

Psychological Safety Guidebook

A Guide to Successfully Promoting
Psychological Safety in Your Organization

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Overview

Summary:

The goal of this guidebook is to help HR leaders understand what psychological safety is and how they can foster it within their organization. Heads of D&I and HR leaders can use these materials to understand what psychological safety is and its benefits, to identify hurdles to psychological safety and keys to successfully fostering it, to determine leadership's role in creating and promoting it in the organization, and to evaluate their employees' current levels of psychological safety.

Tips for Delivering & Consuming this Guidebook:

HR leaders (e.g. Heads of D&I, L&D Leaders, etc.) can consume this resource on their own or in a group setting with HR and other business leaders present. If delivering this session in a group setting, the Head of D&I or a member of the D&I or HR team should facilitate the session.

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Defining Psychological Safety

What Is Psychological Safety?

Psychological Safety Defined

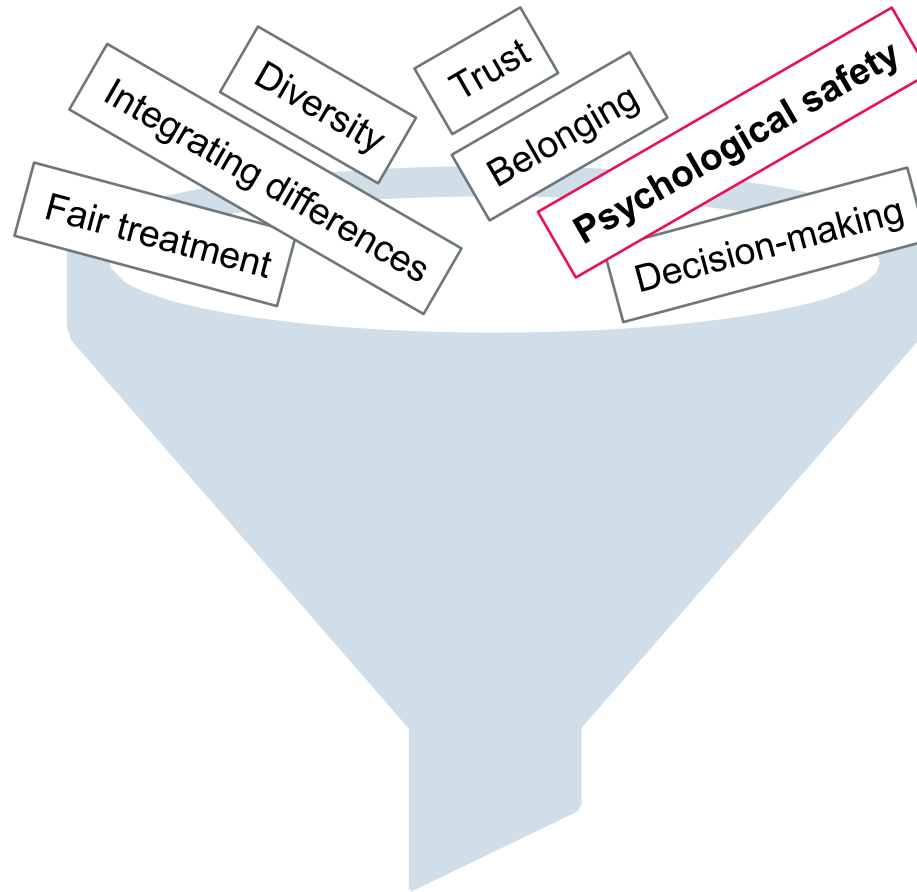


Psychological safety is the shared belief that members of a team feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks.

Source: Gartner (2019)

A Key Element of Inclusion

Psychological Safety Is One of Seven Key Elements of Inclusion



Source: Gartner (2019)

Psychological Safety Has Many Benefits

Key Benefits to Successfully Promoting Psychological Safety



Fosters Mistake-Sharing, Learning, and Innovation



Promotes Teamwork



Encourages Employee Authenticity



Drives Business Outcomes

Source: Gartner (2019)

Psychological Safety Has Many Benefits

Key Benefits to Successfully Promoting Psychological Safety



Fosters Mistake-Sharing, Learning, and Innovation



Promotes Teamwork



Encourages Employee Authenticity



Drives Business Outcomes

Source: Gartner (2019)

Fosters Mistake-Sharing, Learning and Innovation

Psychological Safety Foster Mistake-Sharing, Enabling Teams to Learn and Innovate More Effectively



More Mistake-Sharing

When individuals feel they won't be punished for speaking up, they are more likely to openly share any mistakes they have made.



