

# SUPPORT RESOURCE

A REVIEW OF DAILY HABITS THAT SUPPORT  
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFE TEAMS & INCLUSIVE TEAMS



# Table of Contents

- Introduction to Psychological Safety [2]
- Tuckman's Development Model [3]
- Daily behaviours that determine psychological safety [4]
- Behaviours that contribute to a psychologically safe workplace [6]
- About the authors [13]
- References [14]

*Teams can help to create psychologically safe workplaces where others can speak up to drive out silence. Silence is a behaviour chosen when team members feel the stakes are potentially too high to speak up!*

Psychological safety within your organization will never improve without intentional action by all workers and leaders. No single program or policy will create a psychologically safe workplace. The daily behaviours of all employees and leaders create a psychologically safe workplace.

Dr. Amy Edmondson, the Harvard Business School professor who coined the term psychological safety, defines it as “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.”[1]

Edmondson further purports that psychological safety is critical for creating high-performing teams. This assertion was supported by Google’s research on characteristics of high-performing teams that found psychological safety as the number one predictor of high-performance teams.[2]

Psychologically safe teams are less afraid of the negative consequences[3] that can happen when a person does any of the following:

- Takes smart risks
- Provides candid feedback
- Accepts making mistakes is not a negative
- Shares opinions

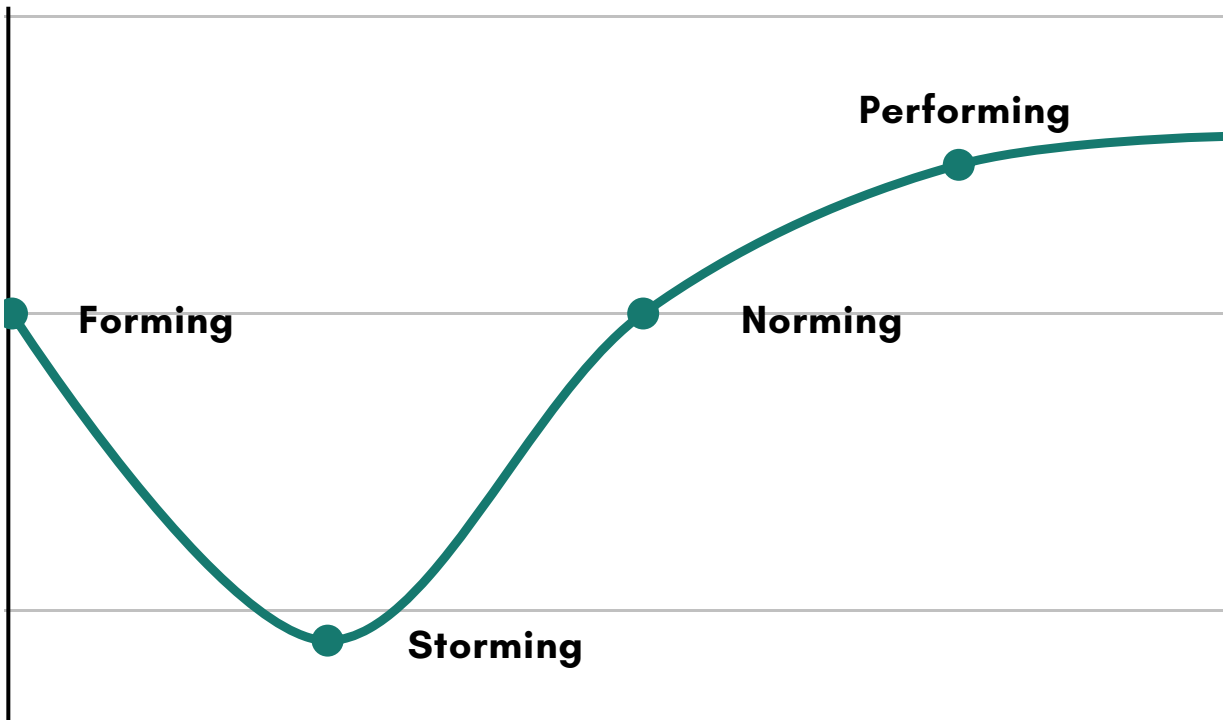
Psychologically safe teams are open and willing to share their honest, unfiltered opinions with team members, even when they differ from others or group think. The Harvard Business Review[4] reported that psychological safety is critical for high-performing teams, whether hybrid or other. Psychologically safe teams are more effective at problem-solving as they facilitate cognitive diversity and sharing opinions without fear of being judged or attacked.[5]

Other benefits of a psychologically safe team are innovation, better reliability and overall work performance, better worker health and safety, higher retention levels, lower turnover levels, improved diversity and inclusion, increased organizational potential to achieve maximum productivity and financial results, and happy, satisfied employees.[6]



# Tuckman's Team Development Model

Tuckman's four stages of team or group development model suggests that as a team matures, they develop relationships, and leadership styles change to a more collaborative or shared leadership.



