Psychological Safety

What it is, what it isn't, why you want it and how to get it

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Agenda

- Introduction
- What is Psych Safety
- Why you want it
- How to balance psych safety and accountability
- What could this look like in practice?
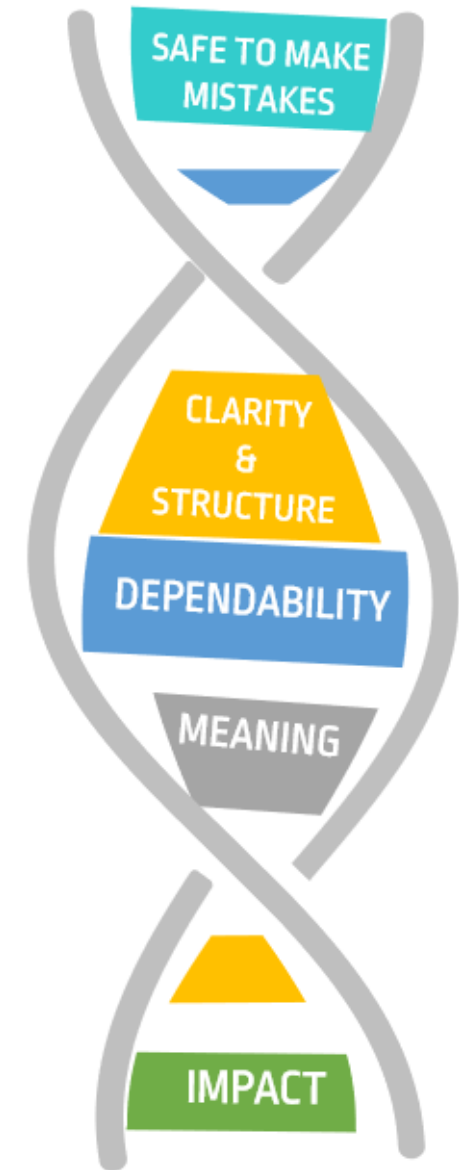- Questions

What is Psychological Safety ?

Psychological Safety

Team characterised by interpersonal trust & mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves

Psych Safety is different to:

Mentally healthy teams – also about functionality!

Psych first aid – it is ongoing!

SAFE TO MAKE MISTAKES

CLARITY & STRUCTURE

DEPENDABILITY

MEANING

IMPACT

Why you want it

Psychological safety reduces perceived threats, removes barriers to change, and creates a context which "encourages provisional tries and which tolerates failure without retaliation, renunciation, or guilt."

Kahn (1990) suggested that psychological safety was a condition necessary for people to feel attachments to — and engagement in — their work roles. He defined it as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (p. 708).

Psychological safety allows employees "to feel safe at work in order to grow, learn, contribute, and perform effectively in a rapidly changing world" (Edmondson & Lei, 2014, p. 23).

