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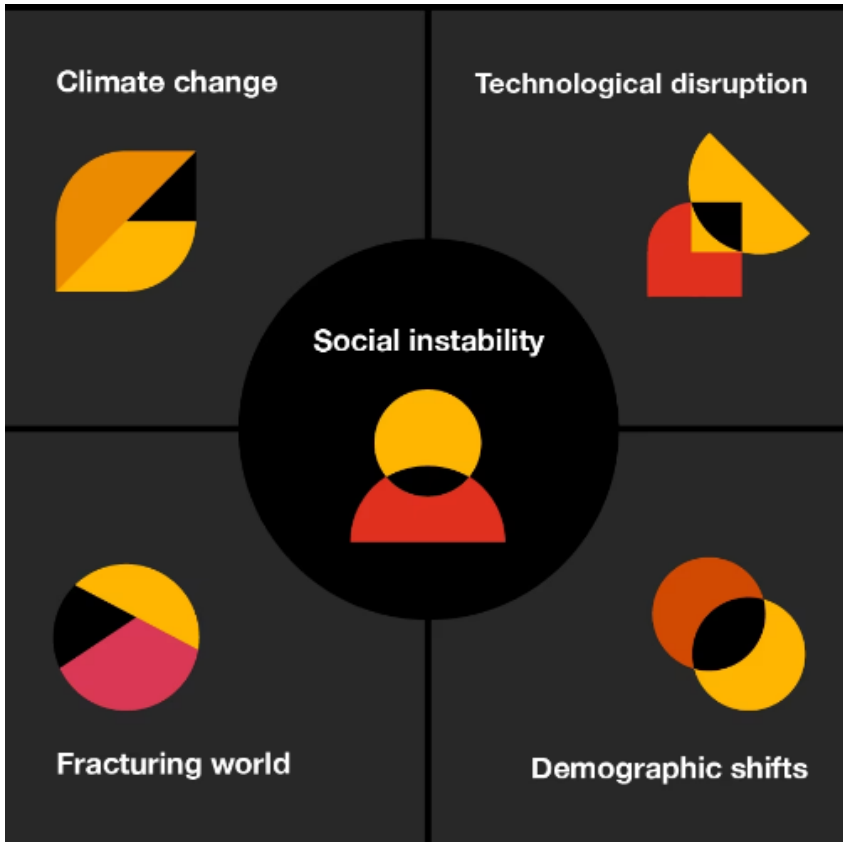
**Final work-based project
Part two: Research Report Presentation**

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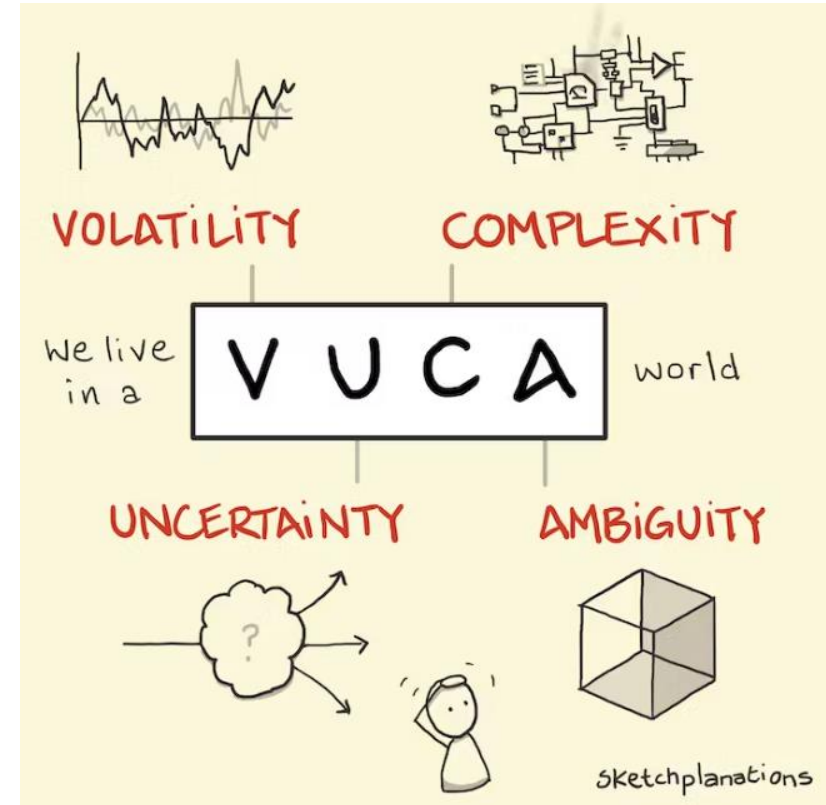
‘How can the Thinking Environment build psychological safety in team meetings to improve the quality of individual and collective thinking and action?’

