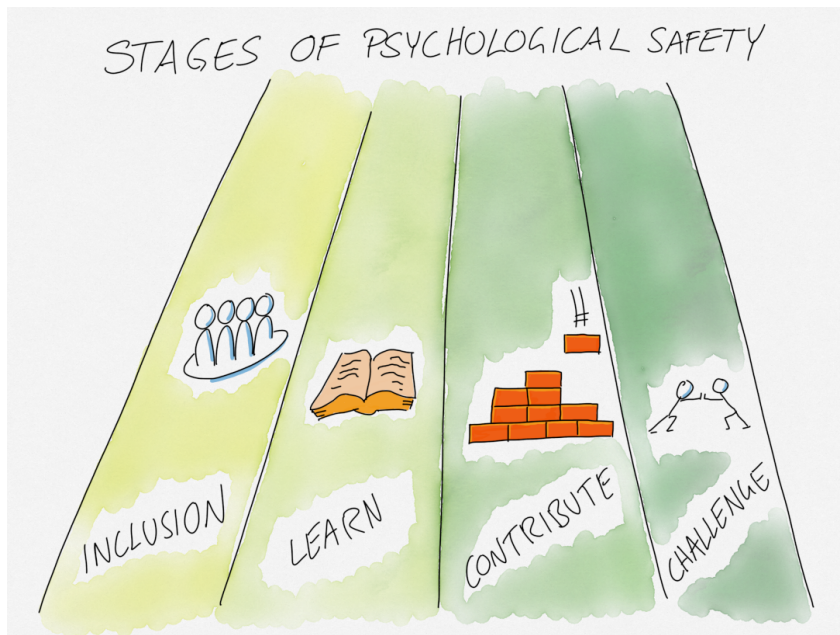


## Four stages of psychological safety



### Purpose

- Improving the psychological safety in the group.

### Possible learning points

- Identify what each individual needs to feel more safe in the group.

### Duration

- 60-90 min

### Material

- Masking tape
- PostIt notes and sharpies.

### Preparation

Print the document with the descriptions of the four stages for everyone.

Print the document with the examples but don't mix the two documents.

Write down the four names of the stages on four large sticky notes or printer papers, one name on each note/paper: - Inclusion safety - Learner safety - Contributor safety - Challenger safety

Read through the descriptions so you have a good understanding of each stage of development of psychological safety.

Divide the room into four areas using masking tape and place a note with the name of a stage in each area. The areas should be placed after each other so that the individuals can move from "Inclusion safety" to "Learner safety" to "Contributor safety" to "Challenger safety" without jumping through any of the other areas.

## **How**

Introduce the exercise by saying that psychological safety isn't on or off but is developed slowly over time and through stages. You will not be in only one stage at a time. You will however have to build safety in the early stages before you can be safe in the later stages.

In pairs, talk about what high psychological safety can lead to.

Change pairs and let the participants read the descriptions of the four stages. In these pairs, discuss your view on the stages. Examples of questions to discuss: - What does that mean to you? - How do they differ? - Do you feel that you have this safety? - How does this relate to where you are working now? - ...

Let everyone move in the room and place themselves on the scale with the four stages you created on the floor.

Pair up with someone standing close (form new pairs) and talk about: - What do you need to move up the scale?

After the discussion, read the examples and discuss (same pairs): - What would you request from your colleagues to help you move up the scale and feel more safe?

With the whole group share the requests you feel comfortable with, identified in the last step.

Form the last set of pairs (hopefully another new person to talk to) and help each other find one action you can take each to meet the requests from your colleagues.

## **Definitions**

### **Inclusion Safety**

Can you be your authentic self on your team? Inclusion safety satisfies the basic human need to connect and belong. In this stage worth precedes worthiness. All you have to do to qualify for inclusion safety is be human and harmless. When you have inclusion safety you can bring your whole self to work. When you don't, superiority and hierarchy dominate your company culture. Barriers are maintained and reinforced. You might be officially on a team, but you won't feel part of the team without inclusion safety.

### **Learner Safety**

Do you have the space to grow? Learning and growing is a fundamental need that needs to be satisfied in order for innovation to flourish in an organization. In this stage, fear is detached from mistakes, and mistakes are rewarded as part of the learning process. But to qualify for learner safety you have to engage in the learning process, it won't happen organically. When you have learner safety in your organization, learning is encouraged and celebrated. Learners are protected. When you don't, mistakes are hidden and punished. Your team executes more than they innovate.

