



What is psychological safety and why is it important in the workplace?

By Julia Kerr Henkel, executive coach & MD of Lumminos Coaching

Psychological safety is a key ingredient for high performing, effective and happy teams.

When people feel unsafe, they tend to engage in less helpful, more basic behaviours, such as being negative, blaming others, needing to be right, catastrophizing by blowing things out of proportion, over-reacting or even withdrawing, resigning and giving up.

On the contrary, when people feel safe, they are more likely to be open, calm, curious, willing to collaborate and find win-win solutions.

First things first

Your priority as a leader, is to create a sense of safety in yourself - like the metaphor of securing your own oxygen mask first before assisting other passengers in the event of a loss of cabin pressure on an airplane.

What aids psychological safety?

The list includes a host of behaviours, including: appreciation, listening, staying curious, asking yourself and others open-ended questions, being honest and keeping the confidence of others.



Take a psychological safety quiz with your team

Use these ten statements below to measure the psychological safety in your team or organisation. Consider each one and rate your agreement on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Chances are that there were some statements that you didn't agree with so much, and these are the areas that you can work on, either as a leader or contributor.

1. On this team, I understand what is expected of me.
2. We value outcomes more than outputs or inputs, and nobody needs to "look good".
3. If I make a mistake on this team, it is never held against me.
4. When something goes wrong, we work as a team to find the systemic cause and aim to get it right versus being right.
5. All members of this team feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.
6. Members of this team never reject others for being different and nobody is left out.
7. It is safe for me to take a risk on this team.
8. It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help.
9. Nobody on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
10. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.

You can do this anonymously via a tool like Mentimeter, SurveyMonkey or Google Forms, and gather the scores in aggregate.

See this process as an opportunity to engage and create psychological safety in your team. The conversation that emerges will also help to develop trust and reveal areas where you can focus your HR and people engagement plans.

For more information, visit www.lumminos.co.za