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Case study

Team Psychological
Safety for
Team Leaders



Executive Summary

The Team Psychological Safety Programme (TPS) for Department and Team Leaders has had a significant impact on participants.

Analysis of feedback from participants identifies that the programme has delivered:

- **Increased awareness and understanding of the importance of building TPS**
- **Greater capability among these leaders to affect cultural change**
- **Recognition of the crucial role of leaders in fostering TPS**
- **Increased focus on the quality of relationships within teams**
- **Individual commitment to action on TPS elements**

Additional data captured throughout the programme identified that of the 7 elements of TPS (see **Appendix A**), this organisation needs to be particularly aware of 'Taking Risks', 'Reaction to Mistakes' and 'Dealing with Issues' in future. However, the data TOWARD has collected will only provide a snapshot view at a moment in time. The ongoing value of the work undertaken is the level of awareness of TPS within the business, and within individual teams. Continued investment in TPS in the organisation will be an essential contributor to the development of high performing teams.

Context

TOWARD initially delivered a Team Coaching Programme with C-suite and Senior Leadership teams in this organisation in 2021. A central outcome of this work was a recognition of the importance of Team Psychological Safety (TPS) in improving team performance across the organisation. A commitment was made by the Senior leadership to cascade TPS learning to other levels of the business via the delivery of a development programme for Department & Team leaders in 2022.

TPS Development Programme

The elements of the Development programme were as follows:

One initial Survey across 300 leaders in the organisation assessing their perception of TPS where they worked in the business.

Two TPS workshops attended on 328 occasions by leaders across the business.

Eight bespoke digital modules of self directed learning with videos, podcasts, articles and exercises for self reflection & team use.

Initial Survey

Toward designed a survey for the organisation to help build initial understanding of how Department and Team Leaders perceived the level of TPS within the business. Completing the survey was also a valuable starting point for staff in raising their awareness of their own contribution to TPS. 186 leaders completed the survey in total.

Team Psychological Safety can be measured across seven elements (see **Appendix A**), and in the TOWARD survey, Mutual Support was perceived to be the strongest element within this organisation with an average score of 5.73/7.00. Dealing with Issues was viewed to be the least strong TPS element with an average score of 4.99/7.00. The TOWARD development programme focussed on all 7 elements of TPS.

Element of TPS	Survey Score (Max of 7)
Mutual Support	5.73
Asking for Help	5.65
Appreciation	5.57
Reaction to Mistakes	5.53
Accepting Diversity	5.46
Taking Risks	5.34
Dealing with Issues	4.99

Workshops

Two workshops were held in 2022, with 328 participants engaging in a mix of face to face and remote sessions. There was excellent engagement from staff at these workshops and, after analysis of feedback from participants, the top themes in terms of ‘lessons learned’ and ‘takeaways’ at the 2 workshops were as follows:

- 1. There are real benefits to shared learning. Everyone is facing similar challenges.**
- 2. TPS needs to be considered and developed within individual teams in the business.**
- 3. The quality of interactions and relationships within the team is extremely important.**
- 4. Team leaders have an essential role in building TPS.**
- 5. There is a diversity of views approaches/ideas within this organisation. Assumptions cannot be made that all team members think and feel the same.**

Feedback on workshops was extremely positive:

- **87%** of respondents scored the programme 8 and above.
- **95%** of participants had a better understanding of TPS following the workshop.
- **99%** of respondents noted they would be implementing actions relating to TPS as a result of the workshops.
- The workshops were described as “An excellent environment to create thought, discussion and action, on how to understand your people and how they feel.”

Digital Modules

In Summer 2022, programme participants had access to 8 bespoke digital modules of self directed learning on TPS with videos, podcasts, articles and exercises for self-reflection and team use. These modules further expanded on the 7 elements and 4 antecedents of Team Psychological Safety and were designed to deepen the learning of the programme participants on TPS. Leaders engaging with this content described it as ‘thought provoking’ and ‘pragmatic’ for use both personally and with their teams. TOWARD estimate that 60% of participants.

Conclusion

This programme has been successful in developing an awareness and understanding among leaders of the importance of building TPS in the organisation. The programme has also supported these leaders in the development of the skills and capability necessary to affect cultural change. Participants identified learning, takeaways and commitments to action, and the feedback from post workshop surveys and the post programme evaluation would suggest the programme has had a significant impact on those involved (see **Participant Feedback**).

Appendix A

Seven Elements of Team Psychological Safety:

Element of TPS	Definition
Taking Risks	Team members feel it is safe to take risks on this team.
Reaction to Mistakes	Making mistakes is not held against team members.
Appreciation	Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.
Mutual Support	Team members support one another and don't act to undermine others' efforts.
Accepting Diversity	Team members are not rejected for being different.
Dealing with Issues	Team members can bring up problems and tough issues safely.
Asking for Help	It is easy to ask others in the team for help.

Four Antecedents:

Element of TPS	Definition
Supportive organisation	The ease of access to resources and information reduces the level of insecurity the team experiences in dealing with their challenge.
Practice	Practice fields (or managerial learning laboratories); opportunities for teams to practise and to reflect upon the results, rather than to take real action.
Trust & Respect	Between the different pairs of individuals in the team.
Leader Behaviours	How the leader uses 'power' affects the psychological safety in the team, and further impacts the general team climate, the willingness of the team members to share knowledge and the motivation for team learning.

Sources

Edmondson, A (1999). "Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work"

Cauwelier, P (2014) "Building High Performance Teams"

Edmondson, A (2003) "Psychological Safety, Trust and Learning in Organisations: A Group -Level Lens" Boston

Participant Feedback

What they said

“It has made me focus on creating an environment where we can help colleagues to bring as much of themselves to the organisation as they wish in order to maximise their enjoyment and performance.”

“Made me more psychologically aware. I’ve been more prepared to take personal risks.”

“There is a difference between knowing and doing - however long we have been in a management role we can always learn. The sessions have definitely created some action points for me to focus on. Taking ownership of these is the next important step, else it will have been 5 hours wasted.”

“I thought I already did this but it made me realise that I can do more!”

“Held me accountable for my actions to drive a psychologically safe organisation (cross functional).”

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