Increased Opportunities for Learning

When individuals openly share mistakes they have made, they have the opportunity to learn and course correct for the future.



Faster Innovation

When individuals are learning and course correcting, they are able to iterate faster and innovate more quickly in the long run.

Source: Gartner (2019)

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Key Benefits to Successfully Promoting Psychological Safety



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Promotes Teamwork



Encourages Employee Authenticity



Drives Business Outcomes

Source: Gartner (2019)

Promotes Teamwork

Psychological Safety Promotes Teamwork



Increases Interpersonal Integrity

- Decisions and interactions become more consistent
- Employee desire to hear the truth about a situation, no matter how unpleasant, increases

Encourages Productive Conflict

- Conflicts about team roles and responsibilities are effectively resolved
- Overall team performance improves
- Team members feel respected and heard after conflict resolution

Source: Gartner (2019)

Psychological Safety Has Many Benefits

Key Benefits to Successfully Promoting Psychological Safety



Fosters Mistake-Sharing, Learning, and Innovation



Promotes Teamwork



Encourages Employee Authenticity



Drives Business Outcomes

Source: Gartner (2019)

Encourages Employee Authenticity

Psychological Safety Encourage Employees to Act Authentically in the Workplace



Individuals do not express their authentic selves to avoid being perceived as:

- Ignorant
- Incompetent
- Intrusive
- Negative



When an employee is comfortable expressing their authentic self, they are more likely to:

- Speak up in meetings and share new ideas
- Express their opinions and voice when they disagree
- Go above and beyond in their role

Source: Gartner (2019)

Psychological Safety Has Many Benefits

Key Benefits to Successfully Promoting Psychological Safety



Fosters Mistake-Sharing, Learning, and Innovation



Promotes Teamwork



Encourages Employee Authenticity



Drives Business Outcomes

Source: Gartner (2019)

Drives Business Outcomes

Impact of Increased Psychological Safety on Business Outcomes



An increase in psychological safety corresponds to increases in:

- On-the-job effort
- Intent to stay
- Employee performance

Source: Gartner (2019)

Barriers to Psychological Safety

What Prevents Psychological Safety?

Four Factors Inhibiting Psychological Safety



Role Ambiguity



Mismatched Expectations



Interpersonal or Social Threats



Employee Well-Being


Source: Gartner (2019)

What Prevents Psychological Safety?

Four Factors Inhibiting Psychological Safety

 **Role Ambiguity**

 **Mismatched Expectations**

 **Interpersonal or Social Threats**

 **Employee Well-Being**

Source: Gartner (2019)

Role Ambiguity

Role Ambiguity Prevents Psychological Safety



Poor definitions of success as well as day-to-day role requirements can lead employees to fear taking risks on projects and in decision-making.


This can take away from overall psychological safety and contribute to low confidence levels.


Source: Gartner (2019)


What Prevents Psychological Safety?

Four Factors Inhibiting Psychological Safety

 Role Ambiguity

 **Mismatched Expectations**

 Interpersonal or Social Threats

 Employee Well-Being

Source: Gartner (2019)

Mismatched Expectations

Mismatches of Environmental Expectations Prevent Psychological Safety

Mismatched expectations in organizational settings, whether real or perceived, can occur when an employee believes their work environment expects them to behave, look or express themselves in a way that is contradictory to their authentic selves.

Three areas where mismatched expectations most often occurs in organizations are as follows:



Values and Ideals

Employee values and ideologies, what they believe in and whether they can express them.



Surface Characteristics

How employees appear physically (e.g., gender, race, age, etc.).



Expression

Whether employees feel they can express themselves and their emotions authentically.

Source: Gartner (2019)

What Prevents Psychological Safety?

Four Factors Inhibiting Psychological Safety

 Role Ambiguity

 Mismatched Expectations

 **Interpersonal or Social Threats**

 Employee Well-Being

Source: Gartner (2019)

Interpersonal or Social Threats

Interpersonal and Social Threats Prevent Psychological Safety

Three types of interpersonal threats feared by employees are as follows:



Negative Judgment

Being judged negatively by peers or as ignorant or incompetent.



Ridicule or Rejection

Being ridiculed, rejected, blamed, disrespected, intimidated, or disregarded.



Retributive Behavior

Being punished with negative performance reviews, unfavorable work assignments, or threatened with limited promotion potential.

Source: Gartner (2019)

What Prevents Psychological Safety?

