

## UNLEASH THE POWER OF YOUR BUSINESS!

This tool is designed to help you understand and foster **psychological safety** within your team. Psychological safety is essential for open communication, innovation, and collaboration, allowing team members to share ideas, ask questions, and challenge the status quo without fear of negative consequences. By using this tool, you'll assess psychological safety in four key areas: **Inclusion Safety, Learner Safety, Contributor Safety, and Challenger Safety**. You'll also explore how bias can impact psychological safety and how to address it.

### Introduction

Psychological safety refers to an environment where individuals feel safe to express their thoughts, ask questions, offer new ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of ridicule, punishment, or negative consequences. It's the belief that one's contributions will be valued and respected, regardless of their status or position in the team. Psychological safety fosters open communication, encourages innovation, and builds trust within teams.

In a workplace setting, this means team members are comfortable taking interpersonal risks, such as disagreeing with colleagues, providing feedback, or admitting when they don't understand something. Without psychological safety, people tend to hold back, avoid taking risks, and suppress their ideas—leading to a stagnant, disengaged work culture.

Psychological safety can be divided into four key quadrants: **Inclusion Safety, Learner Safety, Contributor Safety, and Challenger Safety**. Each quadrant represents a different aspect of psychological safety and plays a vital role in creating a culture of openness and trust.

### **Why Psychological Safety Matters:**

- **Encourages Innovation:** Teams that feel psychologically safe are more likely to propose new ideas and think outside the box, driving creativity and innovation.
- **Improves Collaboration:** When people feel safe to voice concerns and share ideas, team collaboration becomes more effective.
- **Boosts Performance:** Employees who feel safe are more engaged, productive, and satisfied with their work environment.

Let's start with a couple of examples to clarify:



**Practical Example 1:** Imagine a team working on a project under tight deadlines. During a meeting, one member has an idea for a process improvement but hesitates to share it, fearing that others will criticize or dismiss their suggestion. In a psychologically safe team, this person would feel encouraged to speak up, knowing their input would be valued, even if the idea wasn't ultimately implemented.



**Practical Example 2:** A team member makes a mistake that impacts a project timeline. In a workplace lacking psychological safety, they might hide the error, fearing punishment or blame. But in a psychologically safe team, they would feel comfortable admitting the mistake early, allowing the team to address the issue and prevent further delays. The focus is on learning from the mistake rather than assigning blame.

### Section 1: Understanding Psychological Safety and the Four Quadrants

**What is Psychological Safety?** Psychological safety is the belief that you can speak up, ask questions, admit mistakes, and offer new ideas without fear of punishment, ridicule, or negative consequences. It's the foundation for building an open and innovative team culture where everyone feels valued and respected. Creating a psychologically safe environment encourages team members to take interpersonal risks, share their unique perspectives, and engage in honest discussions.

#### **Core Elements of Psychological Safety:**

- **Openness to Risk-Taking:** Team members feel they can voice concerns, ask questions, and offer ideas without fear of negative repercussions.
- **Respect for Diverse Views:** All contributions are valued, and diverse perspectives are welcomed as part of problem-solving.
- **Learning from Mistakes:** Mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn and improve, rather than reasons to assign blame.

**Practical Example:** Consider a team where feedback is a key part of the process. In a psychologically safe team, individuals feel comfortable both giving and receiving constructive feedback, knowing it's meant to help them grow rather than tear them down.

#### **Introduction to the Four Quadrants of Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety can be broken down into four distinct quadrants, each addressing a key area of team interaction. Understanding these quadrants allows leaders and teams to create a more holistic approach to fostering a safe, inclusive, and high-performing work environment.

The four quadrants of psychological safety are:

1. **Inclusion Safety:** Feeling accepted and valued as part of the team, regardless of background, identity, or status.
2. **Learner Safety:** Feeling safe to ask questions, make mistakes, and explore new ideas.
3. **Contributor Safety:** Feeling safe to work openly with others without fear of exclusion or judgment.
4. **Challenger Safety:** Feeling safe to question and challenge the status quo or suggest improvements.

