Psychological safety – Evidence review

Benefits of Psychological Safety

- Psychological safety has been linked to learning behaviour and team performance (Edmondson, 1999)
- It can improve team performance even when people don't agree about how to approach a task (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2012)
- The link between psychological safety and team performance is stronger in teams which focus on mastery rather than performance (Ashauer & Macan, 2013)
- It leads to more engagement in quality-improvement work (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006)
- It leads to greater willingness to report errors (Smith, 2007)
- It reduces people's intentions to leave (Smith, 2007)
- It creates greater trust (Vogelgesang, 2008)
- It leads to higher job satisfaction (Vogelgesang, 2008)
- It leads people to see their managers as more empathetic (Fenniman, 2010)
- It can stimulate knowledge sharing (van den Berg, 2010)
- It facilitates speaking up, collaboration and experimentation (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012)
- It can help people learn from their mistakes and failures (Hirak, Peng, Carmeli, & Schaubroeck, 2012)
- It boosts creativity (Kessel, Kratzer, & Schultz, 2012)
- It reduces psychological problems (Idris, Dollard, & Yulita, 2014)
- It helps people unlearn old ways of doing things (Betzold, 2015)
- It increases cooperative goal interdependence, which in turn increases helping behaviour (Leung, Deng, Wang, & Zhou, 2015)
- It increases meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Simonet, Narayan, & Nelson, 2015)
- It's associated with authentic interactions, spiritual development and perceived organisational voice (Simonet et al., 2015)
- It enhances understanding and power sharing across professional boundaries (O'Leary, 2016)
- It develops interprofessional teamwork (O'Leary, 2016)
- It improves communication (Jain, Fennell, Chagpar, Connolly, & Nembhard, 2016)

What creates psychological safety

- For an individual, status (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006)
- Leaders' inclusiveness (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006)
- Leaders' trustworthiness (Aranzamendez, James, & Toms, 2015)
- Leaders' readiness for change (Aranzamendez et al., 2015)
- Ethical leadership (Aranzamendez et al., 2015)
- Humble leadership – acknowledging limitations and mistakes, acknowledging followers strengths and contributions and modelling teachability (Walters & Diab, 2016)
- Seeking input from subordinates (Smith, 2007)

- Attributing poor performance to external factors (Smith, 2007)
- Providing prompt feedback (Smith, 2007)
- Strong social capital (Carmeli, 2007)
- High-quality personal relationships (Carmeli, 2007)
- 'Interactional transparency' (Vogelgesang, 2008)
- Working in pairs can feel psychologically safer than working in teams (Roussin, 2008)
- Emotional intelligence (Harper & White, 2013)
- Perceived organisational support (Dunne, 2014)
- Perceived fairness (Dunne, 2014)
- Newer and long-established teams have higher psychological safety with a drop in teams who are moderately-established (Koopmann, Lanaj, Wang, Zhou, & Shi, 2016)
- Cave (Cave, Pearson, Whitehead, & Rahim-Jamal, 2016) discusses a tool called CENTRE aimed at creating psychological safety. "CENTRE can be used to help address relational issues, promote psychological safety, inclusion and trust among members, and reduce the risk of undeclared expectations and assumptions from dictating how groups function."
- Forgiveness of oneself and others (Rahmati & Poormirzaei, 2018)

What diminishes psychological safety

- Status hierarchies (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012)
- Narrow performance goals (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012)
- Sequential thinking (Post, 2012)
- Communication problems (Yanchus, Derickson, Moore, Bologna, & Osatuke, 2014)
- Insufficient support (Brown & McCormack, 2016)
- Weak leadership (Brown & McCormack, 2016)

Diversity and Psychological Safety

- Callahan (Callahan, 2005) examined the links between diversity and psychological safety. Diversity led to a decrease in psychological safety for non-Caucasians and an increase in psychological safety for Caucasians. When teams were more diverse men felt more psychological safety and women less. Diversity led to a decrease in psychological safety for people without aggressive personalities but an increase in psychological safety for people *with* aggressive personalities.
- Singh (Singh, Winkel, & Selvarajan, 2013) found that the relationship between diversity climate and employee performance was mediated by psychological safety. The relationships between diversity climate and psychological safety and psychological safety and extra-role performance were stronger in minority groups than in White employees.

Doubts and scepticism

- Gilmartin (Gilmartin et al., 2018) analysed organisational data to examine the relationship between psychological safety and reports of non-adherence to a central-line bundle checklist. Her results showed varied perceptions of psychological safety but no relationship with nonadherence.

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