Four Factors Inhibiting Psychological Safety



Role Ambiguity



Mismatched Expectations



Interpersonal or Social Threats



Employee Well-Being

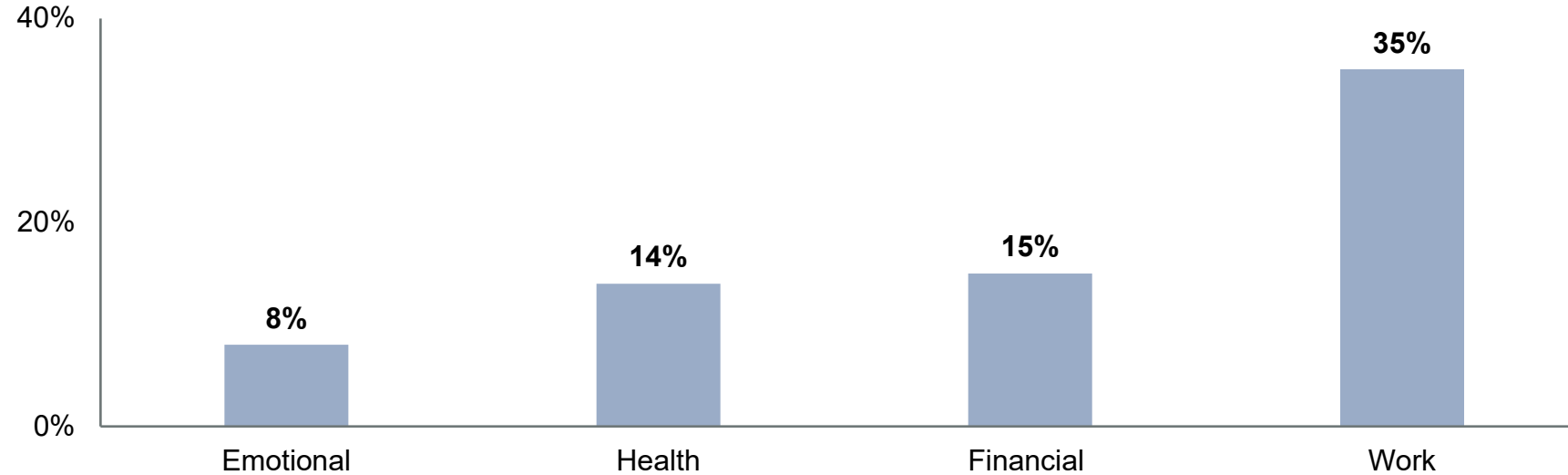
Source: Gartner (2019)

Employee Well-Being

Four Types of Employee Well-Being Have an Impact on Their Psychological Safety

Individuals that indicate having high levels of well-being are more likely than their peers to say they feel psychologically safe in their environment.

Maximum Impact of Different Types of Employee Well-Being on Psychological Safety



n = 7,502 employees

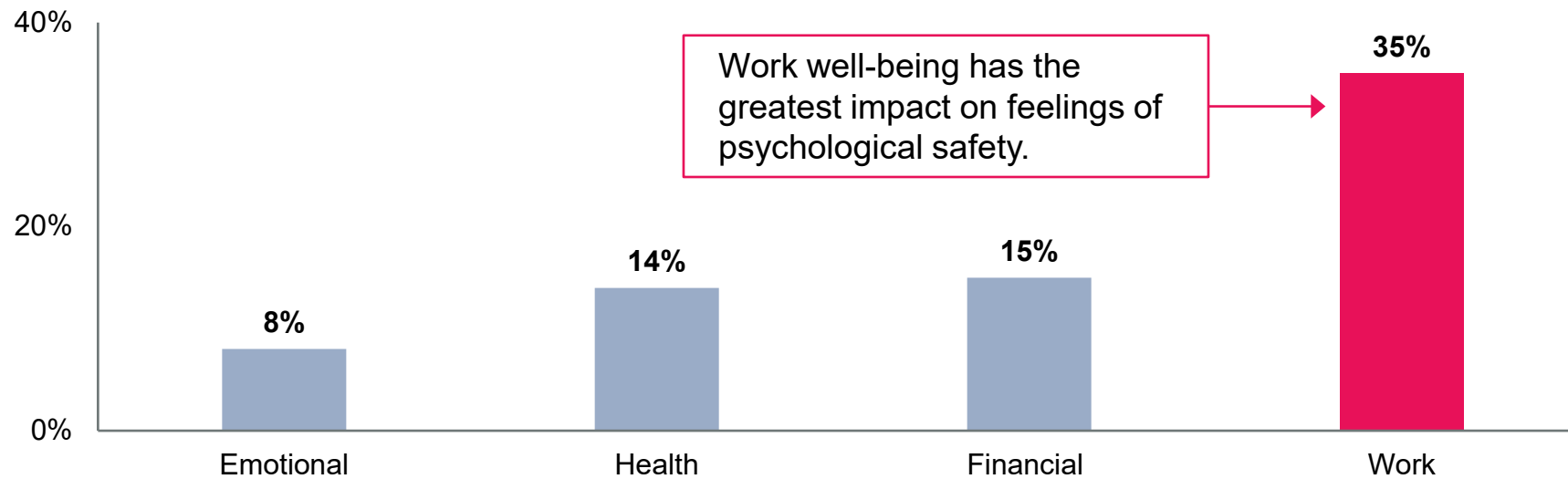
Source: Gartner 2017 Culture Workforce Survey

