



# CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

AN OFFICIAL CLIENT UPDATE OF PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA



Speaking with so many professionals for more than a decade where some of them were quite unfortunate to work in a so-called 'toxic workplace' reminded me of one forgotten critical aspect of managing people within the organization, which is creating psychological safety.

Amy Edmondson, a professor at Harvard Business School, first identified the concept of psychological safety in the workplace in 1999. Since then, she has observed how companies with a trusting workplace perform better.

Psychological safety is not about being nice, she says. It is about giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes, and learning from each other. Professor Edmondson argues that this kind of organizational culture is increasingly important in the modern economy.

One key element which is fundamental in creating psychological safety within an organization is a high level of trust between all the stakeholders in an organization, and building a high level of trust will always start from the leadership level, in this case from the very top level.

Various research results from leading educational institutions, such as Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley, and several others, indicated that within the work environment where trust has been built as part of the internal interaction within an organization, employees always understand that they can voice disagreement

## PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA

### HEAD OFFICE

MENARA PALMA, 12TH FLOOR  
JL HR RASUNA SAID KAV X-2 NO.6  
JAKARTA 12950 - INDONESIA  
TEL: +62 21 2939 1284  
FAX: +62 21 2939 1222

### SURABAYA OFFICE

PAKUWON CENTER, 23RD FLOOR  
JL EMBONG MALANG NO.1-5  
SURABAYA 60261 - INDONESIA  
TEL: +62 31 6000 3367  
FAX: +62 31 6000 3105

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or admitting they made an (inadvertent) mistake without fear of punishment or ostracism; this happens when leaders are able to create a safe environment for open discussion, encourage different perspectives during meetings and allow employees to disagree with them for constructive discussions that can lead to innovative ideas, or creative problem-solving to come up with solutions.

On the other hand, when psychological safety is missing, fear will always be present, and the team will continue to create needless drama. Fear is harmful to a company's efforts to achieve optimum productivity and unleashes the potential for success since employees can't be focused or innovative when they are afraid of the negative consequences.

Research has also found that when psychological safety is low, employees are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and depression due to their work.

How to create more psychological safety in the workplace? Here are several ways that leaders can easily and consistently do daily:

### **Introduce coaching as a pre-requisite skill for new leaders.**

It happens so many times that high-performing employees were promoted solely based on their previous achievements in the technical aspects, but rarely consider their ability to act as effective leaders. Therefore, provide them with an opportunity to learn coaching skills as a tool that enables personal development, soft skills development, career growth, and self-development of their team members. When leaders can act as coaches, it will be much easier for them to embrace the idea of creating psychological safety, at least for those people they manage directly.

### **Two-way communication based on empathy should be practiced at every level of the organization.**

To keep employees feeling safe, good leaders are always aware of the things that are going on around them and keep abreast of everything in the company. They regularly keep people in the loop regarding upcoming plans and projects, deadlines, and any changes taking place, good

or bad. Most importantly, leaders must also show empathy for others to develop two-way communication that is supportive, caring, and trustful.

### **Nurture a sense of connectedness between all members of the organization.**

Just like a sports team where it is compulsory for each team member to feel that they like one another and are part of a team with a common goal, which is winning a championship, leaders in the corporate world need to build a similar sense of connectedness between all members.

Successful companies are those in which the team members feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves. They become selfless and put the team's interests above their interests. The mindset that would create a sense of connectedness, where WE will always be the priority above ME.

It is important to understand that companies with a psychologically safe culture benefit from increased employee engagement, employee experience, better job satisfaction, more positive perception of the leaders, and higher retention rates while reducing absenteeism and employee turnover.

A psychologically safe work environment improves employees' sense of belonging and provides a sense of purpose in the workplace. This will automatically lead to higher levels of motivation and productivity throughout the company.

Lastly, psychological safety is also vital in times of crisis because it helps employees deal with sudden changes and uncertainties, especially at this moment when most businesses are trying to rebound from the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the past two years.

WRITTEN BY HARYO U. SURYOSUMARTO  
DESIGNED BY SHABRINA SEPTIANDINI



**HARYO U. SURYOSUMARTO**  
*Managing Director*  
*PT Headhunter Indonesia*