

## Psychological Safety the New Anchor of Effective Team building

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Team building sessions, if done well will lead to a more engaged and coordinated team but if not handled well can leave employees in a worse off position. Aside from just being fun and an excuse to be together, team building events have serious business and personal impacts. In concurrence, recent studies have indicated the need to move away from the facilitation of team building sessions as a means to do sports and fun games only. However, team building sessions should now dwell on issues to do with psychological safety.

Teamwork is the reciprocal relationship of helping a group of individuals completes a task or project that they could not complete on their own. Employees spend most of their time at work, but it can be hard to get to know their colleagues and what they are really like. People naturally like to feel connected. Co-workers are the thing most people like best about their jobs. Even when the work gets rough, as long as the people are supportive and good to be around, it can make all the difference. However, it can be hard at work to find similarities with other people, especially if you only ever talk about work. It is over a team-building outing that colleagues can find out that they both enjoy hiking, went to the same college, or have kids who are the same age. These connections might not come out in the office, but it helps employees build connections with each other. Personal bonds and similarities are much stronger than simply sharing office walls.

Psychological safety relates to a person's perspective on how threatening or rewarding it is to take interpersonal risks at work. People often mistake psychological safety with trust. Although trust and psychological safety have a lot in common, they are not completely interchangeable concepts. A key difference is that psychological safety is experienced at the group level — most people on a team tend to have the same perceptions of it. While trust usually relates to interactions between two individuals or parties (Edmondson, 2004). For a team to be of high performance a shared understanding of what help is, how help is needed and expected must be established. These four conditions align with psychological safety, and when fulfilled, will increase the trust and output of the team.

Psychologically safe workplace culture is one where people are not full of fear and are not trying to cover their tracks to avoid being embarrassed. Put differently, the act of speaking up and learning from mistakes is encouraged and even celebrated. It is important to note that even people who may be naturally more inclined to raise ideas and offer suggestions may not do so if they fear being blocked or punished. In other words, encouraging and rewarding speaking up can help more people do so in a work set up, even if their personality makes them more risk-averse. Other hindrances to psychological safety might be that employees do not believe that their opinions matter or that their contributions may be restricted by workplace hierarchies. Senior managers, therefore, need to be extra conscientious of employees' feelings and fears and recognize how these emotions affect motivation and workers' ability to do their job.

Factors that evaluate the psychological safety of employees include but are not limited to, what the role of the employee is within the team. Loosely speaking this refers to known roles and how the roles will interact, letting people know how they are expected to work together in cross-functional relationships which will in return improve the team. How much control or influence an employee will have on the team. This refers to whether people have to do what the employee tells them to or whether they will have to do what people tell them to do instead. It also refers to the defined and shared control of and on the team members which will increase teamwork.

Whether the team meets the employee's goals or needs affects psychological safety. Goals drive what we do as individuals and organizations. People have individual needs and goals they wish to have fulfilled. Knowing what they are and creating a clear connection on how group can meet them will build psychological safety. People want to know how much they will have to share, and what is expected of the team.

Managers play a key role in the improvement of psychological safety in the workplace. They can help instill psychological safety amongst their subordinates by admitting when they are wrong. By demonstrating vulnerability and directness, they can show employees that it is alright to make mistakes. Managers can also ask for the team's input. By asking employees for their opinions in group settings, they will not only feel more involved and accountable but also empowered to innovate. Managers should show appreciation when employees speak up about unrealistic timelines or ask for clarification on a project.

Managers should thank them for voicing their concerns, and then help them decide on the next step. Managers also need to forgive employees' mistakes. Nothing kills psychological safety quicker than a negative reaction to an error. Instead, focus on the positives and implement the approach whereby when a mistake is identified, it can be fixed, and there's something to learn from the experience. Above all, a psychologically safe environment protects employees from the fear of being wrong.

As a means of undertaking effective team building sessions, the need to incorporate the enforcement of psychological safety strategies in these sessions cannot be overemphasized. This is one amongst other strategies incorporated in our IPC team building sessions. Learn more about the IPC team building sessions by contacting our experienced and very capable consultants for more information. With your team's psychological safety in check, rest assured that you will have a team that is highly engaged and equipped to produce the required results if not more.

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