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How to introduce Psychological Safety

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This step involves making changes to the way your team members behave, how they communicate and how they operate. It comprises understanding what psychological safety is, its introduction to the team, how it changes behaviours and team member communication and the role of team rules.

Professor Amy Edmondson coined the term 'Psychological Safety' in 1999 (Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School) as a "shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking". It was identified as a critical factor in team learning and High-Performance Team development and performance. An all-inclusive and understanding environment is a breeding ground for new ideas where team members feel they can put forward risky or innovative concepts because they know they will be taken seriously. Hostile business environments lead to the stagnation of creativity, poor work ethics, dogmatic policies, and low retention.

The concept of Psychological Safety is particularly relevant in the modern business world, which counts on teams to innovate and perform in a chaotic environment. Team members who have no sense of Psychological Safety are unlikely to collaborate efficiently and effectively, and productivity will be hampered as a result. An atmosphere of Psychological Safety means that people are content and able to admit and discuss mistakes; a healthy, positive learning and high-performance environment is created.

Research confirms that higher levels of Psychological Safety led to more effective team learning and, in turn, higher team performance. Professor Edmondson demonstrated that in an environment of Psychological Safety, a cycle of learning is created; team members are more likely to ask questions and speak up to express issues and concerns, leading to the quicker identification of problems and search for solutions.

> "When the workplace feels challenging but not threatening, team members Oxytocin levels increase in their brains eliciting trust and trust-making behaviour. This is a huge factor in team success." Source: Laura Delizonna, HBR.

Over time, this cycle leads to improved team performance. "In an internal study by Google (Project Aristotle), researchers concluded from quantitative and qualitative data that psychological safety had the biggest positive impact on team performance and was four times more significant than other factors such as individual performance, structure, and clarity, or meaning. It turns out that it matters much less who is on a team, and much more how those people interact" Source: Google 2015. Simply put, psychological safety is much the same as trust.

In a workplace that can be volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous - creating and maintaining a psychologically safe environment must become a managerial priority for those who want to keep up in the global competitive race.

If you create this sense of psychological safety within your team, you will see higher levels of engagement, increased motivation, more learning and development opportunities, and substantially better performance. You create an environment where team members are energised because they feel they can speak their minds, be truthful and take risks.

Team Communication

"We are all reluctant to engage in behaviours that could negatively influence how others perceive our competence, awareness, and positivity. Although this kind of self-protection is a natural strategy in the workplace, it is detrimental to effective teamwork. On the flip side, the safer team members feel with one another, the more likely they are to admit mistakes, to partner, and to take on new roles." Source: Google 2015.

Psychological safety is a workplace, an environment where team members feel a sense of inclusion which creates conditions that enable individuals to speak their mind, take moderate risks and stick their necks out without fear of having it cut off. These types of behaviour lead to market breakthroughs without fear of judgment or reprisal and facilitate effective collaboration and creativity. In simple terms, psychological safety supports a belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake or make an honest comment.

"A team must have a culture of trust, cohesion, and psychological safety if it is to succeed. The absence of psychological safety can result in problems and conflict being hidden and going unreported, as team members don't feel that they can speak up. A team's ability to take risks, something that is particularly important for some kinds of teams (such as those with an objective to innovate), relies particularly on team members' need for psychological safety being met. It is only after a level of trust and inclusion is established that a team can engage in constructive conflict—essential if a team hopes to be honest and bold and hold each other accountable to their commitment to the team's objectives." Source: Deloitte Insights.

"It's not about being nice to each other or reducing performance standards, but rather about creating a culture of openness where teammates can share learnings, be direct, take risks, admitting you "screwed up" and be willing to ask for help when you're in over your head. Unsurprisingly, in Google's top performing teams' people feel safe to speak up, collaborate and experiment together." Source: Google 2015.

> "There's no team without trust" Paul Santagata, Head of Industry at Google.

