



Live Well, Work Well

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CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Several work dynamics can make the team successful. One of the most crucial ones is psychological safety. Being psychologically safe means you feel secure in taking risks and being vulnerable in front of others. In a work environment that fosters this security, you believe you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

This article explores the concept and benefits of psychological safety and how you can contribute to and be part of a positive and psychologically safe work environment.

The Stages of Psychological Safety

According to research, you may progress through four sequential stages of psychological safety:

1. **Inclusion safety**—You feel safe and accepted to be who you are in the work environment.
2. **Learner safety**—You feel safe to learn, ask questions and experiment. You're also open to giving and receiving feedback.
3. **Contributor safety**—You feel safe to make a valuable contribution using your skills and gifts.
4. **Challenger safety**—You feel safe to challenge the status quo when you see room for change or improvement.

After progressing through those four stages, you are likely comfortable speaking up in the workplace.

The Importance of Psychological Safety

Creating a workplace environment in which employees feel comfortable taking risks is essential to workplace innovation. Psychological safety is crucial because it:

- Enhances your workplace engagement
- Improves your well-being
- Inspires creativity and ideas
- Fosters an inclusive culture

Creating a psychologically safe work environment is intentional, but it can positively impact you and the overall work culture. Achieving this type of security can also have unique challenges in remote and hybrid workplaces, as that culture extends beyond the physical workplace.

Contributing to the Work Environment

Psychological safety typically hinges on organizational leadership, but there are ways that every employee can challenge or influence workplace cultural norms. Consider the following ways you can help support a psychologically safe work environment:

- **Be curious.** Don't be afraid to ask questions or ask for peer or manager feedback. Adopt a



learning mindset by accepting you don't have all the facts and can learn from others.

- **Listen actively.** Active listeners can make others feel valued by avoiding distractions (e.g., phones) and demonstrating understanding during meetings. If you're working remotely, turn on your camera in meetings so it's apparent you're paying attention and engaged.
- **Communicate effectively.** It's essential to set clear expectations for timelines and goals. If you're working in a hybrid work environment, it's even more crucial to check in often to lower the chances for miscommunication.
- **Have an open mind.** Approaching tasks or challenges from a different angle can help bring perspective. Consider feedback to be constructive and meant to strengthen the team's ideas or processes. Also, think about how you're responding to feedback or input. It comes down to being open to ideas or views that differ from your own.
- **Foster a safe environment.** Co-workers may not speak up due to the fear of being judged. To help encourage a psychologically safe environment, be sure not to interrupt and never blame others. The goal is to ensure people feel like their out-of-the-box suggestions are encouraged and considered by the team.
- **Practice your awareness.** During meetings or conversations, pay attention to how your words, actions and other nonverbal cues resonate with others. In a remote or hybrid work environment, video calls can help with observing how you're being received.
- **Recognize courageous acts.** It's vital to give praise or acknowledge when a co-worker shows vulnerability, offers a new idea or shares a mistake. It can be challenging for people to speak up, so it's important to make sure they don't feel embarrassed or unheard after expressing vulnerability.

- **Support others.** If your work or opinions are often embraced, use your influence to empower others who may be underrepresented. Some simple ways to do that are to highlight their accomplishments to others or recommend them for projects or assignments.

A psychologically safe work environment centers on respect. Practice these steps personally and speak up or intervene if you see others not being respectful. The safer the work environment, the stronger and more successful you and your co-workers can be.

Conclusion

Psychological safety is a key work dynamic that takes time to build but just moments to destroy. It comes down to being human in your work environment and creating opportunities for open feedback and dialogue. If working in a remote or hybrid work environment, you'll have to be even more intentional with showing appreciation for co-workers and acceptance of their ideas, thoughts and discussions.

Talk to your manager if you have concerns or questions about psychological safety in your work environment.