## Forming

The initial forming stage is where the team is put together and most members are trying to avoid conflict. They generally look to their leader for direction and guidance.

## Storming

This stage begins when tasks and processes begin to be assigned, bringing forward interpersonal conflicts. This is where leadership and power dominate.

## Norming

In the norming stage, members are finding new ways of working together. Instead of having one member in charge, its beginning to move towards a shared leadership style.

## Performing

To achieve the performing stage, these teams have found interdependence. Members are able to adapt and change to meet the needs of other members. They have found ways to be more flexible.

**Where does your team fall within the four stages of psychological safety?**

## Daily behaviour that determines a team's psychological safety

Psychological health and safety does not happen because an employer implements programs and policies. It happens because leaders and workers consistently, voluntarily, and intentionally demonstrate psychologically safe behaviours that create psychologically safe cultures and teams. These daily psychologically safe behaviours are key performance behaviours (KPBs) that can be described as specific intrapersonal or interpersonal behaviours.

Mastery of any KPB starts with learning and practice. For example, an interpersonal skill such as listening requires basic knowledge and skills, followed by motivation to practice the skill until it becomes an unconscious habit. One practical core value for employers who want to create a psychologically safe workplace is to request all employees to be accountable for actions and be open to learning from others.

Any workplace team can become psychologically healthy and safe only when all members have transitioned through the forming-storming-norming-performing phases of Tuckman's model.[7] Whenever one team member fails to move through these four stages, it can reduce the degree of psychological safety within the team. Fear or silence may prevent a person from dealing with concerns that inhibit them and other team members from experiencing a psychologically safe workplace.



Psychologically safe teams can hold themselves and their peers accountable for their behaviours, feel confident sharing opinions and comfortable working through differences, and willing to learn.

Therefore, all team members should develop tolerance, become aware of their implicit biases, and display empathy, patience, and openness because every team member has unique challenges and needs. Workplaces become psychologically safe, one behaviour at a time. How every worker and leader shows up and behaves daily defines how psychologically safe a team and work culture become.

Any individual, including neurodivergents, struggling with mental health may be at more risk and struggle to self-manage intrapersonal skills (e.g., emotional regulation) that can increase the risk of interpersonal challenges (e.g., misunderstanding and conflict). Employers are encouraged to allow all workers to build their mental fitness (i.e., develop intrapersonal skills and habits) to increase their resiliency and capacity to cope as a protective factor. A second protective factor is for employers to discover what programs and policies they can implement to support employees' resiliency (e.g., train leaders as psychologically safe leaders).[8]



# Behaviours that contribute to a psychologically safe workplace



**8-Intrapersonal Skills**

**Interpersonal Skills**



**8 - Social**



**9 - Communication**



**13 - Collaboration**



## Intrapersonal Skills

1

**Take accountability for your mistakes :** Be accountable for your behaviour. Resist the urge to blame others for your choices. Accept that between every stimulus and response is a choice. Sometimes we make poor choices, sometimes we make mistakes, and sometimes we are just wrong. Own your behaviour and apologize quickly and authentically when you wrong another person. Recognizing your errors can help eliminate the need to hide mistakes.[9]

2

**Regulate your emotions :** Develop emotional regulation to deal with adversity and stress to prevent acting out emotionally. Emotional regulation measures the degree you can deal with unpleasant emotions like rejection, worry, excitement, frustration, anxiety, or feeling low. This is a skill that many have never been taught nor have focused on developing.[10]

3

**Find purpose at work:** Most of us want to feel that our work makes a difference to others. Even if we think that we have lost a sense of purpose at work, there are ways to cultivate it. Reflect on how your strengths could help the organization maneuver the current challenges, offer assistance, and take a break from bad news stories. Finding purpose in your work can be a positive energy source promoting good mental health.[11]

# 4

**Integrity:** Integrity promotes commitment to following through on rules and policies when not being watched. People can trust your intention and that you will do what you say. It means knowing when to say no or not tolerate rule-breaking. Every employee has a leadership role in facilitating integrity.[12]

# 5

**Honesty:** There is no time when being dishonest or lying is worthwhile. No matter the situation, be honest. If someone is not privy to information, explain why you cannot share. Psychologically safe teams develop conditions where it is safe to be honest without fear of retribution or worse.[13]

# 6

**Flexible thinking:** Accept that your thinking may not always be correct, and there is more than one way to look at a situation. Displaying flexible thinking and being in the moment[14] allows you to learn from others versus feeling the need to be correct.

