

FACT SHEET

Psychological Safety



What is Psychological Safety?



Psychological safety is a shared belief within a team that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, such as asking for help, admitting mistakes, expressing concerns, or proposing new ideas—without fear of embarrassment, retribution, or exclusion.

It enables:

- Honest communication
- Productive conflict
- Idea sharing and risk-taking
- Learning from failure
- Inclusive participation
- Better collaboration across roles



Why It Matters?

Psychological safety is not just about making people feel comfortable—it’s a vital part of workplace accountability and performance. When leaders foster psychological safety, they enable team members to speak up, question the status quo, and share new ideas without fear. This openness allows for stronger collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement. By striking the right balance between safety and accountability, leaders create environments where employees thrive, contribute fully, and feel supported to do their best work.

- ◆ Fosters innovation, engagement, and resilience
- ◆ Builds inclusive and high-performing teams
- ◆ Supports mental wellbeing and employee retention

Characteristics of Psychological Safety

Feature	Description
<i>Openness</i>	People can speak up without fear of negative consequences.
<i>Inclusion</i>	All voices are welcomed, especially quieter or underrepresented ones.
<i>Respect</i>	Team members treat each other with dignity and empathy.
<i>Constructive Feedback</i>	Feedback is two-way and focused on growth.
<i>Supportive Leadership</i>	Managers admit their own mistakes and encourage honest dialogue.

Barriers to Psychological Safety

Situation	Unintended Message	Impact
Mistakes are punished	“You can’t admit failure.”	Fear of taking risks
Leaders dominate discussions	“Your input doesn’t matter.”	Reduced participation
Feedback is one-sided	“Your view isn’t welcome.”	Lack of trust and openness
No follow-up on ideas	“Speaking up is pointless.”	Silence, apathy, low morale
Favouritism	“Only some voices count.”	Inequality, disengagement
Public shaming or sarcasm	“It’s risky to contribute.”	Fear of ridicule, decreased confidence

Leadership Behaviours That Foster Psychological Safety

Building psychological safety requires intentional actions from leaders. Here’s what managers can do:

- 1. Make psychological safety an explicit priority**
 "In this team, it’s okay to speak up and challenge ideas respectfully. That’s how we grow."
- 2. Model openness and respect consistently**
 A manager listens without interrupting during a heated discussion, then thanks the person for sharing.
- 3. Facilitates everyone speaking up and creates space for new ideas**
 During meetings, the manager invites quieter team members to share ideas or feedback first.
- 4. Address microaggressions, sarcasm, or exclusion immediately**
 If someone makes a dismissive, inappropriate, or rude remark, the leader calmly steps in and reminds the team of respectful behaviour.
- 5. Establish norms for how failure is handled and reinforce learning from failures—not just celebrating success**
 After a project doesn't go as planned, the team holds a no-blame review to identify lessons learned.
- 6. Recognise contributions of all team members**
 A leader regularly acknowledges team efforts in group chats or meetings, not just individual stars.
- 7. Embrace productive conflict**
 A manager encourages respectful debate on two different approaches instead of shutting it down.
- 8. Provide multiple ways for employees to raise concerns**
 The team can share concerns through one-on-one meetings, an anonymous survey, or a suggestion box.

9. Offer specific feedback and regularly ask for feedback on your own leadership behaviours

“Is there anything I could be doing differently to support you better?”

10. Set clear behavioural expectations for meetings and collaboration

The manager starts the project with a team agreement: “We’ll speak respectfully, listen actively, and stay on task.”

11. Provide coaching or EAP referrals when needed

When an employee seems overwhelmed, the leader checks in privately and offers support resources.

The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety

Stage	What It Means
1. Inclusion Safety	You feel accepted for who you are
2. Learner Safety	You feel safe to grow, ask questions, and make mistakes
3. Contributor Safety	You can use your skills to contribute meaningfully
4. Challenger Safety	You feel safe to challenge ideas and suggest change



Four Essential Leadership Qualities

- **Awareness** – recognizing emotions in yourself and others
- **Vulnerability** – openly admitting limits and uncertainties
- **Empathy** – understanding others’ feelings and perspectives
- **Compassion** – acting with care and building mutual support networks

Key Takeaways

- Psychological safety fuels innovation, inclusion, and team performance
- It requires consistent effort by leaders and all team members
- Mistakes should be seen as learning opportunities
- A psychologically safe team is one where people feel seen, heard, and respected