These quadrants represent different aspects of psychological safety and, when cultivated together, help teams perform at their best. Let's explore each of these quadrants in detail.

#### **1. Inclusion Safety**

**Definition:** Inclusion safety ensures that all team members feel accepted, included, and respected, regardless of their background, identity, or status. It is the foundation of psychological safety, as individuals first need to feel included before they can engage fully.

**Why It Matters:** When people feel excluded, they tend to hold back, avoiding sharing ideas or participating in discussions. Inclusion safety helps everyone feel they belong, which leads to higher engagement and contribution.

**Practical Example:** A new team member from a different cultural background feels reluctant to share ideas during meetings, fearing they won't fit in with the team's established dynamics. In a team with high inclusion safety, they would feel welcomed and encouraged to contribute, knowing that their unique perspective is valued.

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### 2. Learner Safety

**Definition:** Learner safety ensures that individuals feel safe asking questions, admitting when they don't know something, and making mistakes. It supports a growth mindset by encouraging curiosity and exploration.

**Why It Matters:** Without learner safety, team members fear looking incompetent or unintelligent, leading them to avoid asking questions or seeking feedback—both of which are essential for learning and growth.

**Practical Example:** A junior engineer is hesitant to ask a senior colleague to explain a complex process, fearing it will make them look inexperienced. In a team with high learner safety, they would feel encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification, knowing that doing so will help them grow.

### 3. Contributor Safety

**Definition:** Contributor safety is about feeling safe to work with others openly and without fear of exclusion or negative judgment. It emphasizes the importance of trust, mutual respect, and cooperative teamwork.

**Why It Matters:** Teams with high contributor safety build strong interpersonal relationships. When members feel safe collaborating, they share information, offer help, and provide feedback, leading to better outcomes.

**Practical Example:** During a group project, one team member feels hesitant to voice their concerns about the direction of the project, worried that it might disrupt the team. In a team with strong contributor safety, they feel empowered to express their thoughts, trusting the group would consider their input constructively.

### 4. Challenger Safety

**Definition:** Challenger safety allows team members to feel safe questioning the status quo, offering new ideas, and challenging existing processes or decisions. It fosters innovation and creative problem-solving.

**Why It Matters:** Without challenger safety, teams can fall into “groupthink,” where everyone avoids challenging ideas for fear of conflict. Challenger safety creates an environment where respectful disagreement is seen as a way to improve and innovate.

**Practical Example:** In a marketing meeting, a team member wants to challenge a long-standing strategy but fears that doing so will make them seem difficult or disruptive. In a team with high challenger safety, they would feel confident in raising their concerns, knowing their input is valued, even if it goes against the grain.