Frazier, M. Lance, Fainshmidt, Stav, Klinger, Ryan L., Pezeshkan, Amir, & Vracheva, Veselina. (2017). Psychological Safety: A Meta-Analytic Review and Extension. *Personnel Psychology*, *70*(1), 113–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12183
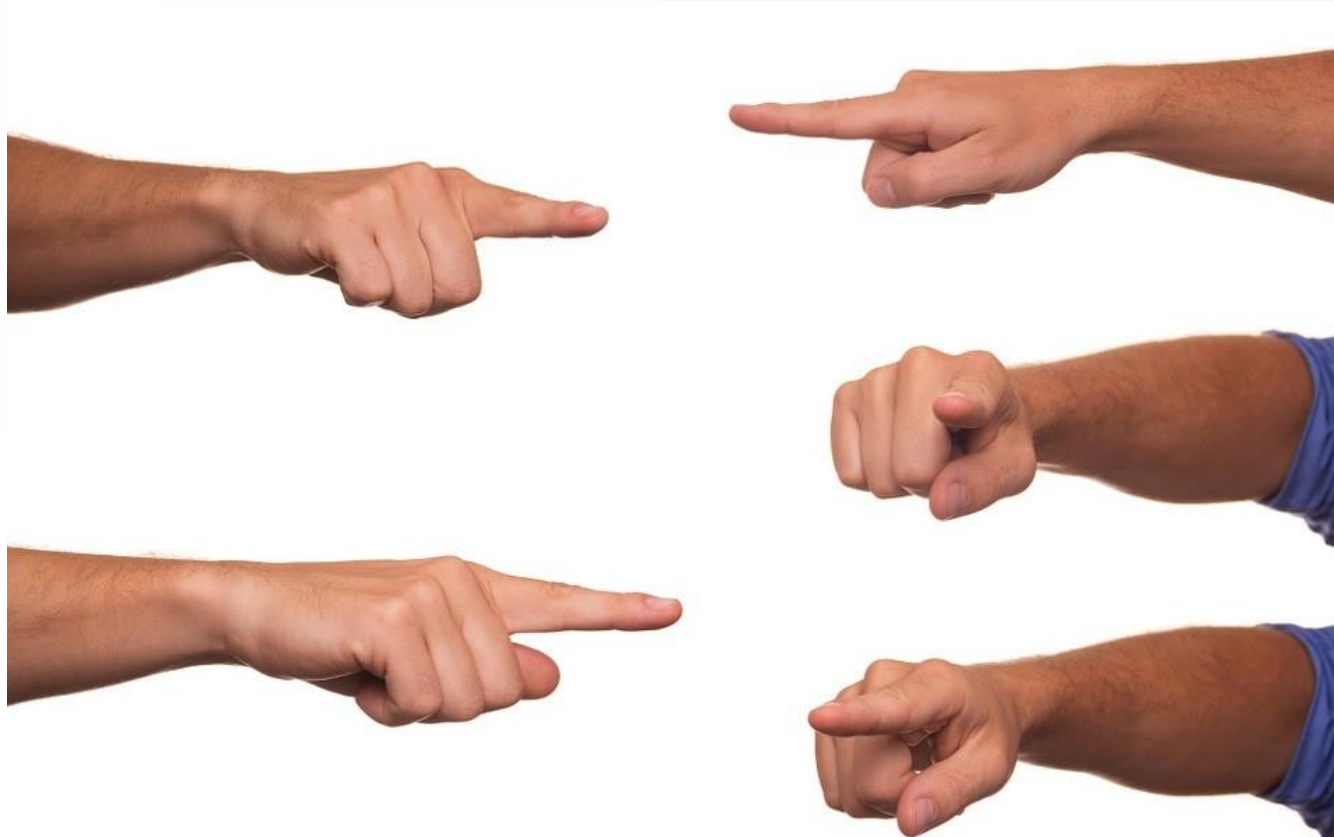
Outcomes of Psych Safety

Workplaces with high psych safety have:

- Higher levels of positive leader relations
- Increased employee engagement
- Higher task performance
- Higher levels of job satisfaction
- Higher levels of organisational commitment
- Higher levels of positive citizenship behaviour
- More information sharing amongst the team
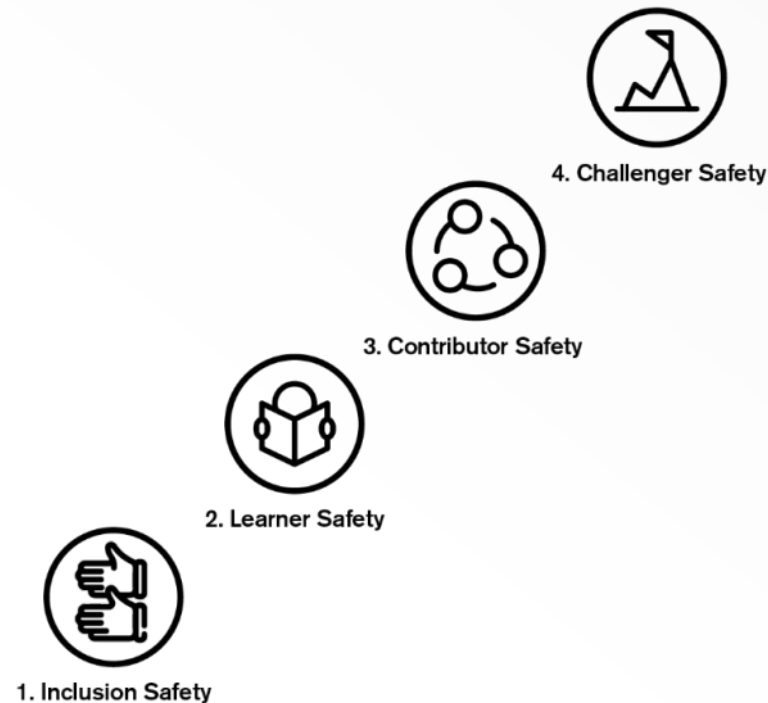- Higher levels of learning behaviour