What is the context at a macro level?

5 megatrends are shaping our world today (PwC 2022)



(PwC 2022)



(www.sketchplanations.com 2024)

We are living in a VUCA world where innovative thinking, new skills and ways of operating are needed to succeed (Stout-Rostron 2019, Çiçeklioğlu 2020, Taskan, Junça-Silva and Caetano 2022).

Culture, diversity and intersectionality – a changing landscape in how we make sense of the world and ourselves.

Our very idea of culture is changing

- *From* a single construct (Hofstede 1997, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997, Rosinki 2003).
- *To* interculturalism reflecting our interconnected world (Chin, Desormeaux and Sawyer 2016).
- Organisational culture – a key lever for driving operational performance that can be shaped and influenced (Cotter-Lockard 2016, Carvalho et al. 2019, Hald, Gillespie and Reader 2020, Zagaria 2021).

We are navigating increasing diversity in the workplace

- Diverse teams are stronger in innovation, performance and resilience but more complex to manage (Jarzabkowski and Searle 2004, Brown 2018, Stout-Rostron 2019, Mangla 2021, Reuil 2022).
- Stout-Rostron (2019) describes diversity as mix of demographic, informational and behavioural differences

Our awareness of intersectionality is growing

- Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) challenging marginalisation of black women it has expanded to describe layers of identity (Carbado et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2021)

To move forward:

- Important to interrogate and challenge power dynamics and systemic inequality that have let many voices go unheard (Carbado et al. 2013, Roche and Passmore 2021).
- Need to create environments of trust and safety welcoming all perspectives (Brown 2018, Collins et al. 2021).

Psychological safety

- A shared belief where one is safe to speak one's mind and be authentic in a team environment “characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves” (Edmondson 1999).
- Psychological safety key lever in organisational performance e.g. Google's five-year study (Newman et. al 2017).
- Edmondson emphasises the role of the organisation and the leader.

Part 1: Individual safety	In this team, it is easy to discuss difficult issues and problems
	I won't receive retaliation or criticism if I admit to an error or mistake
	It is easy to ask a member of this team for help
	I feel safe offering new ideas, even if they aren't fully-formed plans
Part 2: Team respect	In this team, people are accepted for being different
	My teammates welcome my ideas and give them time and attention
	Members of this team could easily describe the value of others' contributions
Part 3: Team learning	In this team, people talk about mistakes and ways to improve and learn from them
	We take time to find ways to improve our team's work processes
	Members of this team raise concerns they have about team plans or decisions
	We try to discover our underlying assumptions and seek counterarguments about issues under discussion

**Measures for psychological safety
(Edmondson 1999)**

Category	Setting the stage	Inviting participation	Responding productively
Leadership tasks	Frame the work - Set expectations about failure, uncertainty, and interdependence to clarify the need for voice Emphasize purpose - Identify what's at stake, why it matters, and for whom	Demonstrate situational humility - Acknowledge gaps Practice enquiry - Ask good questions - Model intense listening Set up structures and processes - Create forums for input - Provide guidelines for discussion	Express appreciation - Listen - Acknowledge and thank Destigmatize failure - Look forward - Offer help - Discuss, consider and brainstorm next steps Sanction clear violations
Accomplishes	Shared expectations and meaning	Confidence that voice is welcome	Orientation toward continuous learning

