

Measuring Psychological Safety

Before embarking on a journey to build a high performing team through psychological safety, it's important to understand where your team are now. By measuring the degree of psychological safety felt by your team members, you can more intelligently utilise and adopt behaviours and practices that improve psychological safety in different ways.

Create a survey, using Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, Typeform, Survey Monkey, or whichever tool suits you best, containing the following statements. Note that there is further detail at the end of this document about the context and rationale for each of these statements.

1. **On this team, I understand what is expected of me.**
2. **We value outcomes more than outputs or inputs, and nobody needs to “look busy”.**
3. **If I make a mistake on this team, it is never held against me.**
4. **When something goes wrong, we work as a team to find the systemic cause.**
5. **All members of this team feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.**
6. **Members of this team never reject others for being different and nobody is left out.**
7. **It is safe for me to take a risk on this team.**
8. **It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help.**
9. **Nobody on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.**
10. **My unique skills and talents are valued and utilised in my work as part of this team.**

Ask your team to score agreement with each statement on a 5 point scale:

1: Strongly disagree	2: Disagree	3: Neither agree nor disagree	4: Agree	5: Strongly agree
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Ensure that all responses are anonymous. This will help team members feel confident being honest, even if their answers are not positive yet.

At the end of the survey, add a question which invites some qualitative feedback, such as “Please add any comments you would like to share to elaborate on or explain your responses. These will help us to identify ways to improve as a team.”

From the results of the survey, identify the statements with the **lowest average scores**. Read the *Post-Survey Action Guide* to help define your immediate priority actions to build psychological safety for your team.

Make a note also of any statements with a **wide range of scores**. These are areas in your team where there are large discrepancies between members, which could indicate an imbalance.

Perhaps you have some people on your team who have been there longer, or some who feel more secure in their relationships with others in the team.

Finally, remember that all teams are different, and no scores are “bad”. This initial survey provides a baseline from which great improvements can be made.

Context and Rationale for the Statements

1 - On this team, I understand what is expected of me.

If team members don't know what is expected of them, they are likely to feel less confident and comfortable in their work, and misunderstandings will be common. This includes expectations about both delivery (speed, quality, cost etc.) and behaviour (everything from dress code and punctuality to coding standards).

2 - We value outcomes more than outputs or inputs, and nobody needs to “look busy”.

Outcomes, such as revenue generated or satisfied customers, matter more than outputs, such as emails sent, lines of code written or meetings attended. When team members feel safe to focus on what matters to the business, they will make decisions that improve outcomes, even if those decisions reduce output and thus make them appear less busy.

3 - If I make a mistake on this team, it is never held against me.

A psychologically safe team will never blame a member of the team for a mistake if their intentions were good. Indeed, by enabling mistakes to be made without a fear of blame, you enable innovation and risk taking that can drive your organisation ahead of the competition.

4 - When something goes wrong, we work as a team to find the systemic cause.

This one is related to the previous point but important enough to warrant its own question. If retrospectives or similar processes are used to find the root causes of mistakes and failures, not only do team members feel safer, but every single “failure” offers an opportunity for shared learning and improvement. Mistakes become a gift, not a threat.

5 - All members of this team feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.

In a psychologically safe team, all members of the team are able to raise difficult issues, ranging from personal struggles to concerns about other members of the team. This is crucial for ensuring the team is a space where members can be vulnerable enough to share when they need help, and courageous enough to have challenging conversations.

6 - Members of this team never reject others for being different and nobody is left out.

Evidence shows that diversity in a team results in higher quality products and happier team members (See: [McKinsey: Why Diversity Matters](#)), but diversity in itself is not enough; it is crucial that all team members feel they belong. A sense of belonging can facilitate high performance because it means every member of the team feels included in the decisions made

and invested in the outcomes generated. This is particularly crucial for remote and distributed teams, where it is more difficult to see if a team member is disengaged.

7 - It is safe for me to take a risk on this team.

Mistakes happen unintentionally, but risks are about knowingly taking actions that might not work, or may have unintended consequences. Some risk taking is essential for innovation and progress. Psychological safety provides the framework for positive, measured risk-taking, enabling innovation and competitive advantage.

8 - It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help.

In psychologically unsafe teams, team members try to hide their perceived weaknesses or vulnerabilities, which prevents them from asking for help. If they can't access the help they need, the performance of both that individual and therefore the whole team will be reduced. This is a key factor in why safe teams achieve more goals than unsafe teams.

9 - Nobody on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.

In an unsafe team, members compete with each other to achieve their individual goals, and may even undermine other team members if they believe that may elevate their "rank" within the team or organisation. In a psychologically safe team, that counter-productive competition doesn't exist, and the success of the team is more important than looking good in the eyes of others.

10 - My unique skills and talents are valued and utilised in my work as part of this team.

We all bring our unique experiences, skills and knowledge to the teams that we're in, but may not always feel safe to share these. Psychologically safe teams ensure that members are valued for being their true selves, and therefore provide space for each individual to maximise their potential from and share their unique skills and talents. If we do not utilise all the talents of the individuals on our teams, we are missing out on valuable opportunities for delivery and innovation.

Now move on to Item 5 - *Post-Survey Action Guide* to determine which measures and behaviours you wish to prioritise and utilise.