Assessing Team Psychological Safety - Conversation Starters

Psychological safety is a crucial aspect of team dynamics, referring to the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It allows team members to feel accepted and respected, fostering an environment where they can express themselves without fear of negative consequences.

Research by Amy Edmondson has shown that psychological safety is linked to higher levels of learning, collaboration, and performance within teams. In his book, *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation*, Timothy R. Clark discusses each stage in detail: Inclusion Safety (feeling included), Learner Safety (feeling safe to learn, ask questions, take risks, and make mistakes), Contributor Safety (feeling safe to contribute one's strengths to benefit the team), and Challenger Safety (feeling safe to challenge the status quo, suggest new ideas, and innovate).

Author
This tool was developed by Michelle Watson-Grant.

Goal
This tool aims to gauge the level of psychological safety within teams, identifying strengths and areas for improvement to foster a more supportive and inclusive work environment.

Advice

Ensure that conversations are conducted in a confidential and non-judgmental manner. Encourage open and honest dialogue, and use the insights gained to facilitate actionable improvements. The questions may be used in 1:1 or team settings. However, if you have formal or informal data that suggests limited psychological safety or if there is previous harm within the team, you may consider limiting its use to 1:1 settings. Prepare to take notes. Explain the purpose of taking notes and reinforce your commitment to confidentiality.

References

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350-383.

Clark, T. R. (2020). The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Conversation Starters for Assessing Team Psychological Safety

Introduction

These conversation starters are designed to facilitate discussions that assess the level of psychological safety within your team. Use these prompts in 1:1 or team settings to explore how team members feel about various aspects of psychological safety, in the context of work and the current team.

How to Use the Tool

Step 1: Set the Context

Explain the purpose of the conversation and the importance of psychological safety.

Step 2: Choose Prompts

Select relevant conversation starters from the list provided.

Step 3: Facilitate the Conversation

Encourage open and honest dialogue, actively listen, and take notes.

Step 4: Analyze Insights

Reflect on the insights gained from the conversations.

Step 5: Develop Action Plan

Collaboratively create an action plan to address areas needing improvement.

Step 6: Follow Up With Your Team

- **Study the Data:** Identify trends and key insights in the conversation(s).
- **Prepare a Summary Report**: Summarize the key insights from the conversation(s).
- **Create a Safe Environment for Discussion**: Emphasize the goal of improvement, ensure confidentiality, and set a positive tone.
- **Present the Findings**: Share the insights with the team and facilitate an open discussion. Start with positives and discuss areas for improvement.
- **Develop an Action Plan**: Set specific, measurable goals, assign responsibilities, and set timelines.
- **Follow Up**: Schedule regular check-ins to review progress and make adjustments as needed.

Conversation Starters To Gauge Team Psychological Safety

Inclusion Safety

1. Can you share a time when you felt truly included by our team?

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2. What aspects of your identity do you feel you need to hide at work? What is at the root of that?

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Learner Safety

3. How comfortable do you feel asking questions or seeking help when you don't understand something?

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Learner Safety, cont.'d

4. Can you describe a situation where you learned from a mistake without fear of negative consequences?

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Contributor Safety

5. How do you feel your ideas and contributions are received by the team? Can you give an example?

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6. How often do you get opportunities to use your strengths and skills in your work?

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Conversation Starters To Gauge Team Psychological Safety

Challenger Safety

7. How comfortable are you with challenging the status quo or suggesting new ideas in your team?

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8. Can you share an experience where you felt supported when providing constructive feedback to the team?

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Improving Team Psychological Safety

9. What specific actions or changes do you think could improve the psychological safety of our team?

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