

Psychological safety in the workplace

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One of your primary objectives as a leader is to ensure that your team members succeed and like their work. Those goals, however, will be impossible to achieve until psychological safety is established. Employees need to feel safe and secure mentally and psychologically for them to do their work appropriately. According to the studies on diversity and inclusion, most HR and senior executives think that variety of opinions benefits organizations.

Many exciting perspectives are brought together by groups made up of people with a variety of life experiences. Diverse groups are also better at recognising problems and coming up with innovative solutions than groups of people who have had similar life experiences. But what if some members of the team are hesitant to speak up? What if they're reluctant to express their worries or ask difficult questions? What if they don't give novel ideas because they're afraid of being rejected?

Unfortunately, this is how many people feel. According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2017, three out of ten employees strongly agreed that their opinions are ignored at work. A lack of psychological safety at work has significant business repercussions. Workplace psychological safety does not imply that everyone is always pleasant. It means you embrace controversy and speak up, confident in the knowledge that your team has your back and you have theirs.

This article will discuss what psychological safety is, why it is important, and how to create it at work.

- What do you mean by psychological safety?
- Why is psychological safety important?
- How can psychological safety be measured?
- How to create psychological safety in the workplace

What exactly is psychological safety?

A belief that one would not be punished or humiliated for coming out with ideas, questions, worries, or blunders," says Dr Amy Edmondson, a Harvard Business School professor who created the phrase psychological safety. Psychological safety is the belief that speaking up with ideas, questions, worries, or blunders will not result in punishment or humiliation.

What exactly is psychological safety at work?

It's a shared understanding among team members that speaking up will not cause embarrassment, rejection, or punishment. A sense of belonging is the foundation of a psychologically safe workplace. Employees must feel accepted before they can enhance their companies, similar to Maslow's hierarchy of requirements, which shows that all humans require their basic needs to be addressed before reaching their maximum potential.

According to Dr Timothy Clark, author of *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation*, employees must pass through the following four stages before they feel free to make valuable contributions and challenge the status quo.

Stage 1: Inclusion Safety: Inclusion safety satisfies the fundamental human desire to connect and belong. At this point, you're free to do whatever you want. But if your employer is not flexible and is always stiff, it becomes difficult to express any concerns you have.

Stage 2: Learner safety: Learner safety satisfies the need to learn and progress. You feel comfortable asking questions, offering and accepting feedback, experimenting, and making mistakes at this point in the learning process.

Stage 3: Contributor safety: It is the third stage, and it satisfies the need to make a difference. You are confident in your ability to contribute meaningfully with your talents and abilities.

Stage 4: Challenger Safety: Challenger safety meets the need to improve things. When you believe there is a chance to change or better anything, you feel secure speaking up and challenging the status quo. Employees should not be afraid to challenge anything in a respectful professional way simply because they fear losing their jobs. There should be room for challenges regarding some issues if they do not sit well with the employees.

Psychological safety, according to Edmondson, is a vital feature for high-performing teams. More recently, research into the qualities of high-performing teams identified psychological safety as the most important determinant of a team's performance.

Teams with high psychological safety are less concerned about the negative repercussions of:

- Taking calculated risks
- Making mistakes
- Sharing their thoughts with their teammates
- Being open and honest with one another

As a result, these groups are more inclined to discuss their differing viewpoints (e.g., avoid group mentality) and take the initiative when it counts most.

What Is Psychological Safety at Work — When Work Is Virtual?

It may appear at first that promoting psychological safety is more difficult when some workers work remotely. After all, how do you build trust when you schedule interpersonal discussions ahead of time and conduct them through a screen? Working from home, according to Altman, can provide a unique chance for team members to form bonds and boost psychological safety – if done correctly.

You can gaze carefully at people on a virtual call, not just listening to their words but seeing and feeling their emotions,” says Altman, who compares a videoconference session to a regular in-person chat. “It might be unpleasant in many cultures to gaze at someone for 30 seconds or even minutes at a time.” On Zoom, though, no one knows who you’re looking at, and your abilities are unrestricted. Team members must have the bravery to be vulnerable in order to be psychologically safe at work, and virtual work environments provide that possibility.

“Perhaps it’s difficult for you to show vulnerability in a person, but you can compose more vulnerable statements in chat and spend a little more time thinking about how you want to transmit it and measuring the impact on others by using a computer. To be psychologically safe at work, team members must be brave enough to be vulnerable, and virtual work environments allow that opportunity.

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Why does psychological safety matter?

Teams that feel free to communicate their perspectives with one another, even if they differ from the rest

of the group, can better maximize the knowledge and ability that each member brings to the table. These groups are more prone to take charge and think about the big picture in each scenario. As a result, the team can innovate and create effective solutions.

