizational agreements (code of conduct, (high risk) organizational characteristics, complaints procedure) around the policy areas as mentioned above (well-being, physical safety, integrity, diversity and inclusion, data processing).

In what follows, we provide an introduction to the ethical code of an Ignatian environment.

²⁵ (Huberts, 2005)

²⁶ (Maesschalck, Towards an Integrity Policy for Civil Servants, 2001)

²⁷ See sections 4.2 and 4.3.



3

Code of Ethics:

organizational compass of an Ignatian organization

In our Ignatian environments, we start from an optimistic view of mankind: we believe that God is present and at work in people, and that through (communal and individual) discernment we can discover God's will for us. This means that we believe that, with the help of God's grace, people are naturally inclined to do good and thus to actively seek how to stay close to that good character.

In the texts below, we define what we understand this to mean within the context of psychological safety. We want to challenge all involved to check their ethical actions against this Ignatian compass. In doing so, we are choosing, first and foremost, a stimulating integrity policy.²⁸ In an Ignatian environment, the code of ethics explained below serves as a compass for describing psychological safety in the Ignatian environment.

3.1 Love evokes respect

Ignatius, in his Spiritual Exercises, gives us a manual for arriving at a unique and highly personalized experience of personal contact with God and Jesus. The entire Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy stem from these Spiritual Exercises. In these Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius gives us a Contemplation to Attain Love:

First, love ought to find its expression in deeds rather than in words. Second, love consists in mutual communication. That is to say, the lover gives and communicates to the loved one what they have, or something of what they have, or are able to give; and in turn the one loved does the same for the lover.²⁹

28 (Maesschalck, The Integrity Management Framework: an introduction, 2023)

29 The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola Translated by Michael Ivens, SJ (no. 230-231)

The realization that (God's) joy is the driving force and that, therefore, not only we, but also our fellow human beings are loved by God, broadens our perspective. A fellow human being is therefore experienced as a valuable person for whom you wish to show consideration and care, someone who in turn seeks to make the world a better place. Our value as human beings is thus reflected in the talents we use, in the way we show respect for one another, in the actions we take and the words we speak. In this way, everything we do bears witness to (God's) joy. In turn, an Ignatian environment shows appreciation for the talents of its people and the deeds they perform, and thus for the contribution these people make to the whole.

3.2 Trust culminates in responsibility and freedom

Ignatius had faith in people. He preferred to give more rather than less confidence. He had an optimistic view of people. Ignatius believed that a person, created in the image and likeness of God, is called to great things. It was his conviction that it is given to a person to be able to experience God directly. In the depths of every person's heart, God's infinite greatness and beauty are present, always in a unique way. A person, however small and vulnerable, is great and worthy, for God himself dwells in him or her.

(...) Thanks to his faith in God, Ignatius could dare to believe in a person's possibilities. For him it seemed obvious that he should show faith and confidence, rather than distrust and suspicion. In his role as a director, he preferred to refer his subordinates to their own experiences and discernment, rather than nervously trying to organise everything himself. When in doubt, Ignatius preferred to give someone a chance, rather than immediately shutting the door as a measure of safety. However experienced and wise he himself may have been, when spiritually guiding others, Ignatius showed great discretion. In this way he made it possible for the other person to grow in discernment and thus in independence.³⁰

This Ignatian optimistic view of people thus invites us to start from trust rather than distrust or suspicion. This in no way precludes an alert attitude. Giving and receiving trust brings life to an Ignatian environment, and allows those involved to grow and develop in freedom. At the same time, as we read in the above quote, this optimistic vision of people is an invitation to take responsibility, including for our own behaviour. It also implies a task for each of us: the more trust you give, the more trust you receive. The more trust you receive, the more you will also dare to show trust and take responsibility yourself.

30 (Sintobin, On the compass of joy, 2024, pp. 65-67)

3.3 Reflection to review

The Ignatian review to reflect on one's own behaviour and actions should be embedded in the Ignatian environment. An Review to look back or discern is a typical Ignatian way of reflecting.

