



Building

Psychological Safety

hello@focusu.com



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Chapter 1: The Art of Feeling Safe

According to a Google study, the highest-performing teams in organizations have one thing in common. That is psychological safety. Psychological safety is one of the essential characteristics of a successful and high performing team. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of what it means and how it can affect an organization's employees.

Incivility is a common trait that runs in several organizations across the world. It includes being mean to co-workers, humiliating subordinates in front of their peers, disrespectful behavior, and even reprimanding and punishing employees for their mistakes.



THE EFFECTS OF INCIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

McKinsey and Company describe incivility as the thoughtless actions conducted in a workplace that leave employees feeling undermined, disrespected, intentionally ignored, and publicly bel





It is caused by insensitive co-workers and a manager. It is anything that causes a flight-or-fight response. Incivility also causes health problems such as insomnia, stress, anxiety, and negative rumination (the process of mentally and repeatedly replaying disturbing workplace events or interactions with a boss or co-worker) long after the event has passed.

The ultimate goal of incivility is to hurt or harm the target. Incivility is a violation of workplace norms. Organizations that harbor incivility, harbor toxicity in the workplace. That, in turn, leads to low self-esteem in employees, underproductivity, and low profitability for the organization as a whole.

WHAT IS PSY(CHOLOGICAL SAFETY)?

Here is where psychological safety plays an important part. Psychological safety is all about providing a workplace environment that makes employers and employees feel safe. They have faith that they will be protected from social and interpersonal threats that will undermine their status or identity. They feel safe



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enough to ask for feedback, seek help, admit to errors or lack of knowledge, try new work-related activities, and voice their opinion knowing that they will be safe emotionally or psychologically.

The benefits of psychological safety

The benefits of psychological safety at the workplace cannot be undermined.

- It promotes a healthier mind and healthier health and the employee's overall wellbeing.
- It encourages employee retention and attraction.
- It promotes improved collaboration.
- It supports a high-performance culture.





Chapter 2: Is Yours a Psychologically, Unsafe Workplace?

How would you know if your workplace is psychologically unsafe? Some toxic environments are supported by management, while others stem from employees themselves.

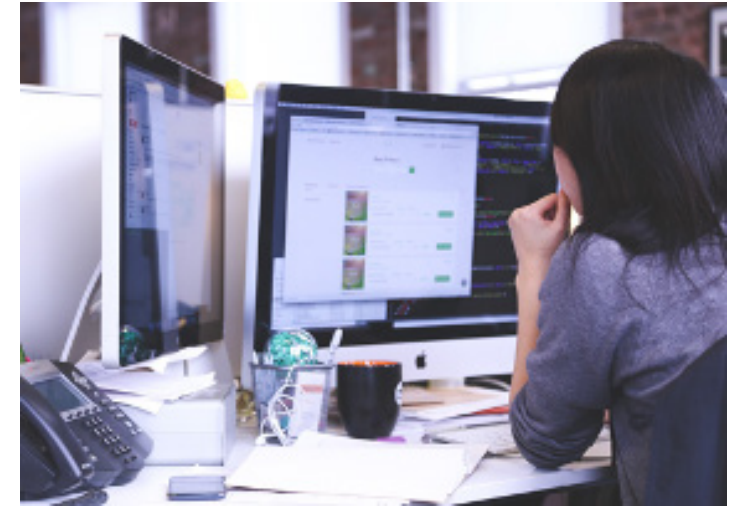


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HERE ARE TEN WARNING SIGNS.



1. Your boss insists on micromanaging the work methods

Good managers and supervisors are interested in the end product and trust you to employ any manner that suits you best to get the work done.

If your manager constantly questions your methods and insists on work done a particular way, it could cause endless frustration.





2. You are not made privy to information on company decisions

Effective managers have an excellent habit of communicating information with their team. On the other hand, managers and employers who are secretive about the decision-making process only contribute to a toxic work atmosphere, and leave their employees feeling belittled, confused, and insecure.



3. Your employer overlooks your legal rights

You have fundamental rights in the workplace. These rights include the right to work in an environment that is free from harassment and discrimination.

If you ever feel that your rights are being overlooked or infringed upon, you could be working in a psychologically unsafe workplace.



4. You are afraid to say, “no.”

Teamwork is critical in an organization. However, if your manager or employer demands that you make personal sacrifices and work late nights every day of the week, you know he is making an unreasonable request. But you still can't stand up for your rights and say, “no,” because you are scared of the consequences.





5. An unnatural employee turnover

Happy employees tend to stay with the organization – unhappy employees don't. When employees realize that a workplace environment is toxic, they leave. If you notice employees quitting or looking for other jobs, take it as a warning sign.



6. Continual irregular communication or no communication at all

No matter how busy a workplace environment is, communication is a must. No connection leads to a very lax and laid back workplace.