The ability of a team to give and receive candid, respectful feedback is also dependent on psychological safety. Take a look at employee perceptions of psychological safety as a starting point if your company wants to improve its feedback culture. The higher-up management should not embarrass the team managers in front of their team members as it damages the image of the team or cluster manager to their team members. When addressing any issue, one should have a sound mind and have emotional intelligence when bringing about an issue to the employees. Employees feel respected, safe, and protected psychologically by their employer and will improve issues pointed out.

The advantage of psychological security: It is critical to creating a trusting environment for performance. Psychological safety not only improves team performance but also boosts employee engagement. When team members feel valued for their contributions, they:

- feel like a valued member of the team;
- see the worth of their work;
- feel accepted for who they are and the particular skills they provide.

The link between psychological well-being and DE&I

Psychological safety is an essential aspect of initiatives to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diverse perspectives, experiences, and information can be more effectively used if team members feel comfortable speaking out and are used to considering different points of view. Highly inclusive teams are free to discuss their diverse viewpoints with one another.

How can psychological safety be measured?

Employee surveys are one technique to assess psychological safety in your firm. Traditional psychological safety assessments, on the other hand, tend to focus primarily on team perceptions. Consider polling employees about their perceptions of psychological safety at work and within their teams.

Use a pulse survey template to ask the correct questions regarding team members' feelings about expressing themselves, taking risks, and making errors. They should not be afraid to raise their concerns

for fear of losing their jobs. As an employer, you should not reprimand them for airing out their problems as it may affect their psychological safety and mental well-being. A leader should be emotionally intelligent enough to listen and look for better ways to deal with issues involving the well-being of their employees

Focus your data analysis on the team level rather than the organization level when assessing your outcomes. While knowing your organization's degree of psychological safety is essential, any action you take to increase psychological safety will be most effective in teams.

How to Create a Psychologically Safe Workplace

How do you improve your team environment and establish psychological safety at work now that you know what it is, why it matters, and how to assess it? These are some strategies one can use;

- **Encourage self-awareness.**

Build self-awareness in your team to establish psychological safety in the workplace. When you understand how you tend to think and act, you can identify biases that may influence your colleagues' desire to offer their opinions. Self-awareness also allows you to recognize your normal reactions to changes and problems. With this information, you may learn to control your emotional responses and behave in a way that encourages open dialogue. Self-awareness can be developed in a variety of ways, including 360° evaluations and assessments.

- **Show concern for team members as individuals.**

You may or may not be naturally motivated to inquire about team members' well-being. Nonetheless, by making it a habit to check in with your staff, you show that you care about them as individuals. This simple step can make team members feel more comfortable speaking up because they know you value them as a full person - no matter what. As an employer or cluster manager, you need to understand your team-members way of thinking and the points they give to you. Regarding health-related issues, address knowing that we are all different and take certain steps not because we want to be stubborn but because there are reasons beyond the organization or ourselves. Employees will respect and feel safe emotionally and mentally by considering all this.

- **Encourage people to ask inquiries.**

Pause your meeting when your team is debating a choice to solicit questions, other points of view, and considerations that have not yet been expressed. Internal processors may require more time to formulate their thoughts before speaking, so practice pausing and encouraging input. Also, before moving on, mentally count to ten.

- **Allow employees to express themselves in a variety of ways.**

While some employees may feel at ease offering their opinions in a meeting, others may prefer additional time to consider their comments. In addition to in-person meetings, encourage team members to comment using email or online collaboration platforms like Microsoft Teams. Some of the company policies and decisions give room for challenges that are done respectfully. Some policies may be done without realising that they are affecting the psychological safety of the employees.

- **Be specific in your communication, expectations, and obligations.**

Your team members must trust you and your word to feel psychologically safe. Be careful about the information you offer as well as the expectations and commitments you make. Be precise. Keep your expectations in check. Also, be considerate. Do not just make demands or outrageous points simply because of your personal feelings. Employees will trust you and be more honest if you set clear expectations and stick to them. Bear in mind that these employees are also human. They have feelings and deserve to be treated with respect and consideration. Their psychological safety is based on how they react to issues of the organization or their way of performing.

- **Give explanations for the change.**

Timelines will shift in the course of business, and your plans will need to adjust. Some members of your team will adjust quickly, while others may be thrown off. When expectations shift or new information emerges, communicate what has changed and why, and allow your team members time to adjust.

- **Accept responsibility for your errors.**

Failure can be frightening, but as a leader, you can help your colleagues cope by owning up to your mistakes and recognizing setbacks as lessons learned. Ask staff regularly what they have done that has not gone as planned and what they've learned from those experiences. This will let team members understand that they will not be penalized if they make mistakes.

The tone you set for your team as a leader has the potential to make or break their success and engagement. You will enable your employees to share their ideas, learnings, and concerns when you use these nine psychological safety methods, which will boost your team's performance. Individuals' and teams' success, engagement, and psychological safety at work are all dependent on relationships. Learn how to establish (and measure) better relationships in your office.

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/psychological-safety-in-the-workplace>