"The research is now abundantly clear that psychological safety is a powerful differentiator of effective teams. The best teams are the ones that have trust and belief in each other," says Googles -Tom Brannan. "Team members who don't feel safe will keep their problems to themselves and be unwilling to share information. This lack of openness may slow a business down, preventing it from responding as agilely as it might, as collaboration and communication become impaired, and individuals are reluctant to share the problems and opportunities they see. At its worst, senior managers can be left unaware of problems until they become so serious that an external regulator or government body is forced to step in." Source: Deloitte Insights.

> To innovate together, team members need to feel they can talk openly and candidly to each other without fear of judgemen or reprisals. Such climates are described as "psychologically safe" environments. The belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. That one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

Team rules

The establishment of clear ground rules gives a team its cultural and psychologically safe baseline. It is a fundamental step in team development. In the case of a new team, rules also help remove the inevitable confusion and anxiety that usually exists as new team members get to know each other.

Establishing team rules is a simple way to negotiate and establish team behaviours and practices, both in general and temporarily say for a project. Team rules increase psychological safety and reduce potential conflict among team members by:

- Aligning relationships on appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.
- Making team values explicit.
- Creating a cultural baseline.
- Not assigning blame.
- Allowing legitimate measures in case of non-compliance.
- Preventing a sense of inequity and injustice to develop within the team.

Team rules are a behavioural framework, an agreement a team makes around the behaviours it will or will not accept. It includes team behaviours and values, decision-making rules, coordinating and communicating, framing expectations such as no assignment of blame in case of failure, dealing with issues, accepting diversity, taking risks, asking for help, mutual support, and accepting diversity appreciation. For example,

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if you agree upon honesty as a behaviour in a team rules framework, you prioritise being honest above most other things. If everyone agrees with each other that the team will be 'supportive', then it's much easier to reward supportive behaviour. At the same time, if someone in the team isn't being supportive, it's much easier for anyone to say, "we said we were going to be supportive, and I felt you weren't when you did XYZ". This removes the personal attack and is much easier to manage and deliver.

> When everybody in the team feels safe to speak up about mistakes or issues, the team will learn faster and move quicker higher levels of performance.

Summary

1. **Psychological Safety.** – A shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. An atmosphere of Psychological Safety means that people are content and able to admit and discuss mistakes; a healthy, positive learning and high-performance environment is created. Arrange a team Workshop to introduce Psychological Safety as a team practice.

2. **Team Communication.** - We are all reluctant to engage in behaviours that could negatively influence how others perceive our competence, awareness, and positivity. Psychological safety is a workplace, an environment where team members feel a sense of inclusion which creates conditions that enable individuals to speak their mind, take moderate risks and stick their necks out without fear of having it cut off.

3. **Team rules.** - The establishment of clear ground rules gives a team its cultural baseline. It is a fundamental step in team development. Establishing team rules is a simple way to negotiate and establish team behaviours and practices, both in general and temporarily say for a project. Team rules increase psychological safety and reduce potential conflict among team members by. Establishing team rules is a simple way to negotiate and establish team behaviours and practices, both in general and temporarily say for a project. Team rules are a behavioural framework, an agreement a team makes around the behaviours it will or will not accept.

Psychological Safety Workshop	1.45 hours
Create a workshop handout. 1. Copy the notes from the psychological safety step and use as a Handout. 2. There is nothing wrong with using the notes verbatim.	
Open the workshop 1. Open the workshop by suggesting that the team considers introducing psychological safety as a team practice, in line with high-performance standards. 2. Have the team read the Handout. 3. Using the notes from this step, produce a workshop Handout	5 minutes
Psychological safety. 1. Briefly explain what psychological safety is, and that changing the way the team communicates and what rules it sets are the ways it is achieved. 2. In simple terms, psychological safety supports a belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake or speak your mind. It promotes openness and honesty. 3. The absence of psychological safety can result in problems and conflict being hidden and going unreported, as team members don't feel that they can speak up.	10 minutes

Team communication.
 	
