



Solution

Psychological Safety

What...

Psychological safety is the most important dynamic in an effective team. It is about risk-taking and being comfortable with vulnerability. It means feeling confident about admitting mistakes, asking questions, or offering new ideas.

Psychological safety develops over time. When it exists, members of a team can be themselves, and they share the belief they can take appropriate risks, and they can and should:

- admit and discuss mistakes
- openly address problems and tough issues
- seek help and feedback
- trust that no one on the team is out to get them and trust that they are a valued member of the team

The four domains of psychological safety that contribute to a safe environment in a team: (Amy Edmondson)

- Willingness to help
- Inclusion & Diversity
- Attitude to Risk & Failure
- Open conversation



Psychological safety boosts well-being, productivity, innovation, and job satisfaction, benefiting business.

Commitment, communication, diversity, and a culture embracing improvement foster well-being and success.

Other benefits of psychological safety include:

Why...

- increased problem-solving
- inclusive practices
- better collective well-being
- lower chance of risky mistakes
- stronger sense of belonging
- more inclusive and diverse cultures

Learning is another benefit of psychological safety. When people ask questions, share mistakes, and have the chance to listen to different perspectives, they're more likely to learn the lessons. This translates into company innovation, growth, and personal development.

Have you ever found yourself holding back a brilliant idea out of fear of ridicule or dismissal by your colleagues? This hesitation signifies a lack of psychological safety in the workplace. But imagine a different scenario—a workplace where you feel comfortable expressing your opinions openly, regardless of their imperfections. A place where you trust that your team members will listen respectfully and be receptive to your feedback. This is the kind of workplace where psychological safety thrives, the kind needed for employees and businesses in times of transformational change.

Psychological safety in the workplace is a critical factor for promoting employee well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity. Practically speaking, it means individuals can share opinions, ask questions, and express concerns without facing negative consequences. When employees feel psychologically safe, they proactively solve problems. Executives see innovation, job satisfaction, and higher returns.



The Science of the Brain: The prefrontal cortex, located in the front of the brain, involves cognitive processes such as decision-making, impulse control, and working memory. It regulates emotions, particularly negative emotions such as anxiety and fear (Davidson, Putnam, & Larson, 2000). When employees feel psychologically unsafe in the workplace, the prefrontal cortex can become less active, impairing their ability to regulate their emotions and making it more challenging to think clearly and make effective decisions.

The hypothalamus, located in the brain's center, is critical in regulating the stress response (Ulrich-Lai & Herman, 2009). When employees feel psychologically unsafe, the hypothalamus can activate, releasing stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. Over time, chronic activation of the stress response can lead to physical and mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout (McEwen, 2007). Therefore, promoting workplace psychological safety is not only crucial for employees' well-being, but it can also lead to increased productivity and organizational success (Edmondson, 2018).



"When you put people first and then surround them with processes and disciplines that recognize their efforts, performance will soar.."

- **David C. Novak**, Co-Founder and Former CEO of YUM, Brands Inc.



How...

Tactics for Creating Psychological Safety:



**Assess your organization. Psychological Safety Quiz:

[Free personal psychological safety survey](#)

- ▶ **Start with Leadership.** Leaders set the tone. Effective leaders play a crucial role in fostering psychological safety by modeling desired behaviors, including acknowledging their own mistakes and demonstrating vulnerability.
- ▶ **Encourage Open Communication.** Active listening, non-judgmental feedback, and respectful communication contribute to an environment of psychological safety. Share stories and examples of how psychological safety has improved workplaces, recognize and encourage open communication, and engage employees in collaborative problem-solving.
- ▶ **Foster Inclusivity.** Encourage cognitive diversity as a driving factor for innovation. Create a workplace that celebrates and embraces cognitive differences, where everyone feels capable of sharing their ideas. Train employees to recognize and mitigate cognitive biases that can hinder critical thinking and data processing.
- ▶ **Continuously Improve.** Create an environment where it's acceptable to make mistakes and learn from them. Regularly evaluate policies and practices to ensure that they support psychological safety, making changes when necessary.

(Psychology Today, Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace Why it matters for employee and business success. Posted September 8, 2023 | Reviewed by Gary Drevitch)



"No 21st century organization can afford to have a culture of fear. Fear silences all but the most confident voices, and small signals of impending risks are discounted or ignored."

-Dr. Amy Edmonson,
Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business
School



Specific actions:

- ▶ Celebrate learning from mistakes and build “lessons learned” debriefing sessions into every project.
- ▶ Lead by example to show how to raise problems and tough issues for discussion in a constructive, nonjudgemental manner.
- ▶ Encourage all team members to raise problems or tough issues that may be on their minds.
- ▶ Applaud thoughtful risk taking and demonstrate it yourself.
- ▶ Request feedback as often as possible.
- ▶ Include your team in decision making processes.
- ▶ Avoid getting defensive when you get feedback.
- ▶ Actively listen to all ideas and concerns and respond to everyone in the same appreciative manner.
- ▶ Admit your own mistakes openly and encourage learning from them.
- ▶ Avoid dominating the conversation (particularly if you encourage everyone to participate)
- ▶ Encourage others to challenge you.
- ▶ Ask others to help you work on your growth opportunities and development areas.
- ▶ Check on team members, even from other teams.
- ▶ Ask people how you can help them develop and do their best at work.
- ▶ Whenever possible, include your entire team in important conversations.
- ▶ Avoid sharing “secrets” with one or a few team members, including chatting about other employees.
- ▶ Publicly recognize and celebrate the unique skills and talents brought by each member of the teams you lead.



“Improving the health and well-being of our employees makes good business sense. As a leading provider of workplace health services, we see everyday the difference it can make to a company's bottom line and the impact it can have on employee morale and motivation. It offers a “win-win” all round. Employees benefit from better support for their health. Companies benefit from less absence and improved productivity. And society benefits from improved public health.”

-Steve Flanagan, Commercial Director of Bupa

