



Building psychological safety within organisations

What is psychological safety?

“A belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes”. (Amy C. Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization*, 2019)

What brought attention to the concept of psychological safety in organisations?

In 2012 Google started a 5 year study of which factors make teams effective; psychological safety was identified as being more critical to making a team work than any other. Since then, it has been adopted within many other large public and private sector organisations as an enabler for learning and innovation.

Why is this particularly relevant now?

In these challenging times, organisations need to be more adaptable and innovative than ever, whilst being cognisant of the mental health impact of the Covid environment on employees. This can only be achieved by optimising the value of individual and team contributions and enabling effective relationships within and between teams. When physical safety is compromised, individuals can be triggered into a greater sense of personal vulnerability which makes it harder for them to speak up and offer a different point of view from colleagues or to admit a mistake – even if the organisational culture allows such behaviours which isn't always the case. Combined with the drive for greater diversity and inclusion, there is no better time to introduce a tool which focuses attention and intention on where it is needed most - deepening trust and dialogue.

The tool

The Psychological Safety Index is new to the UK (created by Amy C. Edmondson, Harvard Business School) and has already generated significant interest, for example, the NHS has invested in a cohort of internal trainers becoming accredited to use the tool.

The index offers a tangible, simple methodology for teams and organisations to baseline, with a score, the climate that exists for embracing specific critical behaviours, as indicated below.

Psychological Safety Index (PSI)	
Inclusion and diversity	Willingness to help
<i>The degree to which you can be yourself and are welcomed for this.</i>	<i>The degree to which people help and appreciate each other.</i>
When team members feel included, they are more inclined to speak up, contribute and add to the group.	Teams become unsafe when people are not able to help to each other or feel appreciated by team members.
Attitude to risk and failure	Open conversation
<i>The degree to which it is permissible to make mistakes.</i>	<i>The degree to which difficult and sensitive topics can be discussed openly.</i>
Teams that hold mistakes against each other risk a lack of control and forward momentum.	A team that has open and candid conversations is able to tackle hard problems better.

The facilitated process

A conversation is facilitated with all team members before they complete the brief survey individually (only 3 minutes online). This serves as an intervention in itself, building awareness around what feels difficult and what is encouraged. The baseline results are then shared in a facilitated team session – they are collated although individuals will be able to see how their responses compare with the median of the team. A plan is agreed to support the necessary behavioural shift with the option of re-testing experiences against the same indicators, for example 3 months later.

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