PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE
Building a culture of trust and belonging

Psychological safety is a condition in which you feel included, safe to learn, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo—all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished in some way. At work, it's a shared expectation held by members of a team that teammates will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for sharing ideas and concerns, asking for help, taking risks, or soliciting feedback. It's knowing that leaders value truth-telling and team members have one another's backs.

At its core, psychological safety is when team members feel safe taking interpersonal risks.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS: WHAT IS IT NOT?

Not everyone will feel comfortable all the time in a psychologically safe environment. Learning from and pointing out mistakes can be uncomfortable and showing vulnerability can feel risky. The key is feeling safe to take these risks without shame or retribution.

Furthermore, psychological safety at work doesn't mean that everybody is nice to each other all the time. There are many polite workplaces where there's no candor because people feel silenced by the enforced politeness. Candor can be hard but non-candor can be worse.

WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY SCORECARD

Harvard Business School Professor Amy Edmonson has developed a simple 7-item questionnaire to assess the perception of psychological safety.

You can assess your perception of your own workplace psychological safety by rating the following seven statements on a scale of 1-5.

> 1 = Strongly Disagree
> 2 = Disagree
> 3 = Neutral
> 4 = Agree
> 5 = Strongly Agree

_____ People at this organization/on this team are **able to bring up problems and tough issues**.

_____ I **feel safe to take a risk** in this organization/on this team.

_____ It **is easy to ask** other members of this organization/team **for help**.

_____ **No one** at this organization/on this team **would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts**.

_____ Working with members of this organization/team, my u**nique skills and talents are valued and utilized**.

_____ If I make **a mistake** at this organization/on this team, it **is often held against me**.

_____ **People** at this organization/on this team s**ometimes reject others for being different**.

A positive response to the first five statements, along with a negative response to the final two statements, indicates strong psychological safety.

You can use the data from the survey to reflect on your organization's or team's experience and be curious about what you could change to improve that experience. Which leads to another critical question: **what can you do to foster psychological safety?**

Make clear why everyone's voice matters and how respecting that will positively affect work outcomes.

FOSTERING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

A lot of what goes into creating a psychologically safe environment are good management practices. When leaders model these behaviors, it empowers all employees to co-create a climate of trust and belonging.

- Establish clear norms for communication so there is a sense of predictability and fairness

- Actively listen to employees and show appreciation and humility when people speak up

- Make clear why everyone's voice matters and how respecting that will positively affect work outcomes

- Normalize vulnerability by owning up to and demonstrating what you've learned from mistakes

- Actively invite input with open-ended questions: *What are you seeing, what are your thoughts on this idea?*

- Respond with a learning mindset – when people speak up with an unusual idea or tough feedback, be appreciative and forward thinking. Replace blame with curiosity: *Tell me more about that…*

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