### Section 2: Identifying Psychological Safety in Your Team

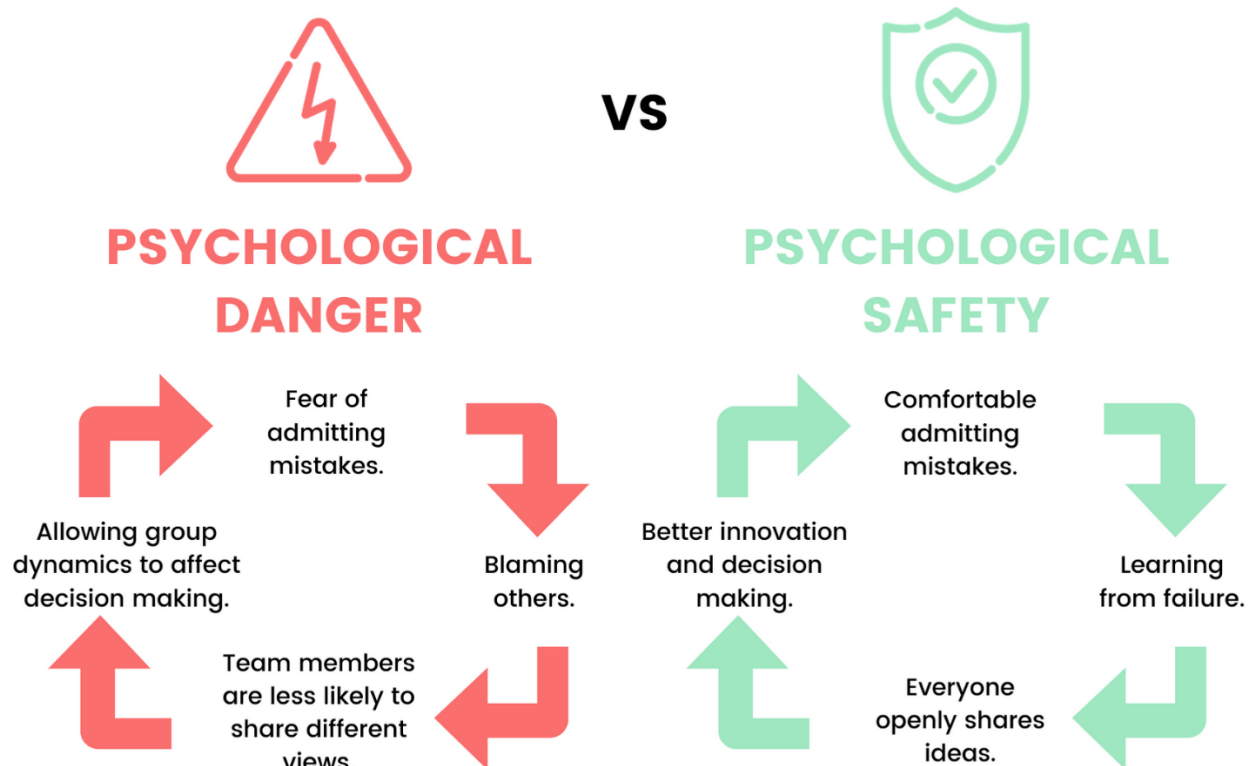
To create a psychologically safe environment, it's important to assess where your team stands in each of the four quadrants. Use the following indicators to gauge the level of psychological safety across these areas:

#### Indicators of Psychological Safety:

- **Inclusion Safety:** Everyone, regardless of background or status, feels accepted and valued.
- **Learner Safety:** Team members freely ask questions and seek feedback.
- **Contributor Safety:** People share ideas openly and participate in group discussions without fear of exclusion.
- **Challenger Safety:** Team members feel comfortable questioning decisions and suggesting new approaches.

#### Signs of a Lack of Psychological Safety:

- Hesitation to ask questions or seek clarification.
- Avoidance of sharing concerns or disagreements.
- Silence or lack of contribution in team discussions.
- Signs of exclusion, where certain individuals are left out or ignored.



**Practical Example:** A team that struggles to meet deadlines because members are afraid to admit they're falling behind. Without psychological safety, they hesitate to ask for help, resulting in more significant delays. In a safe environment, they'd feel comfortable raising concerns early, allowing the team to find solutions collaboratively.

### Section 3: The Role of Bias in Psychological Safety

**Understanding Bias and Its Impact:** Bias—whether conscious or unconscious—can significantly undermine psychological safety. When biases are present, individuals may feel unfairly judged or excluded based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or background. Bias can lead to unequal treatment and reduce a person's sense of inclusion and safety in a team setting.

#### **How Bias Affects Psychological Safety:**

- **Inclusion Safety:** Bias may cause certain team members to feel marginalized or excluded.
- **Learner Safety:** If a leader shows favoritism, others may feel discouraged from asking questions or seeking feedback.
- **Contributor Safety:** Bias may result in unequal opportunities to participate in projects or discussions, reducing trust within the team.
- **Challenger Safety:** If certain voices are valued more than others due to bias, team members may hesitate to challenge ideas, fearing their input will not be taken seriously.

**Practical Example:** A team member from a minority background feels reluctant to offer new ideas during meetings because they have observed that their suggestions are often dismissed or ignored, while other colleagues' ideas are valued. This is an example of bias affecting challenger and inclusion safety.