# 7

**Respond positively to challenge:** Gallup found that only 30% of workers think their point of view matters.[15] To create a psychologically safe workplace, encourage and support workers that speaking up is good, not bad, even if you disagree with them.

# 8

**Actively role model psychologically safe:** Every worker and leader can take a leadership role in role modeling, promoting and practicing the behaviours required to create a psychologically safe workplace, one interaction at a time.[16] The key point is everyone plays a role and is responsible for their behaviour (e.g., how they show up each day at work).

# Interpersonal Skills

## Social Focused:

How well you work and get along with others.

1

**Empathy:** Empathy is the absence of judgment and willingness to discover another experience.[17] Empathy can be difficult to give if you hold yourself and others to the unrealistic expectation of perfectionism. No one is perfect, and every person will have a moment when they will benefit from someone willing to be present, listen, and understand without judgment.

2

**Belonging:** Help every team member feel a sense of belonging, a core human need. We all need to feel secure and safe based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.[18] A sense of belonging helps team members feel psychologically safe when they show up each day.

3

**Adopt an Inclusive mindset:** Commit to learning about implicit bias (e.g., blind spots) that may inhibit or marginalize others. Only through learning and discovery one worker at a time, can a culture become inclusive.[19]

4

**Be open to work preferences:** Accept that others have individual preferences for performing tasks. This does not mean their way or your way is right or wrong.

5

**Embrace creativity:** Be open to the idea that there are options that have not been thought of. Just because you do not know the answer or have not thought of it does not mean there isn't one. Encourage people to try to solve complex problems or challenges regardless of whether you believe there is a solution. Be open to the possibility that there may be a solution.[20]

6

**Nip gossip in the butt:** It is common in many workplaces when a person feels frustrated to complain or talk negatively about another person. Gossip at work erodes trust, decreases morale, and hinders teamwork.[21] Encourage a person hearing gossip to take their concern directly to the source.

# 7

**Engage in help-seeking behaviour:** Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it is a strength. Understand what resources are available in times of crisis and plan for those events. Create a help-seeking plan and include easily-accessible resources if necessary.[22] Psychologically safe teams encourage and promote help-seeking behaviours.

# 8

**Appreciate others:** Thanking someone for their contribution shows respect and value. People who recognize each other's contributions reinforce good behaviour. According to a recent Workhuman study, employees are 56% less likely to look or watch for job opportunities when they feel acknowledged and recognized.[23]

## Communication Focused:

How well you communicate with others.

1

**Listening:** Listening without interrupting or imposing opinions shows caring and respect. When you listen actively and show your interest, it makes speaking to you a more enjoyable experience. Creating an atmosphere where everyone feels welcomed requires learning to listen without a set agenda, staying focused on the person speaking, and not being side-tracked by cell phones or other distractions. Understanding what the person is experiencing and feeling helps to create a psychologically safe space.[24] Asking how you can help others have a positive experience shows interest in their needs and experiences.

2

**Be curious:** Be open and tolerant of another person's thoughts and questions. Encourage others' ideas, points of view, and creativity. Asking for others' opinions, questions, and ideas shows that you appreciate their input. This behaviour can promote innovation and new ideas that can make things better.[25]

3

**Be approachable:** Use inviting and open non-verbals and verbals so that others feel welcomed and safe to interact with you. A team that welcomes differences and inclusion requires every member to feel comfortable approaching you.[26]

4

**Transparency:** Be willing to share what is appropriate and do not withhold information. Being transparent can help build a culture of trust by removing skepticism. Collaboration and sharing of information can help others feel secure and safe.[27] This is a vital behaviour for promoting trust and allowing an opportunity to be vulnerable.

# 5

**Share opinions:** In a psychologically safe environment, you should feel comfortable sharing your opinions openly and honestly without fear of repercussions.[28]

# 6

**Share information:** When you receive information, share it; do not assume others have it. Ask and check in to ensure everyone on your team has the same information you have. According to Spiro, "Sharing knowledge helps employees connect, perform better, and become stronger as professionals." [29]

# 7

**Ask questions to clarify the why:** Asking 'why?' provides context. Once you understand the why, you can better understand and remember the details as they are linked to a broader perspective. [30] Note, however, that tonality and body language should be considered when asking why. They can change the question from introspective to insubordinate.

