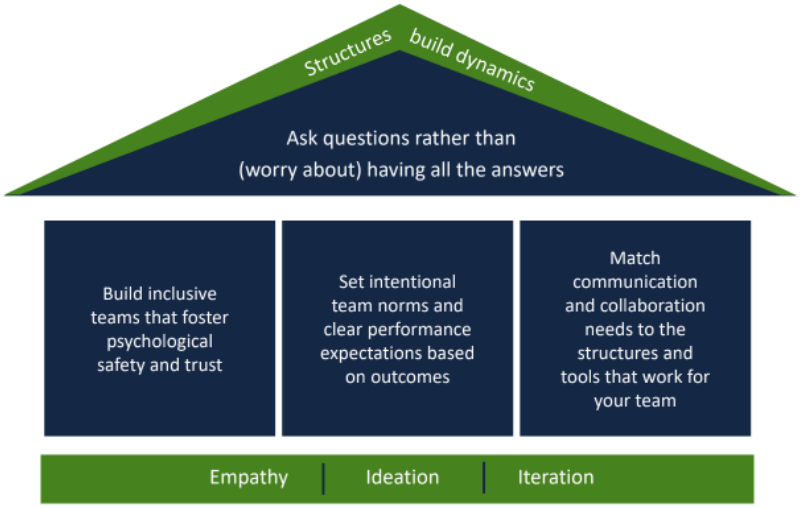
INTRODUCTION

BUILDING INCLUSIVE TEAMS THAT FOSTER PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

This pillar, Building Inclusive Teams and Trust, in the Toolkit for Team Building is designed to help you build and reinforce an environment for your team that encourages the active inclusion of every team member. It is the first of three pillars in this model for developing high-performing teams. Even though it is identified as the first in this model, please know that it is appropriate and encouraged to frequently engage in these structured and unstructured activities at any stage in the team's development. Also, it is highly recommended to revisit and continue building on this work throughout the year and particularly when a new team member is present as team dynamics shift over time. Promoting inclusion and trust, through repeated efforts, helps establish a safe foundation for teams to communicate expectations and collaborate.



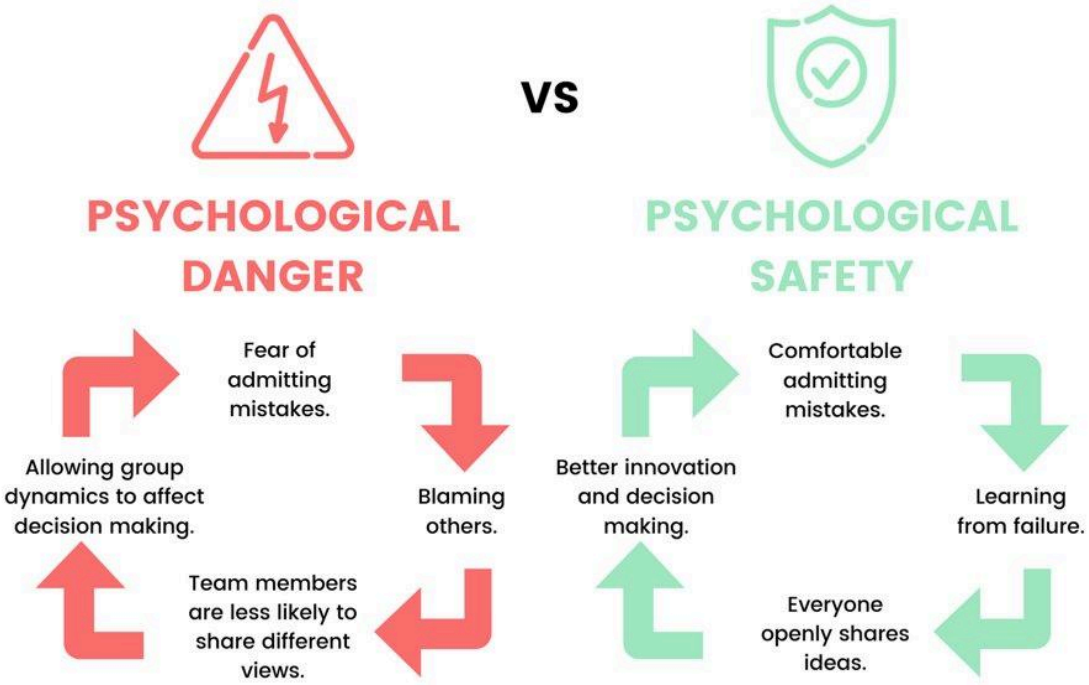
Why is this important?

