

CHAMPION  
HEALTH

# Psychologically Safe Workplaces

A Champion Health Guide

# Psychologically safe workplaces

A study on team performance by Google found that the highest-performing teams have one thing in common: psychologically safe workplaces.

Whether your employees are office-based or work remotely, psychological safety is a must-have in any high-performing organisation.

Psychologically safe workplaces allow for healthier, more productive and more inclusive workforces.

They also provide the environments in which innovation can thrive and people can perform at their best.

As organisations navigate new and ever-increasing challenges, this need for psychological safety is only growing.

That's why Champion Health have created this guide, to help you foster psychological safety within your workplace.



**Dr. Charlotte Heathcote**  
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

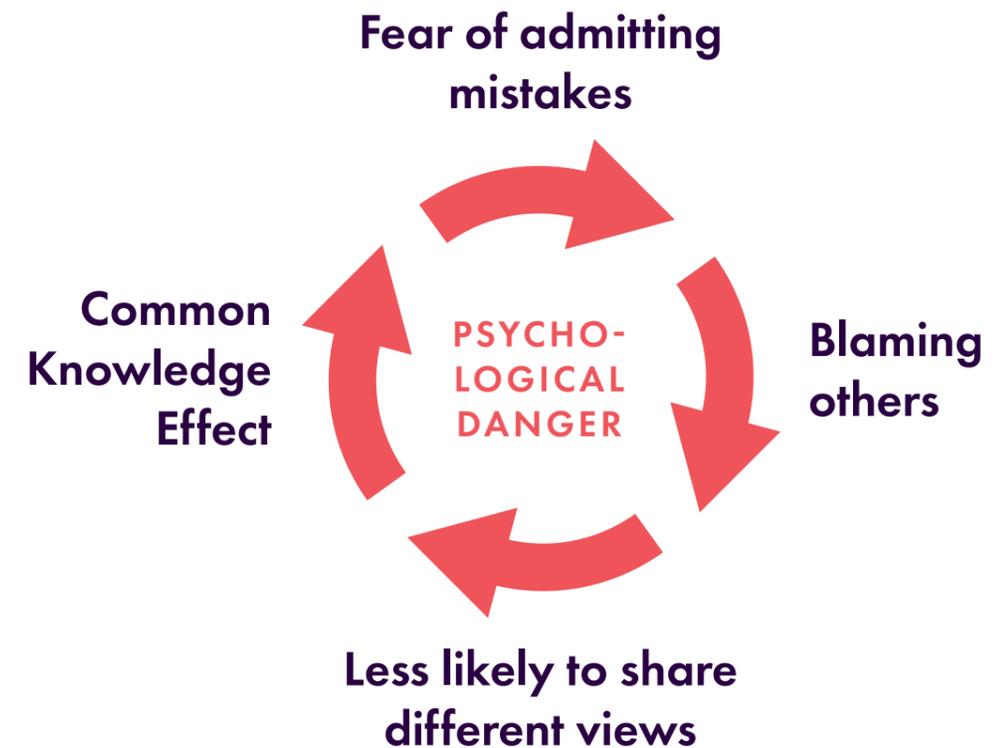


# What is a psychologically safe workplace?

In a nutshell, a psychologically safe workplace is one where employees feel able to express themselves without fear that their manager or colleagues will think less of them

Whether they're sharing ideas, asking questions, expressing concerns or acknowledging mistakes, employees must all feel that it's safe to speak up.

This creates an environment where people feel comfortable being themselves and develops a climate that is characterised by interpersonal trust and mutual respect.



# The dangers of a psychologically unsafe workplace

When psychological safety is low, not only does employee wellbeing suffer, but so does performance, quality and workplace safety. The following case studies show this.

## Case Study 1

A data entry processor is unsure of one of the input processes and asks their manager for help. The manager disparagingly tells them to “show some initiative.” The next time the new starter has an issue, they are reluctant to ask for help, resulting in the data being inputted incorrectly.

## Case Study 2

A new starter notices that their senior administrator may have made a mistake when processing some documents. When they bring this up, the senior administrator replies with “I’ve been here a while you know. I know what I’m doing.” From now on, whenever the new starter notices a mistake, they keep quiet.

## Case Study 3

An employee makes a mistake at work. When they tell their manager, the manager berates them in front of others. The next time that employee makes a mistake, they try to hide it. The mistake is not dealt with, and grows into a larger issue, that costs the company a significant amount of money.