Frazier, M. Lance, Fainshmidt, Stav, Klinger, Ryan L., Pezeshkan, Amir, & Vracheva, Veselina. (2017). Psychological Safety: A Meta-Analytic Review and Extension. *Personnel Psychology*, *70*(1), 113–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12183

Less of this!

More of this!

4 Stages of Psychological Safety

4. Challenger Safety

3. Contributor Safety

2. Learner Safety

1. Inclusion Safety

Psychological safety is
a social condition in which
you feel:
(1) included
(2) safe to learn
(3) safe to contribute
(4) safe to challenge the
status quo

All without fear of being
embarrassed, marginalised,
or punished in some way.

Timothy R. Clark
CEO of LeaderFactor, author of "The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety"

This sounds great, but is it practical?
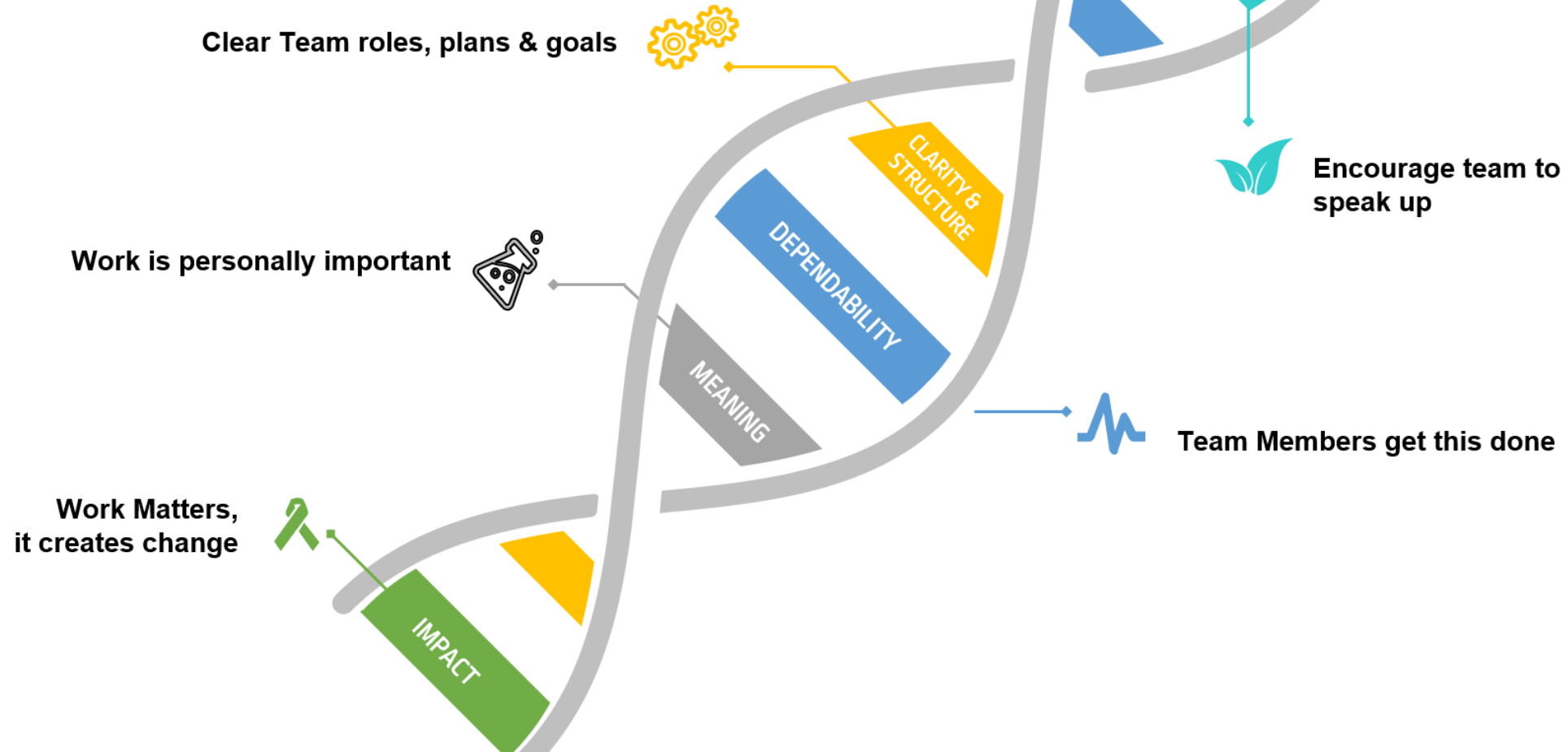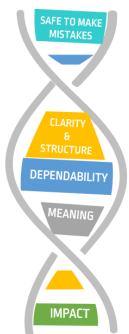
It can be

