

Time to *Break the Ice*



What is Psychological Safety?

An employee's perception of their ability to speak up and express their thoughts and feelings without fear of retribution.

Why is it important?

Psychological safety has a direct impact on mental health. Low levels can cause stress, anxiety, and depression.

The Business Impact

- Absenteeism
- Underreporting
- Lack of innovation
- Higher staff turnover



A common misconception

Psychological Safety **does not** mean being nice, lowering your standards or avoiding feedback. It's about creating a safe place to express new ideas, different opinions, and concerns.



Read on for:

Three Icebreakers to help your team talk about psychological safety

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Activity 1: The Elephant in the Office

Prep Time: 0 Mins | Run Time: 10-15 Mins

In this activity, invite your team to discuss four perceptions commonly held by employees:

- "I don't want to appear ignorant"
- "I don't want to look incompetent"
- "I don't want to seem intrusive"
- "I don't want to appear negative"



Ask the following questions:

- * **What kinds of workplace might encourage these sort of beliefs?**
- * **How could holding one (or more) of these beliefs impact your actions at work?**
- * **Have you ever felt this way? Why?**

Activity 3: Ideas and Innovation

Prep Time: 5 Mins | Run Time: 10-15 Mins

You may wish to print this page out beforehand, in the meeting - tell your group this story:

Anna is a manager known for her technical skills. Her team is bidding for a large scale project. She upholds very high standards, but in the past few months Anna has become increasingly intolerant of mistakes, ideas she considers "subpar," and challenges to her way of thinking.

Anna publicly "crushed" an idea offered by an experienced team member last week, and has spoken negatively about that person to the wider team. Many colleagues thought the idea was worth exploring. Ideas have since dried up. The proposal put forward was rejected because it lacked creativity and innovation.

Why it works

Recognising the underlying beliefs that lead employees **to not** ask questions, admit mistakes, offer ideas, or critique the status quo - can encourage empathy and a greater understanding of practices that could be negatively impacting your team.



Activity 2: What's in a Name?

Prep Time: 0 Mins | Run Time: 5-10 Mins

Ask each person to share a story of how they got their name. After everyone has shared, ask them to discuss something new they have learned.

Why it works

This activity encourages participants to share personal information in a low-stakes environment, it can also prompt them to think about the importance of identity at work.



Ask the following questions:

- * **What behaviours do you see that reflect good psychological safety?**
- * **What behaviors may signal a lack of psychological safety in this scenario?**
- * **Have you ever been in Anna's position?**

Why it works

Applying your team's understanding of Psychological Safety to a realistic scenario can help ground the idea, and make it easier to spot parallels in your own workplace.