Discernment is largely dependent on the ability to listen to what is going on inside you. For most people this is not a skill we are born with. However, you can learn to connect with your innermost self. Ignatius proposes a simple way of doing this: an Ignatian review of your day, also called an examination of conscience or consciousness. Christians can do this in the presence of, and together with God. In this case, the Ignatian review becomes a prayer – the Examen. ³¹

This review searches for what has touched you. It teaches you in this way to detect joy. The review begins by examining feelings of gratitude for what has been ('thanks'), this is followed by exploring moments when you have felt sadness ('sorry') and you conclude by

expressing an intention or resolution in which you ask for help to be able to live more joyfully ('please'). The review of your experiences (good or bad) allows you to proceed through these three steps to what moves you most deeply.

Having taken that honest look at yourself, you are then prepared to accept feedback from others, whether they are from your own (work) environment or not. It is especially important for people in leadership roles within Ignatian environments, whether formal or informal, to test their own behaviour against how others perceive that behaviour and thus develop

You have to understand this: in life, not everything is black on white or white on black. The most important things in life are the grey nuances. So, it comes down to learning to discern in that grey.

Paus Franciscus, cited by (Sintobin,
Op het kompas van de vreugde, 2024, p. 114)

³¹ (Sintobin, Trust Your Feelings, 2021, p. 79).

A great deal of literature on the review/ Ignatian life prayer or Examen can be found among various works by Jesuits. A practical resource here is the podcast "Pray-As-You-Go," created by the British Jesuits. Learn more at <https://prayasyougo.org/>

insight into their own blind spots. This reflection to review behaviour individually and with others should certainly be practised.³²

3.4 Unity grows from diversity

Treating every fellow human being equally and without prejudice is what we want to strive for. In an Ignatian environment, valuable differences and commonalities are put to positive use. In this way, unity in diversity can grow. That sounds simpler than it is. In actual fact, our reality consists of a multitude of fields of tension. It is a hopeless task to try to eliminate those fields of tension, especially if you do not want to entrench yourself in a parallel world and subculture of like-minded people.

Ignatius' example invites you to consciously choose to stand in the middle of these fields of tension and then to stay there. Numerous good and less good forces and interests try to draw you in. Discernment means that you keep looking for the right balance in the middle of that interplay of forces. The deeper emotional experience is an important guide here. Thus, discernment and the broader Ignatian spirituality can become a fast track to creativity, renewal and ever more life. It requires constant attention and the willingness to adapt and change. It is truly a gateway to living fully and joyfully in this fascinating world.³³

³² See the formation offerings of IgnAN and Pray-As-You-Go (see footnote 30).

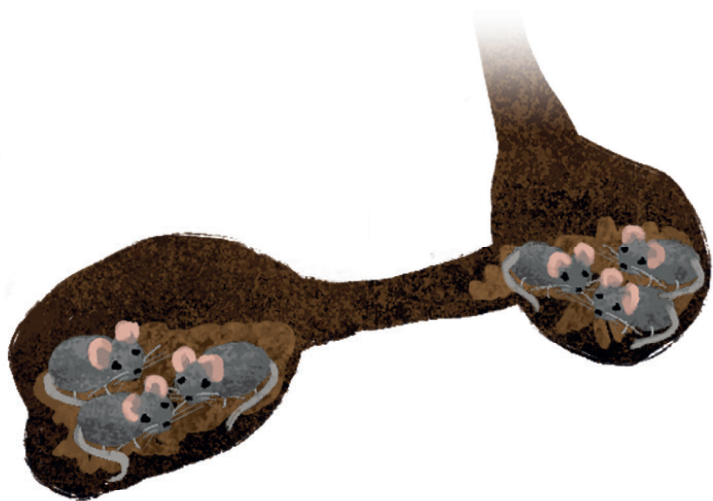
³³ (Sintobin, On the Compass of Joy, 2024, p. 114)

4

Code of Conduct:

organizational agreements as the desired result

A psychologically safe environment requires not only a code of ethics with generally applicable principles and core values, but also clear organizational agreements in the form of a code of conduct. These agreements are made by the organization or community together with those involved and are adapted to its own context. Some background information is given in the following texts.



