

# High Performance via Psychological Safety

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Version .01

MODERN AGILE



**Psychological safety** exists when you are not afraid to be yourself, to take risks, make mistakes, raise problems, ask questions and disagree with others.

No one can put in their best performance unless they feel secure. Se in Latin means "without" and cure means "fear or care." Drive Out Fear! We must be unafraid to express ideas and ask questions.

- W. Edwards Deming, Out Of The Crisis

Leaders can help **foster team safety** by:

- Framing the work as a learning problem, not an execution problem.
- Acknowledging their own fallibility and modeling vulnerability in front of the team.
- Being curious and asking lots of questions.
- Encouraging diverse points of view.
- Adapted from Amy Edmondson and Patrick Lencioni.

## Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team

1. Absence of Trust - The fear of being vulnerable with team members prevents the building of trust within the team.
2. Fear of Conflict - The desire to preserve artificial harmony stifles the occurrence of productive ideological conflict.
3. Lack of Commitment - The lack of clarity of buy-in prevents team members from making

decisions they will stick to.

4. Avoidance of Accountability - The need to avoid interpersonal discomfort prevents team members from holding one another accountable.
5. Inattention to Results - The pursuit of individual goals and personal status erodes the focus on collective success.

**Paul O'Neill's Three Questions** for having the potential for habitual excellence. Can everyone in your org say yes every day to the following:

1. I am treated everyday with dignity and respect by everyone I encounter without respect to my gender, my nationality, my race, my educational attainment, my rank or any other discriminating qualifiers.
2. I'm given the things that I need - training, education, tools, encouragement - so that I can make a contribution that gives meaning to my life.
3. Everyday I can say someone I care about and respect provides regular, meaningful, sincere recognition?

**Raise Respect.** If you know and care about each other everything is easier.

- Share hobbies, interests and skills in a group setting.
- Share what you want to learn & what you

can teach each other.

- Create opportunities for finding common ground.
- Inspired by Lyssa Adkins, Coaching Agile Teams

## Normalize Conflict. Plan for it. Share preferences.

- When it gets difficult, what do we want it to be like as a team?
- When a teammate has a problem with me, I request that we talk about it as soon as possible.
- Center for Right Relationship (CRR) Global

## Establishing Meeting Safety

1. Encourage everyone to contribute.
2. Listen to one another.
3. Review/repeat people's points. "So what I'm hearing you say is ..."
4. Avoid dominating or interrupting.
5. Be caring, curious and non-judgemental. "I'm curious why might you think that?"
- Adapted from Charles Duhigg's book, Smarter, Better, Faster

## Clarity of Purpose & Decision Making in Meetings

- With an agenda, make it clear if you are convening the group to:

- share information that has already been decided
- seek input to inform a decision that you will make.
- discuss how to solve problems with the group to decide by consensus.
- Sam Kaner, Community at Work

**Check-In.** Attending a meeting when you're not 100% present (family situation, pain, exhaustion, etc.) happens. It's helpful to share your context so others may have empathy & not misunderstand your mood or body language. Prior to starting the meeting, invite people to share (in a few words) how they're doing.

- Inspired by The Core Protocols

### All Voices Heard via I/P/G

High engagement requires safety. But do you get everyone participating? Use Individual / Partner / Group: Invite individuals to record ideas, then share the ideas with a partner and then share with the group.

### Feedback Preferences

Make your feedback preferences known:

"Give me brutal honesty please!"

"Please say what you like first, then what you don't like."

"This is an early draft, so please focus on general ideas, not typos or grammar."

**Feed-forward** means sharing what you appreciate in each other and what you would like to see more of. Feed-forward, as opposed to feedback, helps people give constructive

input in a way that accelerates and improves people's performance and development.

- Anne Rød and Marita Fridjhn, Creating Intelligent Teams

### Receiving Feedback

Paraphrase or mirror back the feedback to show that you receive it non-defensively. Have an attitude of gratitude.

- Sam Kaner, Community at Work

**Levels of Listening** - demonstrate that you "hear them":

Level 1 - Preoccupied listening

Level 2 - Focused on the other person

Level 3 - Focus on body language, environment

- from Coaches Training Institute (CTI)

### Respond with Curiosity when Criticized

That's a bad idea. It won't work!

"I'm curious. What makes you think that?"

**C.O.I.N.** - Structure for Difficult Conversations

- C. Context - Where and when did the event occur? Ask your colleague what they remember.
- O. Observation - Use neutral language to describe actions or behaviors that were witnessed, without evaluation or judgment. Ask the other to describe what they observed.
- I. Impact - Describe in a neutral way the impact on you, other people, the work, the organization. Speak from "I" and be vulnerable rather than critical.
- N. Next time - a request for change. Establish agreements and understandings about what will be different in the future.

- from CRR Global

### Contrasting Statements

"Contrast what you don't want or intend with what you actually do want or intend. Say it in a way that helps make it safe for the other person." **Don't say:** "Please don't feed us a rich, sugar-loaded breakfast every day." **Do say:** "We really appreciate the daily homemade breakfasts. Would you be willing to mostly serve a protein-based breakfast instead? We are trying to watch our weight."

- adapted from Crucial Conversations

### Requests vs Demands

"Would you be willing to..." instead of Will you...Can you...or Do this...

- inspired by Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

**Fist of Five** to understand degree of interest in a proposal. Ask people to use 5-1 finger(s):

5. I wildly support this idea. Yes, Yes!
4. I support this idea.
3. I will go with the group. I don't have a strong feeling here.
2. There are things we need to address before I can support this.
1. I cannot support this.

**Decider Protocol** - a way for groups to quickly & visibly vote on a proposal:

- Thumbs up - Yes
- Thumbs sideways - Go with the Group
- Thumbs down - No + alternative suggestions