PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT ICRC

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

- ✓ Psychological safety is the freedom to have a different opinion or to respectfully challenge leadership, without fear of embarrassment, humiliation, shame or any other negative consequence
- ✓ It is a form of *respect* across an organization

WHAT EFFECTS CAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY HAVE ON WORKERS' MENTAL WELL-BEING?

- ✓ Psychological safety optimizes engagement, performance and enriches a team with diverse views. It is also a key protector of **employees' mental health.**

  A workplace with low psychological safety is an environment characterized by stress and anxiety, negatively impacting mental health

  Some problems such as bullying or sexual harassment persevere precisely because people don't feel safe to speak up and fear the consequences of it

- ✓ Psychological safety allows employees to **feel comfortable** at work and, if combined with motivation and accountability, promotes optimal learning.

https://peopletalking.com.au/project/psychological-safety/

- ✓ Psychological safety has effects on individual, team and organizational level

1. Individual level

- ✓ Psychological safety **decreases anxiety and defense mechanisms**, allowing the team to focus on collective goals rather than on protecting the self
- ✓ Psychological safety influences employees' work engagement and predicts creative work and the sharing of knowledge

2. Team level

- ✓ Psychological safety **fosters positive emotions, and increases peer support behavior** and cohesion in teams, positively impacting workers' mental health
- ✓ Psychological safety has a positive effect on group performance, as it increases the ability to communicate openly.
- ✓ A psychologically safe environment enables divergent thinking and creativity, and is more inclusive

3. Organizational level

- ✓ Psychological safety increases the perception of an organizational culture that **values their employees and their well-being**
- ✓ Psychological safety has a positive impact on organizational performance and learning, by increasing the climate of trust, cooperation, and the use of shared codes
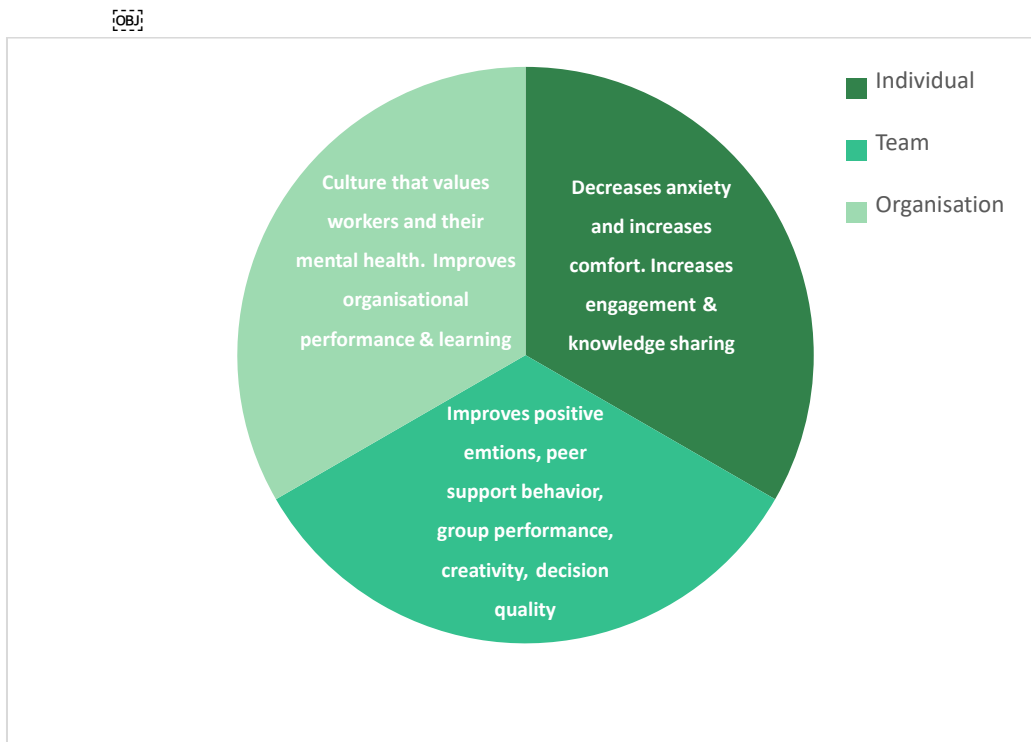
HOW CAN MANAGERS IMPROVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