Employee Work Well-Being

An Employee's Work Well-Being Has the Greatest Maximum Impact on Psychological Safety

Individuals that indicate having high levels of well-being are more likely than their peers to say they feel psychologically safe in their environment.

Maximum Impact of Different Types of Employee Well-Being on Psychological Safety



n = 7,502 employees

Source: Gartner 2017 Culture Workforce Survey

Well-being is largely shaped by an employee's experience in their workplace.

Organizational leadership have the critical opportunity to drive work well-being on their teams by supporting positive working relationships and experiences.

Leadership's Role in Fostering Psychological Safety

Who Can Promote Psychological Safety?

Each Level of Leadership Has a Role in Promoting Psychological Safety in the Organization

CHRO



Sets the Stage

**HR Leaders (e.g. Heads of D&I,
L&D Leaders, etc.)**



Cultivates

**Managers and
HR Professionals**



Fosters Daily

Source: Gartner (2019)

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Fosters Daily

- Promoting a culture of open communication and feedback
- Creating inclusive environmental expectations
- Focusing on the well-being of employees
- Admitting when there are mistakes

Source: Gartner (2019)

How CHROs Can Promote Psychological Safety

Tactics CHROs Can Use to Successfully Promote Psychological Safety



Promoting a culture of open communication and feedback

- Create a shared understanding of the work being done and emphasizing why each employee's input and feedback matters.
- Communicate how employee input and feedback help improve processes and may be the only way to catch mistakes.
- Ask for and accept feedback from throughout the organization and praise those that provide it to ensure employees are comfortable speaking up.

Creating inclusive environmental expectations

- Work with HR leaders to instill and reinforce inclusive behaviors.
- Communicate the organization's values and emphasize its commitment to diversity and inclusion and appreciation for employees' unique ideas, characteristics, and emotions.

Focusing on the well-being of employees

- Encourage leaders and managers to use positive and flexible management styles to better meet employees' development needs.

Admitting when there are mistakes

- Set the example for employees to encourage them to both admit their own mistakes, and take greater interpersonal risks without fearing retribution.

Source: Gartner (2019)

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Each Level of Leadership Has a Role in Promoting Psychological Safety in the Organization

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**HR Leaders (e.g. Heads of D&I,
L&D Leaders, etc.)**



Cultivates

- Inviting input on what is inhibiting psychological safety
- Creating consistent messaging on culture and expectations
- Providing trainings on psychological safety and learning opportunities for managers and employees

**Managers and
HR Professionals**



Fosters Daily

Source: Gartner (2019)

How HR Leaders Can Promote Psychological Safety

Tactics HR Leaders Can Use to Successfully Promote Psychological Safety



Inviting input on what is inhibiting psychological safety

- Invite employees to provide their perceptions of psychological safety at the organization and factors that might be inhibiting to demonstrate your desire for employee input.

Creating consistent messaging on culture and expectations

- Ensure that the environmental expectations, culture of the organization and promotion of interpersonal risk-taking are consistently communicated to employees.

Providing trainings on psychological safety and learning opportunities for managers and employees

- Provide managers and employees with trainings to define what psychological safety is, what it means for your organization, and what each employee can do to foster it within the organization.
- Provide managers with tactics for navigating tough conversations with employees involving things such as career conversations, promotions, etc.
- Implement and encourage managers to use nudges to contribute to a positive workplace environment for employees.

Source: Gartner (2019)

Who Can Promote Psychological Safety?

Each Level of Leadership Has a Role in Promoting Psychological Safety in the Organization

CHRO



Sets the Stage

- Promoting a culture of open communication and feedback
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HR Leaders (e.g. Heads of D&I, L&D Leaders, etc.)