### **Contributor Safety**

Can you create value for your team? Contributor safety satisfies the basic human need to make a difference and offer meaningful contributions. When we create contributor safety for others, we empower them with autonomy, guidance, and encouragement in exchange for effort and results. When you have contributor safety in your organization your team thrives under outcome accountability. Roles are clearly defined, but people are encouraged to think outside of their roles. Small wins are celebrated. When you don't, autonomy is given with little to no guidance, and team members may feel like benchwarmers.

### **Challenger Safety**

Do you feel like you can be candid about change? Challenger safety satisfies the basic human need to make things better. When we create challenger safety, we give air cover (protection) in exchange for candor. Challenger safety gives team members a voice to speak up when there is an opportunity to improve. People can disagree productively. When you don't have challenger safety teams fall silent and people are punished for their bravery and candor.

## **Examples**

### **Inclusion Safety Examples**

- \* Give people space to talk.

Don't immediately respond with your own story or perspective. Keep your colleagues talking and encourage them to share more. The more validation they feel when sharing something personal, the more likely they will be to engage again in the future. This can create a more meaningful relationship for both of you.

- \* Express curiosity.

If someone looks, speaks, eats, or acts differently than you, show curiosity. Phrases like "Can you tell me about... ", "I noticed that... ", or "Would you teach me... ", are all ways to express curiosity. Sincere curiosity is disarming and helps people feel that you're genuinely interested in who they are and how they do things.

- \* Verbally acknowledge and actively respect boundaries.

It can be difficult to set boundaries, but our needs are part of our authentic selves. Identify the needs of your team members. Let each person know that you're aware of their boundaries and communicate what you will do to respect them. Set an expectation of maintaining boundaries in your team culture.

## **Learner Safety Examples**

- \* Value honesty over correct answers.

Work is inherently performance-based. For some people, admitting that they don't know is equated with admitting that they cannot perform. Honesty will move the needle forward a whole lot faster than pretending to have the answers. Choose to value your colleague's honesty over their perceived inability to contribute.

- \* Don't assume competency.

What might feel obvious to you may not be for someone who's new to a task. It's hard to strike the balance between over-explaining and avoiding assumptions. Asking questions such as "Have you done something similar to this before?" or "Are you already familiar with this concept?" takes the pressure off of your team member to feign experience and understanding. Once you establish where they're at, pick up where they left off and fill in the gaps.

- \* Identify what was learned.

Mistakes are most valuable when you can determine what was learned from them. Verbalize what new information you now have as a result of the mistake. Make your colleagues believe in the underlying benefits of their mistake.

### **Contributor Safety Examples**

- \* Ask permission before you give feedback.

Sometimes it's as simple as that! Asking for permission can diffuse some of the emotional risks associated with giving feedback. Try "Hey, may I give you some feedback?" If you get a yes, you're more likely to be met with gratitude and sincerity.

- \* Encourage equal participation.

Let your team know that you expect their input. If someone isn't participating, kindly ask them if they have thoughts. Ask specific questions if they need direction.

- \* Make expectations the bookends of your meeting.

In meetings where tasks are being assigned and discussed, begin with the anticipated expectations of both the meeting and the tasks at hand. At the end of the meeting, reiterate what was discussed and make the necessary edits to the initial

## **Challenger Safety Examples**

- \* Ask for the bad news.

You'll be surprised what people are willing to call out when they're asked specifically for the bad news in tandem with the good news. They will highlight problems that, when solved, will pay dividends for your team. It will show your colleagues that you embrace all aspects of the innovation process.

- \* Assign dissent.

If you've found yourself in an echo chamber or knee-deep in groupthink, ask a colleague to play devil's advocate. Give them permission to disagree, even if they don't think something needs to be re-examined. Ask questions like: "What are we missing here?" or "Could this be done differently?"

- \* Show gratitude for the opportunity to learn and improve.

Bravery is a noble characteristic, one that shouldn't be shut down. Even if you feel embarrassed by the mistake, don't let that guide your reaction to their bravery. They want the best for you and for your organization, otherwise, they wouldn't have mentioned the mistake in the first place. Be open and honest, not guarded and cold. Expect the same reaction from them.