**The leader's toolkit for building psychological safety
(Edmondson 2019, pg159)**

The Thinking Environment

- The quality of every action is defined by the quality of the thinking done first (Kline 2020).
- Individual and collective accountability - the biggest influencer of the quality of our thinking is how those around treat us while thinking (Kline 2015).
- Meetings one of most universal organisational practices (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Allen and Van Vugt 2020)

Attention	<i>Listening without interruption and with interest in where the person will go next in their thinking</i>
Equality	<i>Regarding each other as thinking peers, giving equal time to think</i>
Ease	<i>Discarding internal urgency</i>
Appreciation	<i>Noticing what is good and saying it</i>
Encouragement	<i>Giving courage to go to the unexplored edge of thinking by ceasing competition as thinkers</i>
Feelings	<i>Welcoming the release of emotion</i>
Information	<i>Absorbing all the relevant facts</i>
Difference	<i>Prioritising diversity of group identities and understanding their lived experience</i>
Incisive questions	<i>Freeing the human mind of untrue assumptions lived as true</i>
Place	<i>Producing a physical environment – the room, the listener, your body – that says, 'You matter'</i>

The Ten Components of a Thinking Environment (Time to Think 2024)

Building blocks of The Thinking Environment

- Rounds – opening and closing the meetings with an Opening and Closing round that is a positively framed question. The group move methodically 'around the table' with everyone having an opportunity to speak without interruption. If meeting virtually this is done using a pre-designed and shared 'virtual table'. Rounds can also be used to open discussion on a particular topic and also used as a 'Freshest Thinking Round' instead of a report-back or debrief.
- Open discussion – a more free-flowing discussion, often following an initial Round.
- Thinking Pairs – when a team is split into pairs to each take a turn sharing their thinking on a topic uninterrupted.
- Dialogue – when a team is split into pairs for free-flowing dialogue (rather than Thinking Pairs).

Building Blocks of the Thinking Environment (Time to Think Facilitator Training Materials 2021)

What am I exploring?

The core research question

How can the Thinking Environment build psychological safety in team meetings to improve the quality of individual and collective thinking and action?

The research seeks to explore this topic using five focussing questions, with three questions comprising the primary focus of the research, and the remaining two as secondary 'process' questions.

Primary research questions:

1. To what extent can the Thinking Environment help build psychological safety in a team meeting setting?
2. What is the perceived impact of the Thinking Environment on individual thinking and action?
3. What is the perceived impact of the Thinking Environment on collective thinking and action?

Secondary 'process' questions:

1. How effectively can the Thinking Environment approach be applied as a live learning experience in a team meeting setting?
2. What is the experience of the team, the individual and the researcher in this process?

The methods

Research paradigm

- Interpretivist approach of Symbolic interactionism due to subjective nature of research
- Informed by Critical Theory of transformative learning to contribute to positive social change

Methodology

- Work-based small-scale social and action research (Denscombe 2014).
- Collective case study to explore 'typical' team meeting using three teams to provide richer data (Crowe et al. 2011)
- Phenomenological in nature, seeking to understand the perspective of each individual.
- Important to recognise subjective, personal and diverse nature of content including indigenous heritage.

Methods and measures

- Three stage research using qualitative interviews and quantitative online survey data gathering
- Intervention applied Thinking Environment live in team meetings with each team as action research

Research participants

The participating teams	
Group 1: The Rio Tinto Copper, Growth & Development team.	A highly culturally diverse group of individuals situated across multiple locations. The majority of team interaction is <u>virtual</u> and each is physically working in an environment of cultural difference. There is also a variation in age, gender, education and work experience.
Group 2: The Richards Bay Minerals Communities & Social Performance team	A site-based co-located team within a subsidiary of Rio Tinto and based in South Africa. Team meetings are in person or remote – for the purposes of this research the team chose to meet remotely. All team members are from the same region however there is diversity in tribalism, gender, age, education and experience.
Group 3: A team from a New Zealand government agency	Situated across two locations with a mix of co-located in person and all-team virtual meetings. There is a mix of cultural heritage, indigenous identity, however with a dominant national culture. There is a range of age, gender and education.

The methods: Ethical considerations

1. To protect the psychological safety and well-being of participants through the study

University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) code of ethics (UWTSD 2024) and International Coaching Federation's (ICF) code of ethics (ICF 2024).