Here is how…

Getting the balance right: Psych Safety & Accountability

Psychological Safety – Team characterised by interpersonal trust & mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves

Accountability – holding self and others accountable to meet commitments, taking responsibility

SAFE TO MAKE MISTAKES

Clear Team roles, plans & goals

CLARITY & STRUCTURE

Encourage team to speak up

Work is personally important

DEPENDABILITY

MEANING

Team Members get this done

Work Matters, it creates change

IMPACT

Let's Break it Down

Safe to make mistakes → **Encourages team to speak up** →

Does your Team have a voice?

Do you:

- Frame work as a learning tasks?
- Show your own vulnerability?
- Model collaboration, ask questions?
- Replace blame with curiosity?
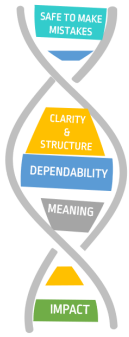
Clarity and Structure → **Clear team roles, plans & goals** →

- Is every team member clear on what needs to be achieved?
- Is your team encouraged to create constructive conflict to deliver breakthrough innovation?
- Is accountability modelled by leaders?
- Do you reward individual or team performance?
- Do you embrace open performance convos?

Let's Break it Down

Dependability → **Team members get it done** →

- Does your team understand and embrace responsibility?
- Are they connected and do they have trust in each other?
- Do they have a deep understanding of diversity, including different thinking styles and preferences?
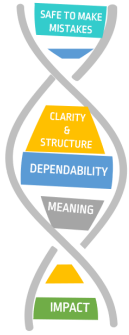
Meaning → **Work is personally important** →