Irregular communication occurs when someone up the chain suddenly demands to know what is happening within a particular team. That leads to a massive pile-up of requested reports and correspondence that leads to a lot of stress.



7. No procedures or policies in place

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8. Emotional outcomes

Problems in your personal life or at the workplace can take a toll on your work. Is your organization flexible enough to help you through your emotional situation? Psychological safe environments pave the way for flexibility during emotionally stressful periods.



9. Hiring and promoting the wrong people

Very often, high-performing employees get promotions to posts for which they lack the required skills. In the bargain, hard-working employees who possess the necessary skills are side-lined. The result is that the promoted employee is unable to cope with and do justice in his new role.



10. Narcissistic bosses

Some managers simply cannot handle the truth and often contradict themselves, lie, or pass on contradictory information. Some managers want to take all the credit. Other managers blame their team when things go wrong. All these scenarios lead to low performance, decreased productivity, and increased stress levels.





Chapter 3:

The Poisonous Apple

Understanding the signs of a toxic workplace is one thing, but finding out who's responsible for a toxic workplace a completely different ballgame. It's easy to play the blame-game and lay the fault on the management alone. But the truth is that every level of the workplace can contribute to a toxic workplace – the organization, the management, and the employees themselves. Usually, it's a combination of all there. Here is a look at who is held responsible for a toxic workplace.

THE ORGANIZATION

At an organizational level, toxicity often starts with problems with the organization's core values.



1. Your organization does not have well-articulated and well-outlined core values

Core values are the expectations a business has of its employees – how they behave and perform. They are also the foundation for all business decisions.





Without well-defined core values, it will be difficult to understand, establish, or convey the organization's culture to your workforce.



2. Your organization does not follow its core values.

Your organization has well-outlined core values, but they are just to make the company look good on the website. In reality, neither does the management or its employees follow the core values.



3. You cannot cite your company's core values

Do you know what your company's core values are? Are those values communicated to your employees regularly? How are these values communicated? If employees cannot cite the organization's core values, then there is something wrong, and you must rethink your communication methods.



4. The organization's processes and procedures are not aligned with its core values.

Misalignment of the company's core values with processes and procedures leads to an environment, unlike one envisioned for the company. For example, if empowering employees is a core value, but managers insist on micromanagement, it will be hard to get the results you envisioned for the company.





5. Sticking to the old way of doing things

Organizations should be able to adapt and modify elements to stay competitive but also to remain aligned with their core values. Organizations often insist on sticking to the “old way” of doing things – leading to misalignment with their core values.



6. Lack of focus on the drives and needs of employees.

No two individuals are alike. Each individual has their own needs and drives. But when organizations miss this and treat its employees as a whole rather than considering the needs and drives of individual employees, productivity suffers.

THE MANAGEMENT

At an organizational level, toxicity often starts with problems with the organization’s core values.



7. Providing employees with irregular feedback

Employees crave feedback. It gives them a sense of direction, and they know what the organization expects of them. But managers very often do not provide feedback or provide very little feedback to their team. That leaves employees wondering what their managers expect of them.





8. Managers fail to uphold the organization's values

Managers hold a high post, and their team looks up to them. When managers fail to enforce the organization's values, they set a poor example for their team to follow. It also creates a very toxic work environment.



9. Managers sympathize with employees.

There is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Managers who sympathize with employees and compromise on standards to keep employees happy contribute to a toxic environment. In contrast, managers who empathize with unhappy employees and resolve the issue for the betterment of the organization and employees contribute to a healthy workplace.



10. Managers make it evident that they disagree with a company's decision

Even if a manager disagrees with a company's decision, it is critical for management to present a united front. This way, they serve as a filter for negativity. Unfortunately, most managers want to be liked by their subordinates, and would rather impress them by showing them that he stands with the employees rather than the management.





11. Lack of mentoring and coaching in line with the organization's core values.

Managers who fail to talk about the organization's core values with their employees fail to contribute to the organization's wellbeing. Managers who are not interested in their employees' professional and personal growth, and lack mentoring and coaching skills fail to do justice to their job.

EMPLOYEES

At an organizational level, toxicity often starts with problems with the organization's core values.



12. Entitlement

A sense of right or ego gets in the way of productivity. Employees who believe they were entitled to a promotion begin to underperform. They are disappointed and refuse to understand that someone better than they deserved the job.





13. A wrong fit

Employees who are not right for a particular job (poor performers) or the organization (poor employees) continue to stay on, deterring the overall health of the workplace environment.



14. Resistance to change

Employees resist change, refuse to adapt to change, and refuse to take risks when changes take place within the organization.



15. Employees are not forthcoming and honest with others

Employees who disagree with policies or decisions within the organization might hold back on their opinions for fear of conflict. This silence can lead to bitterness, resentment, and even disengagement from their job. In short, it can fuel toxicity.