2. Confidentiality of the business information

Offer NDA and no recording

3. Confidentiality of the personal perspectives that will be collected from the participants

All personal information will be gathered, stored and disposed of in line with GDPR principles (GDPR 2023).

4. Respecting the cultural practices of participants

Important to honouring the participant's subjective content through respect, reverence, reciprocity and responsibility (Archibald et al. 2021)

5. Implication of being an insider researcher and the potential impact on the research process and results

Manage boundaries of research given pre-existing relationships and researcher involvement through full and transparent disclosure and auto-ethnographic self-reflection (Costley et al. 2010)

The findings: Participation

	Total in team	Participated in pre-intervention quantitative survey	Participated in pre-intervention qualitative interview	Participated in post-intervention quantitative survey	Participated in post-intervention qualitative interview	Observation of team meeting prior to intervention	Intervention - Application of Thinking Environment in team meetings	Observation of team meeting post intervention
Group 1	10	8	10	6	3	Complete	4	Due to competing priorities a number of the meetings were rescheduled which delayed research and impacted ability to do observation of final session.
Group 2	7	7	7	7	7	Complete	3 One meeting was cancelled due to a team emergency, only three interventions could be conducted.	Complete
Group 3	13	11	10	10	9	Complete	4	Complete

Participation across research groups (Britz 2023b)

- All participants had full autonomy to opt out at any point
- Participation varied across the teams due to operational pressures and leave – live example of pressures of modern world
- Findings are presented as whole rather than by team to protect confidentiality

The findings: Key themes

- Awareness of 'difference'
- The role of the leader
- Time and the meeting format
- Transactional vs relational
- A place for voice



The findings: Awareness of 'difference'

- Identity elements gender, age, education, culture, heritage, faith, professional experience, upbringing and parenthood.
- Individuals with deeper awareness of identity identified with indigenous or non-Western heritage and grappled with intersectionality e.g. heritage and professions:

"I've always been a minority in whatever field I've been, we will never be very heavily I guess represented in whatever field that is, and whatever profession that is, and whether that's the corporate or any other aspect of it. But I think that's why it's been a big factor for me, the cultural barrier, and I guess, the way we intersect, the way I am interpreted and the way I communicate with others."

"Culture, it's where I come from, how my ancestors lived, it has shaped the way I am today. How I grew up under those traditions. Growing up in a society, being taught respect, being taught differently from your brother. The expectations from society when a woman grows up to a certain age, things like getting married, having a child, going to school, all of those things, they I think they do influence how then you look at life the decisions you take later on. And then going into race, I believe. We may not, you know, we can say we are all equal, but I do know I always consider race for example, in professional settings, or in perceptions around you know, being a black woman at this age. So, it does influence my decisions at some point."

- Majority of white, Western individuals mainly identified themselves through age, gender, profession and education with little mention of culture or heritage influencing their identity although some through lived experience, had deeper sense of cultural awareness and sensitivity similar to 'global mindset' of Plaister-Ten (2013).
- Post-intervention interviews indicated a shift in the awareness of diversity and intersectionality in the team meetings.

The findings: The role of the leader

- Edmundson (2019) emphasises influence a leader has team the psychological safety Difference in influence of leader manifested in different ways:
 - one team leader dominated in presence and voice leading to reticence of majority of team to speak up. Leader was intermittently present
 - another team, leader highly spoken of as welcoming perspective. Leader was consistently present.
- The influence of the leader on a team's psychological safety as described by Edmundson (2019) and Brown (2018) visible through the perceptions of the teams on their comfort to speak up.
- Application of Thinking Environment potentially presented greater degree of Component of Equality.

The findings: Time and the meeting format

	Frequency of meetings	Involvement in agenda preparation
Group 1	• Every two weeks (although frequently cancelled due to competing priorities). • Meeting was in two parts – first was a 30-minute check-in, second part was 45 minutes of deeper project update with smaller group of individuals. • Majority of participants joined virtually, however at times subset of individuals would join in person together.	• Author worked with same two individuals to prepare the agenda for each meeting using the Thinking Environment meeting structure.
Group 2	• Two hours monthly. • Whole team would join virtually.	• Each meeting a different member of the team was nominated by the leader to lead the meeting. The author would work with the individual to shape the agenda using the Thinking Environment meeting structure.
Group 3	• 90-minute weekly. • Team split across two locations, with majority in one location, two individuals from the second location. Some individuals would join virtually when working from home.	• Each meeting a different member of the team was nominated by the leader to lead the meeting. The author would work with the individual to shape the agenda using the Thinking Environment meeting structure.

