Eagle I.O's Take on Psychological Safety

Is your workplace psychologically safe? Ask yourself these four questions:

- If you make a mistake on your team, is it held against you?
- Do people on the team sometimes reject others for being different?
- Is it safe to take a risk?
- Are your unique skills and talents valued and utilized?

> *"It's so much better to be in a workplace where you can be your real self, and contribute to the work in a meaningful way."*
> *- Amy Edmondson*

What does Psychological Safety mean?

Psychological safety is the belief that voicing one's opinion and sharing ideas will not lead to backlash or punishment. Psychologically safe workplace environments foster development and growth by allowing employees to speak their minds without the risk of being judged or mistreated by coworkers or supervisors[1]. Employees in a psychologically safe workplace often feel included, respected, and supported by their organization.

Why is Psychological Safety Important?

When workplaces lack psychological safety, it has negative consequences on employees as individuals, the teams they are members of, and the organization at large. When employees are not psychologically safe, they experience demoralization, a sense of threat, disengagement, and strain. They perceive workplace conditions as ambiguous and unpredictable. This demoralization can, in turn, undermine shareholder, consumer, and public confidence in the organization [2].

Due to the aforementioned disengagement and strain, it becomes more difficult for employees to find work-life balance, causing burnout on the job and can ultimately lead to turnover, which is an organizational nightmare. Lack of psychological safety can also have negative impacts on the mental health of employees in a wide variety of ways including but not limited to: feeling shamed by a boss or colleague for expressing original thought, feeling abandoned in the workplace, fearing going to work, and mounting stress levels [3], just to name a few. If you are feeling a lack of psychological safety in the workplace, the first step is to speak up to the proper channels. There are entities in place to assist but they can only help you if they are aware of the issues at hand.

Below are additional tips on self-care practices in the workplace:

- Be proactive about what you need.
- Create a calming workspace.
- Use your PTO!
- Socialize with your coworkers but don't create superficial relationships.
- Use your break time to totally disengage from work.
- Stay hydrated!
- Learn to be present.

For Leaders:

Only a minority of employees feel completely psychologically safe. Leaders play a significant role in driving psychological safety at work, and every leader or manager should recognize and embrace this as part of their role. Doing so will nurture creative, confident, and collaborative teams who will feel empowered to work towards strategic organizational goals [5].

Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, employees must feel accepted before they're able to contribute fully in ways that improve their organizations [4], [5].

Here's 5 steps you can take toward a psychologically safe work environment:

1. Set the Scene

2. Lead the Way

3. Take Baby Steps

4. Share Positive Examples

5. Be on the Lookout

67% Of people believe they can speak up to leadership.

62% Of employees believe leadership values their input and feedback.

69% Of employees believe they have open communication.

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Culture is Key:

The key to psychological safety is that people feel comfortable being and expressing themselves in the workplace. In other words, it's a company culture in which employees aren't afraid of being punished for failure [5].

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Making Psychological Safety a Priority

Talk about the importance of creating psychological safety at work, connecting it to a higher purpose of promoting greater organizational innovation, team engagement, and a sense of inclusion [4]. Model the behaviors you want to see, and set the stage by using inclusive leadership practices.

Embracing Productive Conflict

Promote dialogue and productive debate, and work to resolve conflicts productively. Set the stage for incremental change by establishing team expectations for factors that contribute to psychological safety [4]. Remember that psychological safety represents an organization's climate and culture.

Encouraging Speaking Up and New Ideas

Be open-minded, compassionate, and willing to listen when someone is brave enough to say something challenging the status quo. Organizations with a coaching culture will more likely have team members with the courage to speak the truth [5]. When challenging an idea, provide the challenge in the larger context of support. Consider whether you only want ideas that have been thoroughly tested, or whether you're willing to accept highly creative, out-of-the-box ideas that are not yet well-formulated [4]. Learn how to foster more innovative mindsets on your team.

Benefits

There are various positive relationships between team-level psychological safety and performance. Psychological safety also has an indirect effect on team-level outcomes. A benefit of psychological safety is an increase in performance when paired with accountability [4], [5]. Psychological safety has other benefits including teams being happier and taking more intelligent risks as well as better health, safety, and security [4], [5].

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