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The psychological safety toolkit

Psychological safety [sīkəˈläjək(ə)l sāftē]

Noun

The belief that one can speak up about ideas, questions, or concerns without the risk of punishment or humiliation, even if they make a mistake.

Source: Amy Edmonson, Harvard Organizational & Behavioral Scientist

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Psychological safety is crucial to fostering workplaces of inclusion and belonging, and is especially important with mixed-age teams. It can alleviate tension between generations and have a major positive effect on morale, engagement, and productivity.

It can be a particular challenge to foster this in a hybrid workplace, but it can be done with intention.
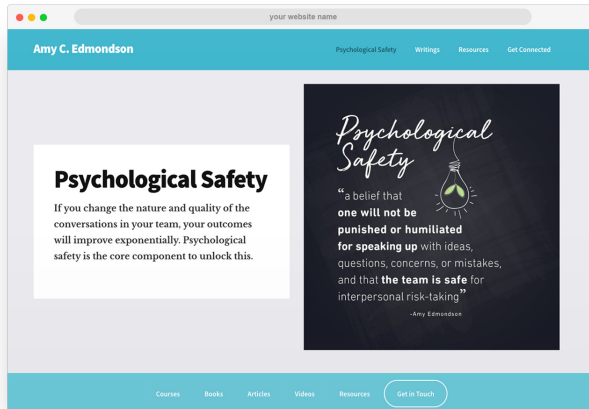
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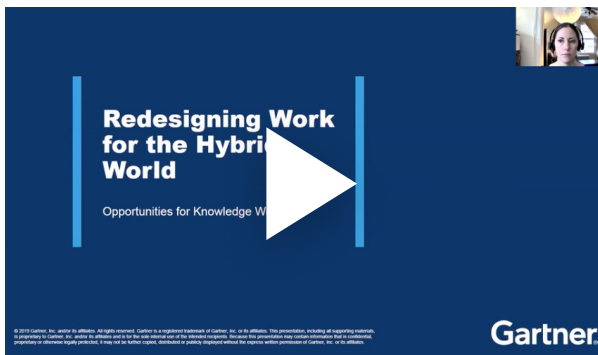
Redesigning Work for a Hybrid Workforce

(Run time 59:21)

🔍 See

Amy Edmonson's website for LI Learning courses and other resources

📖 Read

1. What is Psychological Safety

2. Forbes Creating an Inclusive Culture: Actionable Ways Leaders Can Foster Belonging

Cultivating a sense of psychological safety in the workplace is critical to employee well-being. And it's especially crucial in mixed-age teams.

In an industry where employees of all ages are personally concerned about age bias, yet don't speak openly about it, fostering an atmosphere of psychological safety can alleviate tension between generations that my include fears of being pushed out on one end or denied opportunity on the other. Increasing psychological safety also increases performance, retention rates, and morale.

But how do you do that? Start here.

✏️ **Do**

How Can I Alleviate Tensions Between Team Members of Different Ages?

1 **First, map your personal experience of psychological safety at work.**

Jot a list of moments at work when you felt you could share a risky or unpopular idea:

_____

_____

_____

Jot a list of moments at work where you felt comfortable sharing something that made you feel vulnerable:

_____

_____

_____

These are moments where you likely experienced psychological safety.

On the other hand: Jot a list of moments at work where you tried to become "invisible" or avoid sharing your full thoughts with someone:

_____

_____

_____

Jot a list of moments at work when you were criticized, ignored, experienced a micro-aggression or your idea was dismissed in a way that didn't feel respectful:

_____

_____

_____

These are moments when you were trying to work in a context without psychological safety. It's likely that you were not able to contribute fully to the work at hand because it didn't feel like your contributions and perspectives were valued.

2 **Now, spend the rest of today actively looking for signals of psychological safety in the meetings, conversations and correspondence that you participate in and witness in your own team.** At the end of today, reserve five minutes to jot what you noticed:

A. An example of a **1:1 in-person interaction** where it seemed both people felt psychologically safe:

_____

_____

How I could tell:

_____

B. An example of a **1:1 in-person interaction** where I'm NOT sure if one or both of them felt psychologically safe:

_____

_____

How I could tell:

_____

C. An example of an **in-person interaction in a meeting** where it seemed everyone felt psychologically safe:

_____

_____

How I could tell:

_____

D. An example of an **in-person interaction in a meeting** where I'm NOT sure everyone felt psychologically safe:

_____

_____

How I could tell:

_____

E. An example of **a decision I saw made today** where it seemed everyone was willing to share their input and perspectives freely, debate and feel valued regardless of the decision outcome:

_____

_____

How I could tell:

_____

F. An example of **a decision I saw made today** where it was clear that NOT everyone was willing to share their input and perspectives freely, debate and feel valued regardless of the decision outcome:

_____

_____

How I could tell:

_____

G. Did you see or experience any moments where there was potential tension between team members of different ages that was left unresolved?

_____

If so, how might this have played out differently if those team member(s) felt more psychologically safe with one another or on the team?

_____

_____

3 Choose one of the situations where you noticed a lack of psychological safety (from b, d, or f on the previous pages.) **Could you have helped by using any of these suggested conversational "shifts"?**

Post-meeting individual follow-up:

"There were a few moments in that meeting where it looked like you had an idea or a different view, and I'd love to hear what it was." Then, after the individual shares it, you might ask, "Next time, is there anything I could do in that situation to make it easier for you to share your ideas with the whole group?"

In a meeting where decisions are being made without buy-in or input from everyone:

"I hear that some people feel strongly that we should do (x). Let's pressure-test it to see if that holds. For the next few minutes, I just want to hear us brainstorm things that are cons/risks with this decision."

If you see any team member showing age bias to a colleague, you cannot ignore it:

• Pull them aside afterward and succinctly explain, "I noticed that when you spoke to/about (name), you made a comment that [paraphrase what they said]. Regardless of your intent, which may have been humor or just casual, it's important that you realize that it was disrespectful of our other colleagues. Can we talk about how you can shift your behavior/language/assumptions in the future?"

• Next, approach the person they spoke to/about, with a similar acknowledgment that you saw the age bias happening and have taken steps to encourage their colleague to rethink their approach. Ask them how they are feeling, and what if anything they'd like you to do.

• Jot a note about the exchanges so you can refer back if needed (e.g., if the colleague showing age bias does not change their behavior).

_____

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