- Meetings typified by rush, interruption, lack of attention and engagement
- Use of agenda shaped as questions, building blocks of Thinking Environment created space and ease

“It provides members to be more prepared as the agenda items are in the form of a question. It provides a sense of being at ease before any meatier discussions begin and I think it has brought a more positive, encouraging and appreciative environment which I felt was lacking before. the use of the virtual table was awesome as well because it invited people to share their thinking behind the topics and encouraged them to think deeper and provide a quality response.”

The findings: Transactional vs relational

- Teams tended to focus on the actions, outputs and artefacts with little to no relational space – reflects Lehmann-Willenbrock, Allen and Van Vugt's (2020) observation most common purpose of meetings in the modern-day world is for information sharing and decision-making.
- But human brain wired to be social and social interaction key for learning (Paul 2021, Lee and Kent, 2023)
- 10 Components and 'building blocks' aim to welcome person's full self for full quality thinking integrating energy, information and relationships (Kapai 2024).

“Well, I consider that the value of people's experience in the team and with where they come from, what have they learned, being in conversations with some of our colleagues, you get to know them at a deeper level.”

The findings: A place for voice

- Creating environment where 'voice' is welcome essential to psychological safety (Edmondson 2019)
- Noticed inequality in the share of voice among participants. Other themes of time, structure and balancing transactional and relational nature of the meeting all influenced.
- Three further potential factors - communication styles, culture and power dynamics in the group.
- Author believes 'implicit voice theory' at play (Detert and Edmondson 2011).
- Shift was seen in post-intervention interviews:

"When we create that thinking environment, there is value, I'm being recognised, I'm being invited. But I'm also expected to have a voice because voice is valued. So once all of those empowerment elements are in place, I just think that people then get to a state of mind, where there is much more inclination to talk with confidence to contribute, knowing that they are fully invited here. It is not by mistake."

The findings: A pre- and post- data perspective

Composition and Overall Measures															
Overall				Group 1				Group 2				Group 3			
Ave. Duration in Team (yrs)				Ave. Duration in Team (yrs)				Ave. Duration in Team (yrs)				Ave. Duration in Team (yrs)			
2.42				1.39				4.03				2.25			
Ave. Psychological Safety Rating															
Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
3.78		4.01		3.50		3.67		3.94		4.14		3.90		4.11	
Standard deviation		0.49		0.48		0.47		0.47		0.38		0.43		0.42	
Min		Max		Min		Max		Min		Max		Min		Max	
2.83		4.58		3.17		5.00		3.00		4.25		3.17		4.58	
Ave. Thinking Environment Rating															
Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
3.17		3.46		2.90		2.95		3.44		3.64		3.24		3.64	
Standard deviation		0.55		0.59		0.51		0.37		0.47		0.53		0.57	
Min		Max		Min		Max		Min		Max		Min		Max	
2.27		4.36		2.45		4.73		2.27		3.55		2.45		3.64	

Overall average results for pre- and post- intervention surveys
(Britz 2023b)

How can the Thinking Environment help build psychological safety in a team meeting setting?

- Strong connections between Thinking Environment and Psychological Safety
- Where differs is in the 'how' – psychological safety focusses on leader as catalyst and driver (Edmondson 2019), Thinking Environment focusses on 'way of being' with others (Kline 2020).
- Research pointed to role of group and how individuals behave influencing elements of psychological safety including being accepted for being different, speaking up
- Thinking Environment offers guidance on structure and behaviours on how teams themselves can build psychological safety.

“It's easy, you participate with ease. There's nothing forceful. You volunteer yourself, or the way that the meetings are flowing, you would want to contribute anyway. So yeah, I think level of participation was good. Everyone brought themselves on follow on. And it was really. It was a safe space, and we shared personal stuff. So yeah, I think the environment itself, I will conclude in saying that, being in a safe environment.”