- Does your team have strong alignment to the org purpose?
- Do you have an established team purpose that is aligned to org purpose?
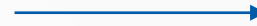- Does your team care about the impact their work is having on patients?
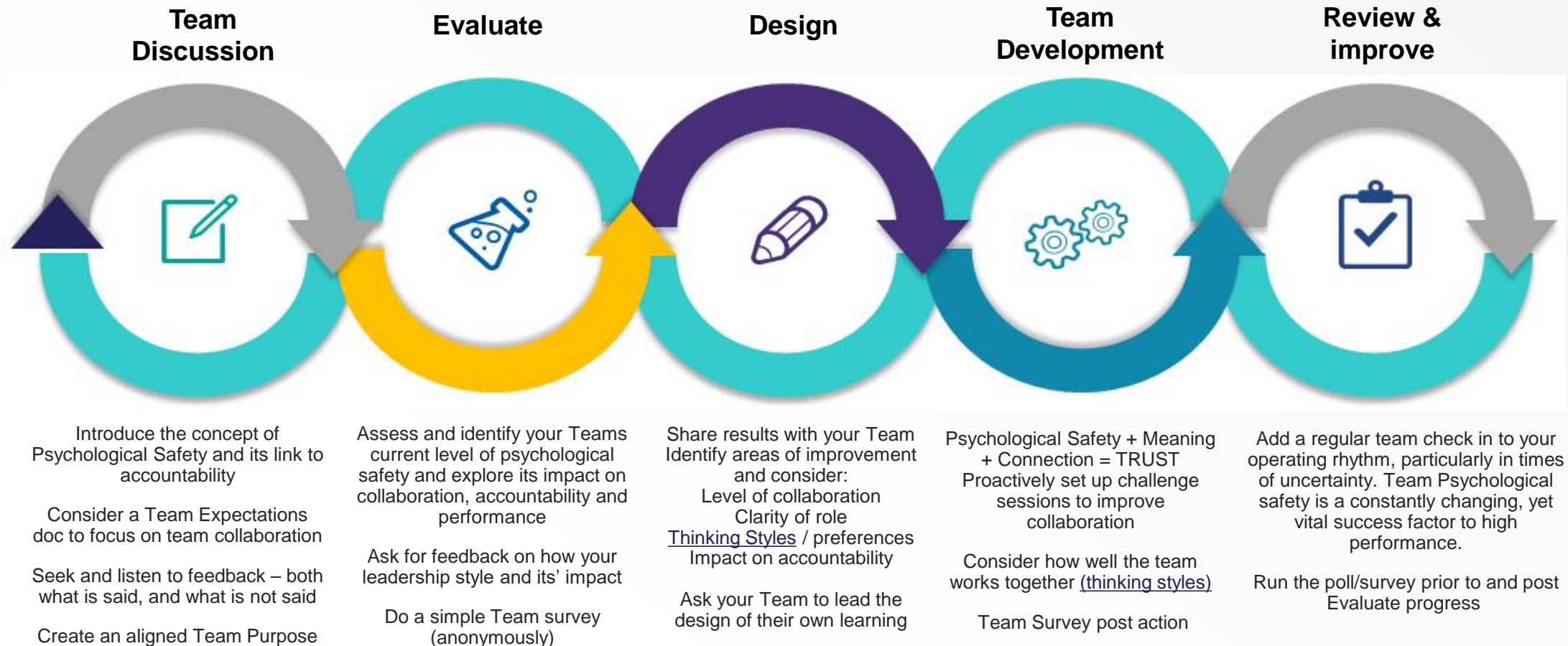
Let's Break it Down

Impact → Work matters →

- Is the team committed to the org purpose and strategy?
- Does your team feel a strong sense of belonging and trust about their value and input?

How to get it right: Connection and Accountability

Team Discussion	Evaluate	Design	Team Development	Review & improve

Introduce the concept of Psychological Safety and its link to accountability

Consider a Team Expectations doc to focus on team collaboration

Seek and listen to feedback – both what is said, and what is not said

Create an aligned Team Purpose

Assess and identify your Teams current level of psychological safety and explore its impact on collaboration, accountability and performance

Ask for feedback on how your leadership style and its' impact

Do a simple Team survey (anonymously)

Share results with your Team Identify areas of improvement and consider:
Level of collaboration
Clarity of role
Thinking Styles / preferences
Impact on accountability

Ask your Team to lead the design of their own learning

Psychological Safety + Meaning + Connection = TRUST
Proactively set up challenge sessions to improve collaboration

Consider how well the team works together (thinking styles)

Team Survey post action

Add a regular team check in to your operating rhythm, particularly in times of uncertainty. Team Psychological safety is a constantly changing, yet vital success factor to high performance.

Run the poll/survey prior to and post Evaluate progress

Available Resources

How to foster Psychological Safety on your teams

Demonstrate engagement
- Be present and focus on the conversation (e.g., close your laptop during meetings)
- Ask questions with the intention of learning from your teammates
- Offer input, be interactive, and show you're listening
- Respond verbally to show engagement ("That makes sense. Tell us more.")
- Be aware of your body language; make sure to lean towards or face the person speaking
- Make eye contact to show connection and active listening

Show understanding
- Recap what's been said to confirm mutual understanding/alignment (e.g., "What I heard you say is…"); then acknowledge areas of agreement, disagreement, and be open to questions within the group
- Validate comments verbally ("I understand." "I see what you're saying.")
- Avoid placing blame ("Why did you do this?") and focus on solutions ("How can we work toward making sure this goes more smoothly next time?", "What can we do together to make a game plan for next time?")
- Think about your facial expressions- - are they unintentionally negative (a scowl or grimace)?
- Nod your head to demonstrate understanding during conversations/meetings