Cultivates

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Managers and HR Professionals



Fosters Daily

- Clarifying role and project expectations
- Recognizing and rewarding employee successes
- Prioritizing learning, not just results
- Responding positively to questions, doubts and confusion
- Taking employee preferences around management and communication style
- Using effective conversation tactics
- Openly discussing and leveraging mistakes as learning opportunities
- Trusting employees

Source: Gartner (2019)

How Managers and HR Professionals Can Promote Psychological Safety

Tactics Managers and HR Professionals Can Use to Successfully Promote Psychological Safety



Clarifying role and project expectations

- Take the time to set clear goals and verbalize expectations for employees to help them feel confident in their roles and throughout their projects.

Recognizing and rewarding employee successes

- Recognize and reward employees for their performance.

Prioritizing learning, not just results

- Prioritize learning by emphasizing the importance of taking creative risks that produce positive project outcomes that may not have been anticipated.

Responding positively to questions, doubts, and confusion

- Express appreciation for employees' willingness to vocalize questions, doubts, and confusion, and help them determine the best next steps.

Taking employee preferences around management and communication style

- Take the time to understand direct reports' preferences around check-ins, communication, and receiving feedback.

Using effective conversation tactics

- Consulting – asking your employees for input
- Considering – acknowledging, celebrating, and contemplating their input
- Closure – providing closure and following up on employee concerns and content

Openly discussing and leveraging mistakes as learning opportunities

- Model a mindset shift to encourage employees to learn from mistakes.
- Discuss past personal mistakes you have made to help foster an environment where employees feel comfortable communicating mistakes and challenges.

Trusting employees

- Demonstrate trust for direct reports and employees to promote confidence in their perceptions of their abilities and risk-taking.

Assessing and Monitoring Psychological Safety

How You Can Monitor The Impact

Strategy for HR Leaders to Monitor the Impact Psychological Safety Has on Their Organization

1

Determine Which Metrics to Track

Sample Metrics

- Reported Mistakes
- Individual Employee Performance
- Team Performance
- Employee Participation in Meetings
- Collaboration Across the Organization
- Employee Satisfaction

2

Create a Process for Collecting Metrics

- Determine your feedback connection channel
- Determine your methods of collection
- Create consistent data collection and reporting processes
- Determine times to discuss results
- Meet to discuss next steps

Qualitatively Assess Current and Future Levels

Questions for HR Leaders to Use in Interviews or Focus Groups to Assess Levels of Psychological Safety

Assessing Current Levels of Psychological Safety

- Do you feel welcome to express your true feelings at work? **
- Do you believe anyone would harass you for expressing contradictory opinions? *
- Do you feel comfortable bringing up problems and issues related to work? *
- Are you afraid to speak honestly to your managers? *
- Do you feel comfortable providing honest feedback in employee surveys at your organization? *
- Do you feel that you are allowed to express your authentic self? *
- Do you feel encouraged to present yourself the way you are? *
- Do you think diverse thoughts are accepted?
- Are interpersonal relationships transparent?
- Do you feel you can communicate openly?
- Have you ever felt rejected for being different?
- Do you feel enabled to confidently hold conversations with leaders when addressing difficult topics?
- Do you feel mistakes you have made are held against you?
- Do you feel safe to take risks in your work?
- Have you found it easy to ask your teammates for help?
- Have you ever felt someone tried to undermine your efforts?
- Do you feel your unique skills and talents are valued and utilized on your team?

* - These questions were identified in Gartner's Organizational Inclusion Index

** - This question was identified as the most representative item for determining levels of psychological safety in Gartner's Organizational Inclusion Index

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

- Psychological safety is a shared belief that a team feels comfortable taking interpersonal risks.
- The benefits include increases in mistake-sharing, learning and innovation, teamwork, employee authenticity, on-the-job effort, performance, and intent to stay.
- Factors that inhibit psychological safety include role ambiguity, mismatches of real or perceived environmental expectations, interpersonal or social threats, and employee well-being.
- CHROs, HR leaders and managers and HR professionals all have critical roles in fostering psychological safety in their organization.
- CHROs should set the stage for the organization and focus on promoting open communication and feedback; creating inclusive environmental expectations/culture; focusing on mental well-being; and admitting when mistakes are made.
- HR leaders should cultivate an environment that supports psychological safety by focusing on inviting input on current factors inhibiting psychological safety; using effective conversation tactics (three C's); creating consistent messaging on culture and expectations; and providing trainings and nudges to managers and employees on psychological safety.
- Managers and HR professionals are uniquely positioned to ensure psychological safety is present in employees' day-to-day work by clarifying role and project expectations; recognizing and rewarding employee successes; prioritizing learning over performance when possible; responding positively to questions, doubts, and confusion; forgiving and admitting to mistakes; treating employees how they'd like to be treated; and finally trusting their employees.