



Article

Psychological safety

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A study of heart surgery teams moving from open heart to keyhole surgery looked at the factors that most influenced how the teams evolved to achieve the required levels of speed and quality in their operations. Overwhelming, the key factor was psychological safety -- the environment, where people in the team, regardless of status or experience, are able to:

- Speak openly about their concerns and fears
- Admit weaknesses and ask for help
- Challenge constructively and offer help to others
- Trust the people around them

The questionnaire *How psychologically safe is this team?* provides a useful resource for assessing how psychologically safe you and your colleagues feel within your team environment.

As a line manager, building psychological safety is essential in creating a coaching culture within your team. Some of the practical steps you can take include:

- Make it clear that you genuinely do want other people's opinions and ideas, and that you will listen to them. Tell them, too, how helpful their thoughts have been in your thinking, even if you have not gone along with their suggestions
- Take the lead in disclosing your own fears and concerns
- Make it clear that mistakes are a valuable source of learning. (Many teams give a "Mistake of the Month Award" to the colleague, who offers the best learning from a mistake – so talking about your mistakes is seen as a positive behaviour.)
- Encourage team members to challenge what they see around them – for example, some teams have regular "Challenge our assumptions" sessions
- Create a safe space, where people can say things without fear of retribution, resentment or embarrassment. A useful technique is to ask everyone to tell each of their colleagues "One thing I'd like you to do more of; and one I'd like you to do less of".
- Recognise when blaming or scapegoating is occurring and challenge what is happening. (And be prepared for team members to challenge you, as well.)

In coaching or mentoring sessions, emphasise confidentiality, appropriate disclosure and openness. Also, try to find a private environment that supports psychological safety.