4.1 Risk analysis

Psychological security is created by people's behaviour. This behaviour is linked to the context and organizational characteristics. These characteristics influence psychological safety positively and negatively, and can increase or decrease the risk of undesirable and transgressive behaviour. For example, a psychologically unsafe environment can become a breeding ground for (sexually) transgressive behaviour.³⁴

It is therefore strongly recommended that first and foremost a risk analysis is made to detect the risks of the environment in question and estimate their magnitude. Following this, the Ignatian environment should implement measures taking the greatness of the risks into consideration. Ideally existing (infra)structures and previously acquired knowledge will be used to do this.

³⁴ The (IgnAN) training programme includes a specific section on sexual transgressive behaviour. For those already looking for inspiration, we mention the *Handreiking Cultuurverandering op de werkvloer: Over preventie en de aanpak van seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag* (Cultural Changes in the Workplace: On the Prevention and Management of Sexually Transgressive Behaviour), prepared by the Governmental Commission on Sexually Transgressive Behaviour (SGOG) and Sexual Violence, commissioned by Mariëtte Hamer, Governmental Commissioner on SGOG and Sexual Violence, March 13, 2024 edition. Freely available at <https://www.rcgog.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2024/03/13/handreiking-cultuurverandering-op-de-werkvloer>.

These are some organizational characteristics with a possible risk of psychological insecurity in the (work) environment:

- dependency within the different relationships (e.g. teacher-pupil, director-volunteer, secretarial assistant-visitor...)
- competitive working environment
- the use of flexible employment contracts (and thus job insecurity) and permanent contracts (and thus rusty relationships)
- lack of clarity regarding role, function, expectations
- workload and financial pressure
- (informal) power differences
- organizational culture which is overly internally focussed ³⁵
- excessive hierarchy or perceived untouchability of individuals within the organization.

4.2 Importance of defining both desired behaviour and transgressive behaviour

When outlining a policy on psychological safety, it is important to pay attention at the outset to a description of exactly what is meant by transgressive behaviour. We recommend that this exercise be done in a discernment consultation with the policy team and the staff so that the description is supported and rooted within the organisation. In doing so, it is best to describe not only transgressive but also desirable behaviour. In any case, the discussion will remain a dynamic event and the possibility always exists that additions or changes may become necessary.

Several elements are taken into account in such a description, for example by using case-studies. Besides the person exhibiting a particular behaviour and the person at the receiving end of that behaviour, there are also the bystanders, the environmental context, the previous history, the visible and invisible consequences of a particular behaviour. We encourage leaders to facilitate the discernment process in this regard, so that tensions can become clear and come to a synthesis.

³⁵ In an internally focused culture, internal processes and activities, systems and employees are the most important. These cultures expect everything and everyone to conform to the organization's way of doing things at all times. This translates into the behaviour and communication style of the people in the organization. A highly internally focused organizational culture runs the risk of not questioning itself, and not creating the space for employees to expose psychologically unsafe situations.

4.3 Starting to define undesirable and transgressive behaviour

With regard to behaviour, we see a lower limit and an upper limit. What falls below the lower limit of behaviour we consider to be socially acceptable behaviour ('green zone'). What occurs above that, exceeds that limit of socially acceptable behaviour ('red zone'). Often the lower limit is not expressed, but is determined by generally accepted values and norms. Moreover, this lower boundary may be different for each person. An organization also has a lower limit that applies to the organization as a whole.



The upper limit with regard to behaviour is very clearly expressed. It is an objective, clear, legal limit. Anything that happens above the upper limit is a violation as described by law. These must always be dealt with by the appropriate authorities and information about them must be easily accessible, both to the person in charge and to employees. What we have in mind here are cases of (sexual) harassment, stalking, unwanted sexual acts, discrimination, bullying, violence, etc.