Be inclusive in interpersonal settings
- Share information about your personal work style and preferences, encourage teammates to do the same
- Be available and approachable to teammates (e.g., make time for ad hoc 1:1 conversations, feedback sessions, career coaching)
- Clearly communicate the purpose of ad hoc meetings scheduled outside normal 1:1s/team meetings
- Express gratitude for contributions from the team
- Step in if team members talk negatively about another team member
- Have open body posture (e.g., face all team members, don't turn your back to part of the group)
- Build rapport (e.g., talk with your teammates about their lives outside of work)

Be inclusive in decision-making
- Solicit input, opinions, and feedback from your teammates
- Don't interrupt or allow interruptions (e.g., step in when someone is interrupted and ensure his/her idea is heard)
- Explain the reasoning behind your decisions (live or via email, walk team through how you arrived at a decision)
- Acknowledge input from others (e.g., highlight when team members were contributors to a success or decision)

Show confidence and conviction without appearing inflexible
- Manage team discussions (e.g., don't allow side conversations in team meetings, make sure conflict isn't personal)
- Use a voice that is clear and audible in a team setting
- Support and represent the team (e.g., share team's work with senior leadership, give credit to teammates)
- Invite the team to challenge your perspective and push back
- Model vulnerability; share your personal perspective on work and failures with your teammates
- Encourage teammates to take risks, and demonstrate risk-taking in your own work

Sources
- Edmondson and Lei (2014). "Psychological Safety: The History, Renaissance, and Future of an Interpersonal Construct," Annual Review Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior.
- Edmondson (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly June 1999.
- Goman, Carol Kinsey Ph.D.. 'The Silent Language of Leaders: How Body Language Can Help--or Hurt--How You Lead.' Jossey-Bass Publishing, April 2011.

Team Effectiveness Discussion Guide

Below is a sampling of improvement indicators and guiding questions:

Psychological Safety

Signs that your team needs to improve psychological safety:
- Fear of asking for or giving constructive feedback
- Hesitance around expressing divergent ideas and asking "silly" questions

Questions to ask yourself:
- Do all team members feel comfortable brainstorming in front of each other?
- Do all team members feel they can fail openly, or will they feel shunned?

Dependability

Signs that your team needs to improve dependability:
- Team has poor visibility into project priorities or progress
- Diffusion of responsibility and no clear owners for tasks or problems

Questions to ask yourself:
- When team members say they'll get something done, do they?
- Do team members proactively communicate with each other about delays and assume responsibility?

Structure and Clarity

Signs that your team needs to improve structure and clarity:
- Lack of clarity about who is responsible for what
- Unclear decision-making process, owners, or rationale

Questions to ask yourself:
- Do team members know what the team and project goals are and how to get there?
- Do team members feel like they have autonomy, ownership, and discrete projects?

Meaning

Signs that your team needs to improve meaning:
- Work assignments based solely on ability, expertise, workload; little consideration for individual development needs and interests
- Lack of regular recognition for achievements or milestones

Questions to ask yourself:
- Does the work give team members a sense of personal and professional fulfillment?
- Is work matched to team members based on both skills/ability and interest?

Impact

Signs that your team needs to improve impact:
- Framing work as "treading water"
- Too many goals, limiting ability to make meaningful progress

Questions to ask yourself:
- Do team members see their work as creating change for the better?
- Do team members feel their work matters for a higher-order goal?
- How are current team processes affecting well-being/burnout?

Psych Safety Survey in development

To measure a team's level of psychological safety, Edmondson asked team members how strongly they agreed or disagreed with these statements:

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.

2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.

3. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.

4. It is safe to take a risk on this team.

5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.

6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.

7. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.

Available Resources

[People Styles on Learning Hub](#)

The presence of fear in an organisation is the first sign of weak leadership.

Questions?

Resources to learn more

TedX - Amy Edmonston Building a psychologically safe workplace:Talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8

https://trustologie.com.au/2017/10/01/6-tips-for-leaders-to-create-psychological-safety-in-teams/

HBR Article- High Performing Teams need Psychological Safety: https://hbr.org/2017/08/high-performing-teams-need-psychological-safety-heres-how-to-create-it

Podcast (14.29 mins) People Leaders Psychological Safety in the Workplace –https://peopleleaders.com.au/psychological-safety-workplace/