

What is psychological safety and why does it matter?

Creating a psychologically safe space at work helps employees feel like they can share their true feelings and be vulnerable without fear of negative consequences.

Four components of psychological safety

According to Dr Timothy Clark, author of 'The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety': Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation, employees have to progress through the following 4 stages before they feel free to make valuable contributions and challenge the status quo.

Stage 1: Inclusion safety



This satisfies the need to connect and belong. Employees are accepted by peers and feel like part of the team. They can interact without fear of rejection, embarrassment, or punishment. Not belonging can impact an employee's confidence, resilience and ultimately, performance.

Stage 2: Learner safety



This satisfies the need to learn and grow. Employees are allowed to be vulnerable, take appropriate risks, and feel safe to engage in the learning process without judgement or ridicule. They can ask questions, give, and receive feedback, experiment, and make mistakes without fear of personal attack or harm.

Stage 3: Contributor safety



This satisfies the need to make a difference. Employees can make a meaningful difference through utilising their skills and working autonomously. They feel safe to make decisions and take initiative without risking their reputation. Micro-management and processes which disempower employees can damage the safety of an organisation.

Stage 4: Challenger safety



This satisfies the need to make things better. Employees can appropriately and constructively challenge the status-quo and put forward ideas for improvement without fear of ridicule or damage to their reputation. They are encouraged to be curious and question things, understanding that this process helps to innovate and improve the organisation.

Tips to build a psychologically safe workplace

SPEAK UP

Model behaviour by showing your own vulnerability, being open and actively listening to others points of views.

ENCOURAGE LEARNING

Let people take appropriate risks, encourage experimentation, and celebrate mistakes and failures. Reframe these by understanding the lessons learnt through the process. This will facilitate a more innovative organisation.

FOSTER INNOVATION

Give people the space to come up with new ideas, challenge the norms, and think differently. When providing feedback, reframe this in the context of providing support rather than shooting something down.

SET THE RULES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

Allow for debate and constructive, and opposing views. However, establish how to provide this feedback. How do we manage differing opinions while still respecting one another?

EVERYONE HAS A PART TO PLAY

Psychological safe work environments are greatly influenced by leadership, as well as culture and processes. Importantly, it is up to the employees to make sure their interactions support a safe environment. Examples of this are allowing other colleagues to speak up in meetings, asking for help, sharing failures, and expressing gratitude.

6 questions to ask about your workplace

Ask these questions to self-reflect on whether your workplace encourages psychological safety:

- 1 How are mistakes handled and responded to, in my workplace?
- 2 Are team members able to bring up problems and tough issues?
- 3 Is it safe for me to take risks in my work?
- 4 Are people disadvantaged for being different at my work?
- 5 Is it difficult to ask other members of my organisation for help?
- 6 Are my unique skills and talents valued and utilised?

Need help with psychological safety in your workplace?

Corporate performance psychology specialists and Flare partner, [Veretis](#), provides guidance on how to build a psychologically safe workplace. Veretis works with organisations of all sizes, to help develop and maintain sustainable, constructive, and high-performing cultures.



4 ways that you can support psychological safety

- ▶ Be consistent
- ▶ Develop and practice self-awareness
- ▶ Acknowledge personal bias
- ▶ Practice active listening