What is the perceived impact of the Thinking Environment on the quality of individual and collective thinking?

- Lack of awareness of 'difference', time pressure, constraints of meeting format and individual behaviours focussing on transactional interactions and impacted sharing of 'voice' all contributed to a lack of 'ease' and safety.
- 'Interruption' is an assault on thinking (Kline 2020)
- When excluded brain pattern similar to physical pain (Boyatzis and Jack 2018).
- "Generative attention, uncorrupted and sustained, calms the brain's amygdala, the emotional 'control centre' of the brain, producing hormones like serotonin and oxytocin. These hormones then 'bathe' the cortex, the cognitive 'control centre' of the brain, allowing a perfect interplay between these 'approach' hormones and cognition."(Brown in Kline 2020, pg 33).

"It's funny how everything emanates from thinking that then there's other factors that are brought in, you know, just thinking that it's a thinking environment, then we get people to share, to open up more to participate, we get people to open up in terms of their personal lives, we get people to participate more, we get people to think more about a subject.

So when you think about it, that it all starts with saying that this is a thinking space. I'm thinking that everything comes from giving yourself time to reflect more, to think more, to sit back to digest, to internalise everything before you action, before you could talk, before everything."

Creating spaces for psychological freedom

- Correlation between Thinking Environment Component of Difference and 'being accepted for being different' as an element of psychological safety. Bodies of work even more relevant today with increasing complexity of diversity, identity and intersectionality present in the workplace.
- Liberatory consciousness - where an individual is awakened to the inequality and social injustice that still exists in systems and institutions today "deepening the capacity to notice, to give our attentional to our daily lives, our language, our behaviours, and even our thoughts" (Love 2018, pg 560).
- Going beyond psychological safety to psychological freedom – the 'uninterrupted me' (Kapai 2024).

"I now understand the value of being yourself, but I think there's power in each one of us. And that, that, that that was the culture that was always promoted, but I've always said you know, it's fine if I don't say anything, some other people may take it otherwise, but knowing that it's, it's perfectly understood, I am now more, more confident to share my headspace at anytime."

Creating spaces for psychological freedom

- Thinking Environment speaks to and resonates with various forms of Indigenous practices and wisdom.
 - Dadirri, is a word, concept and spiritual practice from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory, Australia) and means 'inner deep listening, quiet still awareness and waiting' (Miriam Rose Foundations 2024).
 - The va/va'a/vaha, a pan-Pacific concept of the relational space within which all humans interact and which nurtures "personal and collective well-being and growth through knowledge generation, social action, and cultural transformation" (Tapasā).
 - Ubuntu – I am because of who we all are. Helping shift less on individual benefit to collective value of practices through 'humaneness' (Stout-Rostron 2019). In Zulu, "Injobo enhle ithungelwa ebandla" which - "A good lionskin is sewn in the company of others." People perform better in whatever they are doing by seeking knowledge/information and guidance from others.
- Thinking Environment as means to build psychological safety as collective to spark innovative thinking.
- In diverse world where voice for social change is louder every day, Thinking Environment, with its Components that echo the practices of Indigenous wisdom, could be a bridge in meetings where potentially there may have been dynamic tension between Western systems and Indigenous ones.

Limitations and recommendations

- Case study did provide mix of participants but still small number and team sizes small.
- Preserving confidentiality of the participants the research took a more 'meta' approach looking at overall themes – value in further exploration of comparison to understand influence of role/ profession/ broader organisational culture.
- Case study conducted over short time, limited number of sessions, no follow-up exploration.
- Recommendation for future research to include in its design expansion of the sample size to cover a greater number of teams and a combination of size teams, to run the study for a longer period of time and include a follow-up session with the team. This would potentially provide even richer data to test the findings of this study.

Reflections on lessons learned (secondary research questions)

Two key areas of learning:

- Professional - Applying the Thinking Environment as a live learning experience
- Personal - Embodying the Thinking Environment



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Please note this is the full reference list from the research report as this presentation spoken and written reflects the research

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