HOWEVER it's not only a responsibility of the leader. It is a group-level phenomenon

1. De-stigmatise failure

WHY DO IT? Blame increases anxiety, leads people to be defensive, not admit to mistakes and hampers innovation

HOW? Subtle shifts in language can help e.g. replacing "mistake" with "an unsuccessful attempt"

2. Demonstrate fallibility and humility

WHY DO IT? People will be resistant to share ideas if the boss appears to project an aura of 'knowing it all'. By admitting to vulnerability and fallibility you allow for others to open up

HOW? Acknowledging own mistakes and committing to learning from them will encourage those around us to do the same

3. Responding and not reacting by practicing non-judgmental listening

WHY DO IT? Non-judgmental listening will create a safe environment for optimal interaction. This is crucial to make sure that people feel valued

HOW? Automatically disregarding opinions sends the message that its better not to speak unless you are 100% right. Promote the idea that all opinions are welcomed and open for discussion

4. Respond productively

WHY DO IT? To build trust one must do more than just listen

HOW? Stating trust "I believe in your decision"; re-considering your views and asking everyone to participate, if needed asking direct questions to encourage contributions

5. Manage conflict early

WHY DO IT? Conflict can damage performance and have a negative effect of workers' well-being. However, correctly managed conflicts will promote personal growth and creativity

HOW? Depict conflict as a collaborator ("healthy conflict") and not an adversary. When conflict arises, it could be useful to ask the question "How could we achieve mutually desirable outcomes?"

6. Ask and listen to feedback and signs of fears

WHY DO IT? If the manager is the only one giving feedbacks, it can limit growth and promote a culture of fear. If as a manager, you don't hear your areas of improvement in managing people you might end up working oblivious to what is happening around you.

HOW? Be open to feedback. Encourage feedbacks in all directions and make sure there are no repercussions, and by empowering them to give constructive criticism

7. Be self-aware and promote self-awareness

WHY DO IT? People bring their "unique self" at work. Considering different personalities, preferences and work styles increases the feeling of respect and allows the person to give his/her best

HOW? For example, show self-awareness by sharing how you like to communicate or how you work best. Encourage your team to do the same and to respect the "unique selves" of others

8. Promote the sharing of concerns and doubts and provide regular spaces to discuss difficult situations or files

WHY DO IT? Demonstrating concern and interest for team-members' doubts, concerns and discussing with them difficult cases will make them feel supported

HOW? Let your team see you understand their pain points. Provide multiple channels for colleagues to share their concerns. Encourage them to reach out to you via email or other collaborative tools, as some workers might not feel comfortable doing so during a meeting

Without feeling safe we are not able to trust, and there is no team without trust (Paul Santagata)

For more tips and ideas for staff mental health and mutual support go to: **Staff Health Wiki**
Feel in need of psychological support? **Get in touch with Staff Health**

ICRC Staff Health Centre of Expertise

Further read:

https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/psychological-safety-and-the-critical-role-of-leadership-development?cid=other-eml-alt-mip-mck&hdpid=83b04e18-a1fa-4139-b84b-f29484d45f77&hctky=12611838&hlkid=b195211341e6478684bec1cfb90c0506

https://psychsafety.co.uk/create-psychological-safety-in-your-workplace/

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https://thriveglobal.com/stories/9-ways-to-increase-your-teams-psychological-safety/

https://www.predictiveindex.com/blog/psychological-safety-in-the-workplace/

https://www.quantumworkplace.com/future-of-work/create-psychological-safety-in-the-workplace

https://www.impraise.com/blog/what-is-psychological-safety-and-why-is-it-the-key-to-great-teamwork

https://hbr.org/2017/08/high-performing-teams-need-psychological-safety-heres-how-to-create-it

https://blog.jostle.me/blog/7-ways-to-create-psychological-safety-in-your-workplace