In the area between this lower limit and upper limit ("amber zone") are behaviours which one person feels to be unacceptable or for which consent is needed, and the other feels it is perfectly admissible. One of

the people involved feels ill at ease, uncomfortable, attacked, harmed, adversely affected, etc. in such situations. The other person involved is unaware of any harm or (consciously) exhibits behaviour without malicious ulterior motives. Such cases are perhaps the most common. If an environment is psychologically safe, these behaviours are more likely to be brought to attention and discussed.

We encourage organizations to create a forum on a regular basis where this amber in-between zone can be discussed using actual cases from the daily operation of the organization. What elements determine whether behaviour is undesirable? What circumstances allowed the unacceptable behaviour to take place? What lower limit do we set for behaviour?

4.4 Reporting and addressing transgressive behaviour

It is, of course, important that every organization has a reporting system to record psychologically unsafe situations, and that these reports are handled carefully and seriously. The comprehensive description of a reporting system, focused both internally and externally, is a requirement in any policy text on psychological safety. It is also necessary for this reporting system to undergo repeated quality control.



For inspiration, we are setting out below a table of contents of a possible policy text around a psychologically safe environment. With this, we certainly do not want to interfere with the dynamics that are currently running in local contexts, but rather provide additional input and encourage them in the task at hand.

PART 1: Definitions

1. **What is psychological safety?** - General description and its importance for the organization
2. **For whom is this document intended?** What is the purpose of this document?

PART 2: Code of Ethics - Encouraging.

What are the general principles/core values of the organization? All of the following points strongly influence organizational culture.

1. **Organizational Compass:**
values, norms, beliefs of the organization - What is important to the organization, more specifically about how employees treat each other?
2. **Organizational structure:**
Participants in the psychological safety policy
- who takes care of what in the context of psychological safety? Where do employees find information? What is needed to sustainably establish, support and embed psychological safety in the organization?

3. **(Possible) visible outcomes of organizational culture** - What are the desired effects? What is the organization doing to achieve the desired organizational culture?

PART 3: Code of Conduct - Monitoring.

What are the clear organizational agreements?

1. **Organizational characteristics** - Know the risks.
Importance of risk analysis/baseline measurement.
2. **Transgressive behaviour in the organization** -
Describe what behaviour is impermissible in terms of psychological and physical safety, data processing, inclusion & diversity, integrity. Also indicate where to find policy documents on these.
3. **Protocols for reports and complaints** - both internal and external, informal and formal

PART 4: Implementation and evaluation

1. **Training opportunities** - Who will attend what training, and with what frequency?
2. **Cyclical: evaluation** - When and by whom does an evaluation of the policy occur?

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7.1 Members of the Integrity and Psychological safety Committee

Members of CISOV Core. The CISOV core meets monthly.

Thekla Schrammeijer	safeguarding delegate, chair of CISOV	safeguarding.elc@jezuieten.org
Bart van Emmerik sj	socius of the Region	socius.elc@jezuieten.org
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Wiggert Molenaar sj	secretary of the Region	secretary.elc@jezuieten.org

Members of CISOV-wide. The CISOV-wide meets twice a year. For CISOV-wide, the CISOV core is expanded to include these members:

Marc Desmet sj	ELC Regional Superior	regsup.elc@jezuieten.org
Mia De Schamphelaere	General reporting point in the Church	
Manu Keirse	Dignity Foundation	
Jacques Haers sj	em. Professor of Theology KU Leuven, pastor University Parish KU Leuven	jacques@jesuits.net

7.2 Prior documents

7.2.1. European Low Countries Region (ELC).

- 2016: BSE/NER sexual abuse prevention policy.

7.2.2. Flemish Episcopal Council

A comprehensive overview of decrees, policy texts, (translated) documents... can be found on the Kerknet website.

- 2012: Hidden Grief - toward a global approach to sexual abuse in the Church.
- 2014: From taboo to prevention - policies to prevent sexual abuse and behaviour which crosses over the boundaries in pastoral relationships with children and youth.
- 2019: Code of conduct for those who work in the church

7.2.3. Dutch Roman Catholic dioceses

A comprehensive overview of decrees, policy texts, documents ... can be found on the website of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands.

- 2018: Code of Pastoral Conduct



Ignatian Apostolic Network