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Chapter 4: Creating the Safety Net

In a psychologically safe workplace, employees are not fearful of consequences. They feel confident to speak up and express their concerns, with the full knowledge they will be heard, and not rebuked or humiliated. They are also willing to take risks without the fear of untoward consequences. They feel psychologically safe.

You can detoxify a toxic workplace to create a psychologically safe workplace. Both management and employees can contribute to this. Here are some practical ways to create a safety net and a psychologically safe workplace environment.

HOW MANAGERS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT



1. Show engagement

Top managers and frontline managers can set the stage and create a shared understanding of the work at hand and why everyone's input matters.

Next, invite input from the team. Directly asking individual employees for





their opinion is a great way to get employees to speak up and be heard. The manager must respond appreciatively to responses from individual teammates without rebuking or humiliating them.



2. Demonstrate understanding

Demonstrate understanding by recapping what has been shared by the team and individual team members. Body language such as nodding your head, leaning forward, and your facial expressions play a crucial role in showing you understand.



3. Build trust by avoiding blame

Don't look for someone to blame when things go wrong. When building a psychologically safe workplace environment, your employees and team need to be able to trust that you will not chastise them – even if they have made a mistake. Instead of blaming someone, ask questions like, “what can we do differently next time?”



4. Be mindful and demand your employees to be the same

Ensure that when you are at work, that you are entirely conscious of your work. Ensure individuals do the same. Let them bring their unique





personalities, work styles, and preferences to the workplace – all these contribute and help build self-awareness. Let them understand your work values and preferences and understand theirs.



5. Don't operate from the standpoint of what you want

Contrary to the saying that you should treat people the same way you want to be treated, the rule here is to treat your employees the way they want to be treated. That holds for them as well – they should treat you as you would want to be treated and not as they would want to be treated.



6. Nurture curiosity

A workforce that nurtures curiosity promotes self-awareness, mindfulness, innovation, creativity, and better communication. That leads to agility and adaptability, as well as engagement. Learning and inquiry are supported, despite the risks of uncertainty. In a psychologically safe environment, employees are willing to take this risk.



7. Promote healthy conflict

Healthy conflict involves the freedom to ask questions. Asking questions





and debating ideas makes employees feel respected and heard. Don't judge them for their questions or ideas. Employees will not hesitate to share ideas – some of which might prove to be invaluable to your organization.



8. Give employees a voice

Do not limit communication. Create liberal pathways for employees to meet with leadership. Encourage conversations between various hierarchies within the organization. Provide multiple channels for feedback.



9. Earn your employees' trust

Trust is a critical element of a psychologically safe workplace environment. Trust can only be earned, and you must do your part to secure your team and employees' trust.



10. Encourage creativity

When you shut the doors to creativity, you are forcing your employees to hold back. A safety net must be free of threat. Employees must feel free to follow their instincts and build on their creativity. They should feel comfortable enough to take risks without the fear of penalties.





HOW EMPLOYEES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

Employees can do their bit to contribute to creating a safety net within the organization. Here are some tips on how to do that.



1. Create a support network with your teammates

If you believe that your workplace culture is toxic, the chances are that you are not alone. Your teammates might feel the same way too. Talking about it with them can help relieve a lot of the stress you feel, build trust with your teammates, and increase your productivity level.



2. Talk to your manager

If you feel your workplace environment is toxic, talk to your manager about it. Even if your manager is contributing to the toxicity, talking to him about your wellbeing and concerns of the toxic environment can motivate him to take appropriate action and get the team in order.





3. Understand that there is only so much that you can control.

Don't try to detoxify the entire organization. Do your part to contributing to a psychologically safe workplace, and you will influence others around you to change as well. Stay calm in all circumstances, and instead, be the change you want to see.

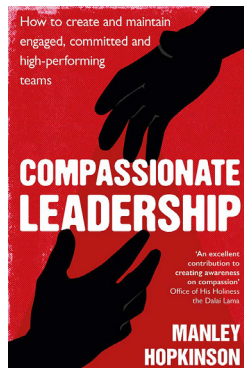
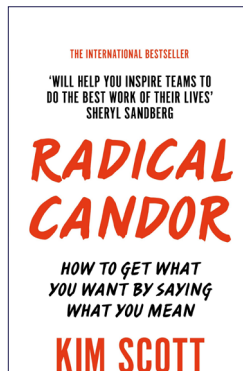
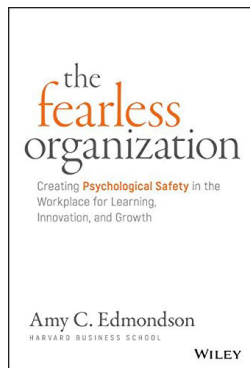
CONCLUSION

Creating and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace is very critical to ensuring your employees are happy, engaged, confident, and productive.





A few books that we recommend:



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