MODULE OVERVIEW

When your team goes quiet: Building psychological safety

Adaptive module | ~20 min

Studying hospital teams, Amy Edmondson expected the best to make fewer errors; she found the opposite: the top performers reported more of them, because everyone dared to speak up. This climate, called psychological safety, can be built. The module first shows how to recognize its absence: silence in meetings, flat discussions, few ideas, and hidden errors. It then gives five manager practices, from going around the table with the manager speaking last to sharing a recent mistake publicly.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

01 Understand what psychological safety is: being able to say “I don’t know” or “I was wrong” without risk.

02 Spot the four signs of its absence: silence despite invitations to speak, flat meetings, no creative risk-taking, and errors that surface late.

03 Use the five practices that open up discussion, with the ritual question “What haven’t we said today?” among them.

04 Accept being vulnerable as a manager, and everyone’s role, so disagreements and warnings surface in time.

WHO IT’S FOR

Managers who want to hear disagreements and doubts in time, and teams who want to speak up about them.

- **Prerequisite:** none

HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

1 **Self-assessment**: on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.

2 **Expert video**: 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.

3 **Practice scenarios**: the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.

4 **Dated commitment**: one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.

5 **Memo to download**: key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Willingness to be vulnerable – Afthonios method, consistent with the work of Amy Edmondson (Harvard)
- Psychological safety – Amy Edmondson (Harvard)
- Groupthink – Irving Janis
- Five concrete practices (going around the table, a ritual question, inviting disagreement, sharing a mistake, no stupid ideas) – drawn from Afthonios coaching experience

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Amy Edmondson (Harvard Business School) – her research on hospital teams (from the 1990s) showed that the best-performing teams dared to report their mistakes, which led to the concept of psychological safety
- Google – Project Aristotle (about 180 teams): psychological safety is the top factor in team performance, ahead of skills, experience, and resources
- Irving Janis – theorist of groupthink in the 1970s
- Nembhard & Edmondson (2006) – inclusive leadership and psychological safety

Module created by Afthonios.com.

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