# 8

**Invite feedback:** Feedback is how we learn whether our actions are right or wrong. Ask others for feedback and clarify how you prefer to receive feedback. Not all feedback is positive, but it should always be constructive. Feedback provides an opportunity for recognition, one of the biggest drivers of employee engagement. In a recent survey conducted by PwC, 60% of employees surveyed stated they would like feedback daily or weekly. That number increased to 72% for people under the age of 30.[31]

# 9

**Be open to unsolicited feedback:** Leaders, co-workers, and customers may provide you with feedback at any time. It may come at the most inopportune time. One key to giving and receiving effective feedback is creating a psychologically safe environment at work where people feel accepted and respected. Edmondson describes a psychologically safe environment as "one exuding a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up." [32]

## Collaboration Focused:

How well you understand the impact of your actions on others.

1

**Do what you say you will do:** Keep promises, be dependable, and do what you say you will do. Failure to follow through on a commitment can create a sense of distrust. If you cannot do what you said you would, let those involved know why.[33]

2

**Role clarity:** Every worker should be clear on what their role is and is not.[34] Be clear that you understand your role. If you are unsure about another person's role, ask to ensure there are clear boundaries and no confusion that could result in conflict and unnecessary stress.

3

**Promote a north star:** Become clear on the organization's values, purpose, and mission and promote and support these through words and actions. In a world of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), building resiliency in a team begins with understanding how individuals and teams define the culture. Being intentional and aligned to the organization's "why" and showing up each day to help yourself and your team achieve this mission can promote resiliency and sustainability, facilitating a psychologically safe workplace for all.[35]

4

**Ask for help when needed:** Asking for help and showing vulnerability is a good thing. It builds connections by allowing others to share information and shows others that you trust their ideas and advice.

5

**Be interested in others' perspectives:** Pay attention and show respect when someone shares a point of view. Resist the urge to check texts and emails when others are speaking. Demonstrate respect and interest in the person. Inviting others' perspectives is a good business idea. Research shows that the more diverse a group, the more innovative it can be.[36]

6

**Celebrate:** When you see a teammate do something well, acknowledge and encourage them with positive feedback. Explain why you believe what they have done is fantastic to foster teamwork and trust. Authentic recognition from a peer can positively impact another's workplace experience.[37]

7

**Acts of kindness:** Do things for teammates because you want to help. Providing acts of kindness for others helps them, supports your mental health, and creates psychologically safe workplaces. [38] Helping or doing something nice for a peer, like bringing them a coffee, demonstrates that they matter.

8

**Forgive mistakes:** Accept that people you work with make mistakes. How you react to errors can threaten a culture, not the mistakes. A psychologically safe workplace protects employees from the fear of being wrong.[39] Accept mistakes, forgive them, and look for the positive. Compassion (recognizing we all make mistakes and responding with kindness) has been shown to improve goal driven behaviour[40].

9

**Embrace conflict:** When humans work together, there is conflict. Conflict is not bad. How people deal with their emotions during conflict is often the challenge.[41] If you struggle with conflict, develop skills to work through it.

10

**Give others the benefit of the doubt:** Constantly distrusting co-workers' intentions may create conflict, decrease productivity, and increase silence. Give others the benefit of the doubt and if there is a concern, check in with them before assuming the worst. Research has found that those who constantly trust and give others the benefit of the doubt are happier than those who distrust.[42]



# 11

**Resist the urge to blame others:** There will always be mistakes, delays, mishaps, and more. You may feel like blaming others for these shortcomings, whether you or someone else caused them. Blaming others creates negative emotions, including resentment, anger, and hatred. Once we accept that mistakes are part of the human condition, we can focus on how we respond to mistakes rather than acting as if it is possible can avoid them completely.

# 12

**Include others in decisions:** Including others in the decision-making process facilitates an inclusive culture and creates space for various perspectives. Others could see a more practical approach, have a skill set to support a decision, or see potential consequences. Often we want to bring the solution when we highlight a problem but involving others in the decision-making process shows your trust for them and that you value their opinions. [43]

# 13

**Be supportive:** Create an environment where you and others feel safe, valued, and respected. Be supportive of others' ideas and opinions. Acknowledge that others are heard, provide support, and thank them for their contribution.

Focusing on intrapersonal and interpersonal KPBs can help individuals come together to become psychologically safe teams. Holding ourselves accountable for what we think and do is a start. We have 100% control over our decisions and willingness to contribute to a psychologically safe team that can help others become confident that they are valued and matter.



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