1. Introduce this element by announcing what your expectations are:
  o That team members can freely express their opinions, ideas, and thoughts without fear of humiliation.
  o That team members should feel energised because they can speak their minds, be truthful, take risks, innovate, and learn from outside ideas.
  o That the team adopt a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.
  o Creation of a workplace where team members feel a sense of inclusion which enables team members to take moderate risks and stick their necks out without fear of having it cut off.
  o An environment without fear of judgment or reprisal.
  o It is only after a level of trust is established that a team can be honest and be bold.
	30 minutes

Create team rules.	

1. Why have team rules?
   ○ The establishment of clear ground rules gives a team its cultural baseline.
   ○ Team rules are a behavioural framework, an agreement a team makes around the behaviours it will or will not accept. It includes topics such as team behaviours and values, decision-making rules, how to coordinate and communicate, how to frame expectations such as no assignment of blame in case of failure, how to deal with issues, accepting diversity, taking risks, asking for help, mutual support, and appreciation.
   ○ Establishing team rules is a simple way to negotiate and establish team behaviours and practices, both in general and temporarily say for a project.
 	
2. Break the team into two or more groups and ask each group to answer these two questions:
   ○ What is acceptable, what are the behaviours we want to abide by in our team? - What is IN.
        e.g., Be on time, have no meetings on Friday, be open to new ideas, complete work as agreed, inform on progress.
 	
   ○ What is unacceptable, what are the behaviours we do not want in our team? - What is OUT.
        e.g., Being disengaged, a one-fits-all solution, being late, applying procedures blindly, doing it right the first-time, last-minute changes.
 	
3. Next, share the results, allowing each group to present and share their answers. Finally, consolidate what is IN and what is OUT: - creating a first draft of the team rules. Continue discussing until a final list of rules is agreed upon. End the meeting with an agreement that everyone is mutually accountable to each other for obeying the rules and when the team rules come into effect.
 	
4. Examples of team rules:
   • Neglecting your family is unacceptable.
   • We actively support our staff.
   • Everyone has a voice.
   • If it's not written down, it doesn't exist.
   • Problems are fixed once.
   • Be prepared to present evidence.
   • Always conduct yourself professionally.
   • Ensure that our work standards comply with industry standards.
   • Asking for and offering help is expected.
   • Failure is ok; having a go is what's important.
   • Management submissions are restricted to half a page.
   • Our team is non-hierarchical, and we are non-competitive.
   • It's not what you say, but how you say it.
   • Sometimes it's ok to ask for forgiveness rather than permission.
   • Add the team rules to the High-Performance Leadership document.
	45 minutes

Summarize the workshop	15 minutes
5. Expectations going forward.	
• You won't be punished when you make a mistake or speak your mind.	
• We do not want problems or conflicts to be hidden or going unreported. Everyone must feel that they can speak up.	
• We want to create an all-inclusive and understanding workplace that is a breeding ground for new ideas where team members feel they can put forward risky or innovative concepts because they know they will be taken seriously.	
• We want team members to feel a sense of inclusion which creates conditions that enable individuals to stick their necks out without fear of having it cut off.	
• Our aim should be to create a culture of openness where teammates can share learnings, be direct, take risks, admitting you "screwed up" and be willing to ask for help when you're in over your head.	
• We want team rules because it is a simple way to describe team behaviours and practices, both in general and temporarily say for a project. Team rules increase psychological safety and reduce potential conflict.	
• Team rules are a behavioural framework, an agreement we as a team make around the behaviours we will or will not accept. It includes team behaviours and values, decision-making rules, coordinating and communicating, framing expectations such as no assignment of blame in case of failure, dealing with issues, accepting diversity, taking risks, asking for help, mutual support, and accepting diversity appreciation.	
Close the workshop.	10 minutes
6. Ask for any questions or if anything needs to be clarified.	
7. Arrange for a copy of the team rules to be made accessible to everyone.	
8. State that the new practices are applicable from now.	

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