#### **How to Mitigate Bias:**

1. **Acknowledge Bias:** Recognize that everyone has biases and that these biases can affect how we perceive and treat others.
2. **Create Awareness:** Regularly discuss bias and its impact on team dynamics, fostering awareness and mindfulness around how decisions are made.
3. **Set Inclusive Norms:** Actively work to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and heard, regardless of their background or position.
4. **Encourage Diverse Perspectives:** Make it a point to solicit input from all team members, particularly those who may not always speak up.

### Section 4: Fostering Psychological Safety in Your Team

Psychological safety isn't something that happens by accident—it must be intentionally cultivated. Both leaders and team members play a role in creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable taking risks, sharing ideas, and being open.





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Key Actions to Foster Psychological Safety:

- 1. **Lead with Vulnerability:** As a leader, admit when you don’t have all the answers. This shows others it’s okay to make mistakes or not know everything.
- 2. **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Create opportunities for team members to share ideas without judgment. For example, include regular feedback sessions or brainstorm meetings where everyone’s input is solicited.
- 3. **Respond Supportively:** When someone speaks up, respond with curiosity rather than judgment. Ask follow-up questions to better understand their perspective and acknowledge their contributions, even if you don’t agree.
- 4. **Normalize Mistakes:** Reinforce the idea that mistakes are part of the learning process. Share examples of your own failures and how you grew from them, showing that the focus is on improvement, not blame.
- 5. **Encourage Diverse Voices:** Make sure everyone, especially those who are quieter or less senior, has a chance to speak. Actively seek out their ideas and ensure they feel heard.

**Practical Example:** In a psychologically safe team, a leader might start a meeting by admitting, “I don’t have all the answers here, so I’d love to hear your thoughts.” This openness invites others to share their insights and ideas without fearing judgment or dismissal.

Section 5: Psychological Safety Reflection Worksheet

This worksheet helps you assess the level of psychological safety in your team and identify areas for improvement. Use the questions below to rate your team’s current environment, then reflect on how you can contribute to creating a safer space.

| Question                                   | Rating (1-5) |
|--|--------------|
| I feel comfortable sharing new ideas.      |              |
| I am not afraid to ask questions.          |              |
| Mistakes are treated as learning moments.  |              |
| My team encourages open dialogue.          |              |
| I feel comfortable challenging ideas.      |              |
| I feel accepted and included in my team.   |              |
| Disagreements are resolved constructively. |              |

Reflection Questions:

- What can I do to improve learner, contributor, challenger, and inclusion safety in my team?
- How can I recognize and address bias in my team dynamics?
- How can I encourage more open communication and inclusion in discussions?
- What actions can my team take to improve trust, openness, and collaboration?

Use these reflections to start meaningful conversations with your team about how to improve psychological safety and foster a more open, inclusive environment.

Psychological safety is a condition in which you feel:

- included
- safe to learn
- safe to contribute, and
- safe to challenge the status quo

### Conclusion

Psychological safety is an essential element for creating a high-performing, innovative, and collaborative team. By fostering an environment where individuals feel safe to speak up, make mistakes, and challenge ideas, you unlock the potential for greater creativity, stronger relationships, and more effective problem-solving.

Through the four quadrants of psychological safety—**Inclusion Safety**, **Learner Safety**, **Contributor Safety**, and **Challenger Safety**—you can address specific areas that contribute to a culture of openness and trust. Each quadrant plays a crucial role in ensuring that all team members feel valued and empowered to contribute.

Cultivating psychological safety requires ongoing effort. It's not a one-time fix but a continuous process of encouraging open communication, addressing biases, and creating space for diverse perspectives. By regularly assessing where your team stands in terms of psychological safety and implementing changes based on feedback, you can help your team grow and evolve together.

As you move forward, remember that building psychological safety starts with small, everyday actions—listening more, encouraging feedback, and embracing mistakes as opportunities to learn. These efforts will pay off in the form of a more engaged, innovative, and resilient team.

“Psychological safety is not relaxing your standards, feeling comfortable, being nice and agreeable, or giving unconditional praise.”

—Adam Grant