

CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



25 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGERS

Creating psychological safety means building an environment where employees feel comfortable speaking up, asking for help, admitting mistakes, and challenging the status quo without fear. Facilitating psychological safety can help ensure that diverse ideas are shared, empower teams to take calculated risks, improve retention, and identify issues before they become problems.

Modeling Vulnerability and Openness

1. **Admit your own mistakes openly:** Share your failures and what you learned. This will help to normalize imperfection.
2. **Say “I don’t know”:** Admitting gaps in your knowledge shows you are only human and encourages others to do the same.
3. **Ask for help:** Asking your team for assistance signals that needing help is not a sign of inability.
4. **Practice active listening:** Use your skills in paraphrasing, clarifying, reflecting, and summarizing.
5. **Request feedback on your own leadership:** Ask, “What could I have done better?” or “What do you need from me?”

Facilitating Open Communication

6. **Invite dissenting voices first:** When asking for opinions, call on people who may disagree before sharing your own view.
7. **Use anonymous feedback tools:** Create safe spaces for shy or hesitant team members to contribute.
8. **Appoint a “devil’s advocate”:** Explicitly give team members the role of questioning plans to ensure robust discussion.
9. **Frame the work as learning, not just implementing:** Acknowledge when a project is complex or unique, making it okay to repeat and improve.
10. **Use “Jazz Dialogues”:** Implement rules of communication based on the interactive communication among musicians during a performance, such as listening more than speaking and building upon others’ ideas (the “yes, and...” approach).
11. **Ask open-ended questions:** Instead of “Is everyone okay with this?”, try “What assumptions should we challenge today?”

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Establishing Supportive Norms and Team Culture

12. **Establish team contracts:** Create agreed-upon team rules for communication, conflict, and feedback.
13. **Celebrate “failing forward”:** Support thoughtful risk-taking that did not pay off, focusing on the learning gained.
14. **Capture the learning before “cleaning the slate”:** After a less-than-successful effort, focus on credible process improvements rather than excuses or blame.
15. **Rotate meeting facilitators:** Shift power dynamics by allowing different team members to lead discussions.
16. **Bring everyone along:** Ensure all team members have ownership of a problem or issue.
17. **Set clear expectations:** Reduce fear of the unknown by defining roles and the criteria for acceptable behavior.

Recognizing and Empowering Individuals

18. **Praise in public, correct in private:** Make recognition visible and public, but handle constructive criticism privately.
19. **Send agendas in advance:** Give introverts or slow processors time to think through their contributions before meetings.
20. **Actively draw in quieter voices:** Ask for input from team members who have not spoken up.
21. **Provide a wellness policy:** Legitimize the need for self-care by encouraging rest.
22. **Offer flexible work arrangements:** Support work-life alignment to support each employee as a complete person.

Addressing Conflict and Feedback Positively

23. **Respond constructively to bad news:** Thank people for raising concerns, even if the news is uncomfortable.
24. **Resolve conflict promptly:** Step in early to manage disagreements fairly and respectfully.
25. **Act upon feedback:** When team members give feedback, show you’ve heard them by taking visible and appropriate action.