**These case studies are real.  
Have you ever experienced something similar?**

# 1

## Inclusivity

All of your employees will be given an equal opportunity to flourish, regardless of their situation.

## Innovation

Your employees will be more likely to take risks, which is essential to staying innovative. They will also be more open-minded, creative, and able to find solutions.

# 2

**The benefits of  
psychologically  
safe workplaces**

# 3

## Issue prevention

If people are comfortable admitting mistakes, then issues within the workplace can be spotted early and resolved quickly, before they become a significant problem.

## Employee retention

According to research, employees who feel psychologically safe in their team are less likely to quit their jobs (People Management Report, 2019).

# 4

If someone makes a mistake on your team, is it often held against them?

Are members of your team able to bring up problems and tough issues?

Does anyone on your team deliberately act in a way that undermines another's efforts?

## Measuring psychological safety

Do people on your team sometimes reject others for being different?

The following questions make up the Fearless Organisation Scan; a framework you can use to measure the psychological safety within your team.

Is it safe to take a risk on your team?

Is it difficult for members of your team to ask other members for help?

Are the unique skills and talents of people on your team valued and utilised?

# How individuals can create psychologically safe workplaces

## Lead the way

As a leader, you can foster psychologically safe environments by promoting conversation around different issues within the workplace. You can also model curiosity by asking your employees lots of questions, which creates a necessity for them to speak up.

## Acknowledge your own fallibility

If employees see their seniors admitting fallibility, they are more likely to feel comfortable doing so themselves. That's why phrases like "I may miss something - I need to hear from you" really help to create psychologically safe environments.

## Ensure feedback is constructive

Giving feedback is important for the development of your workforce, but it's crucial that your employees do not feel criticised or stilted by it. Try to draw on individuals' strengths whilst encouraging growth in areas requiring improvement.

## Commit to an open-door policy

Make sure you're available and make sure your team knows it. When they approach you, endeavour to be approachable, open-minded and non-judgmental. Employees will then be more likely to come to you to discuss potential issues.

## Be open to feedback

Your team need to know that you're confident in your ability, but also flexible in your approach and open to feedback. Demonstrate this by inviting your team to challenge your decisions – healthy conflict leads to better decisions and more accountability.

# How organisations can create psychologically safe workplaces

Fear of making mistakes can stifle creativity and independent thinking, so it's vital that your workforce know that it's okay to make errors. Reframe these mistakes as an opportunity for team learning.

When something goes wrong, instead of singling someone out for blame, talk about how the team can work together to put it right. Instead of asking "what happened and why?," ask "how can we make sure this goes better next time?"

Every breakthrough is the result of curiosity, so promote healthy debate around decisions that are made. Encourage your employees to voice their opinion, ask questions and challenge decisions, all in a healthy way of course.

Create a culture of praising your employees for their effort, not just the results they bring. When people believe that performance is contingent on effort, and not just results, they are willing to try new things and persevere in the face of failure.

Hold regularly scheduled meetings, where any member of the organisation can pose ideas or questions to upper management. If anyone does speak up, make sure they know that their ideas or suggestions are being taken seriously.

**Embrace failure**

**Put a ban on blame**

**Endorse curiosity**

**Praise effort, not just results**

**Hold regular 'town hall' meetings**



# A final thought

The road to psychological safety is not an easy one, but hopefully you can see that it's more than worth the struggle.

Psychological safety takes off the brakes that keep people from achieving what is possible and creates the conditions for them to perform to their potential.

This allows for fearless organisations, where everybody can bring their full contributions to work.

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## Resources used to develop this guide:

Google's Project Aristotle

[rework.withgoogle.com/guides/understanding-team-effectiveness/steps/introduction](https://rework.withgoogle.com/guides/understanding-team-effectiveness/steps/introduction)

People Management Report 2019

[www.predictiveindex.com/learn/inspire/resources/surveys-reports/people-management-report](https://www.predictiveindex.com/learn/inspire/resources/surveys-reports/people-management-report)

The Fearless Organisation

[www.fearlessorganization.com](https://www.fearlessorganization.com)

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Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope you found it useful. If you would like to find out more about building psychologically safe workplaces, please do get in touch. You'll find us at:

[hello@championhealth.co.uk](mailto:hello@championhealth.co.uk)   [www.championhealth.co.uk](https://www.championhealth.co.uk)

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