4 Stages of Team Psychological Safety

Insights from "Psychological Safety: Without It, You Ain't Got Much!" by John O. Burdett, Orxestra Inc., © 2022

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Moving to Action

If we want people to operate in the kind of organisations we need to build, unbridled curiosity and habitually looking beyond the ways things happen today have to become the default behaviours.

Psychological safety kickstarts challenging established assumptions. It also:
1) Builds team resilience;
2) Is a catalyst in inclusion and diversity;
3) Lies at the centre of employee engagement;
4) Encourages risk taking;
5) Is the energy in innovation;
6) Fuels personal growth; and
7) Is a "must have" dimension of team chemistry.

Psychological safety evolves through four stages.

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1. Knowing – curiosity, being aware

Articulating the need for psychological safety. Creating the early road map. Discussing the meaning behind empowering language, e.g., humility, authenticity and openness. Establishing shared ownership.

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2. Sowing – ploughing under outdated notions of followership

Seeding the ground. Taking the first steps. Navigating the way forward. Unlearning. Letting go of unhelpful behaviour. Introducing appropriate processes. Defining the leadership and team behaviours demanded. Personal example from the team leader. Positive reinforcement.

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3. Growing – shared and collaborative practice

Appreciating that psychological safety is always a work in progress. Learning how to learn. Recognising and reinforcing the right behaviours. Quietly counselling any outliers. Defending/supporting risk taking. Shedding the mask. Building the confidence needed for the team to live in truth.

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4. Showing – servant leadership

Continuing to learn. Allowing the road map to fully unfold. Taking pride in the team's capacity to deal with the unexpected. Surfacing positive stories. Becoming a role model for others in the organisation.

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John has extensive international experience as a senior executive. As a consultant he has worked in more than 40 countries. His extensive consulting around organisation culture encompasses, literally, some of the world's largest organisations. John's coaching work, meanwhile, embraces a number of international CEOs. His books, articles and assessment tools are embraced by executives worldwide.

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