Having a foundation of psychological safety and trust is consistently cited as the lynchpin for fostering inclusion and developing high-performing teams. Looking at the image (below), you can see there is a marked difference between a team that has psychological safety vs a team without psychological safety.

Without psychological safety, you have psychological danger. When this is present, there is fear of admitting mistakes and it becomes commonplace to blame others in order to avoid negative attention from the leader. When team members default to blaming others, then team members are more likely to feel the need to preserve their individual safety. In doing so, team members seek protection. They fear negative attention, and so they are less likely to offer different views.

Personal safety affects decision-making and, rather than seeking decision-making based on what may be effective for the organization, decisions are made based on how they will affect individual status in the group dynamics. They cycle loops and also reinforces psychological danger.

In contrast, team dynamics and decision-making are drastically different when there is psychological safety. With psychological safety, team members are comfortable admitting mistakes. On these teams, members address problems and challenges as opportunities for learning. Instead of blaming people and being hard on the people, the team looks to each other to openly share ideas in order to attack the process, policy, and/or procedures. By focusing on the business issues *vs.* the people, the team achieves better innovation and decision-making.



When a team has psychological safety, the team has greater interpersonal integrity and resolves conflict in more productive ways. They are more resilient, agile, collaborative, and responsive to changing circumstances. You will notice employees will desire to hear the truth about a situation, no matter how unpleasant. Team members will feel respected and heard after conflict resolution**.**

When can I use these activities?

We recommend anyone who wants to lead any of the toolkit activities to begin with recognizing their own journey and seeking support when needed. You can read more about ensuring you are ready to lead these activities in the toolkit's "Recognize your own journey" section of the Overview document.

Once you are certain you are ready to lead these activities, focusing on inclusivity and trust-building is a worthwhile investment of your time and energy, regardless of the team's development stage. You can use these when:

- You are a new manager or have a new team member.
- The team has had significant turnover.
- The team has undergone significant stress.
- When you notice people casting blame on others.

These activities are also a great way to periodically engage with the team in a low-stakes, fun way.

Change takes time

As you continue to work on the three pillars, the impact you'll see on your team will vary. The changes you see could be subtle and varied, obvious and immediate, or both at the same time. If you are engaging in these activities, you are making positive steps towards ensuring the key pillars that teams need to thrive - psychological safety, mutually agreed-upon expectations, and tools to communicate and collaborate effectively. Changes can be simple, and still not easy. Don't get discouraged. Keep at it. You are building the infrastructure for a high-performing team.

Menu of Activities

- **Quick Start Guide - Pulse Survey** — Pulse surveys are check-ins with your team to get a sense or "pulse" of the team regarding a specific topic.
- **CliftonStrengths Self-Facilitation Guide**-- The CliftonStrengths assessment gives teams a shared, asset-based language to understand how individuals naturally communicate, solve problems, and work effectively together. This step-by-step framework empowers you to lead an internal team session at your own pace—no outside facilitator required.

Resources for Learning More

- **[TED Talk]** Building a Psychologically Safe Workplace with Dr. Amy Edmonson
- **[Article]** Google's Guide to Team Effectiveness: research-based approach to developing high performing teams, including the importance of psychological safety as a key factor.

- **[Self-Guided Slide Deck]** Gartner's Psychological Safety Guidebook provides an overview of psychological safety and how it can be fostered within an organization. While this slide deck is written from the perspective of Human Resources the content can be applied to any department.
- **[Instructor-led Training]** Building Inclusive Teams and Trust: instructor-led training offered by UC San Diego Human Resources. This class will focus on understanding and developing the relationships between trust, inclusion, and engagement within teams.