



Using Belbin to Build Psychological Safety in Teams.

By The Belbin Team | 25 July 2019

“In the best teams, members listen to one another and show sensitivity to feelings and needs.” ^[1]

That was the finding of Google’s ground-breaking Project Aristotle – the concept of psychological safety. Put simply, it’s the idea that, in order to succeed, people in teams need to feel safe to take risks and make mistakes without fear of recrimination. Establishing psychological safety frees up time and cognitive energy so that the team can expend it on projects, rather than threats from within.

“Psychological safety is not nearly as complicated as it may sound. After all, it’s really about truly making a team come together as one and putting forth an environment that sets up everyone for success.” – Forbes ^[2]

And shaping that environment is where Belbin comes in. Because it’s not as simple as away day trust-building exercises or one-to-ones. There are practical steps you can take to build psychological safety into your team’s everyday interactions.

1. Treat others as they’d like to be treated, not as you would.

Our default can be to work and interact on our own terms, but our own behavioural styles don’t sit well with everyone. We need to learn how others communicate, learn, interrelate and contribute to a team in order to understand how best to approach and work with them. Belbin Reports are a great starting-point, giving you a rundown of each team member’s preferences – and where they fit.

2. Encourage mistakes.

Organisations have long tried to eliminate the language of weakness from industry, because it can be difficult subject-matter. But too often, the result is a blame culture or one where mistakes are brushed under the carpet. Belbin Team Roles, or behavioural styles, encourage us to understand and own our weaknesses as a flipside to a certain behavioural strength. This approach gives a framework to talk about what goes wrong and why, and helps develop strategies to counteract these difficulties.

3. But keep accountability.

Whilst it should be OK to make mistakes without fear of blame, this doesn’t mean tolerating loose cannons who undermine the team’s efforts. Team members still need structure, purpose and boundaries. Accountability could mean committing to articulating our strengths effectively, sacrificing our preferred roles in the team where necessary in the short-term, and taking responsibility for own shortcomings by working in partnership with others.

References: ^[1] *What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team, NY Times.* ^[2] *Are You Psychologically Safe? Bernard Coleman III, Forbes Coaches Council, Forbes*



4. Encourage conflict.

Richard J. Hackman's study found that disagreements were good for a team, so long as they were handled in the right way. Whilst it might be tempting to work with others who take a similar approach to our own, behavioural diversity offers a better outcome, since important factors for success are less likely to be missed. At each stage, consider which contributions the project requires, not which selections will make for a quiet life.

5. Allow creativity to flourish.

Some team members (Plants and Resource Investigators, in Belbin Team Role terms) need space to explore new, left-field ideas and even to present incomplete work, without being too constricted. So long as they have the team's brief in mind, they should be given this space. This might mean restricting the influence of other team members (the analytical Monitor Evaluator or the practical Implementer, to name but a few) until these ideas have had a chance to blossom.

6. Promote honest, constructive feedback.

Leaders need to lead from the front by showing vulnerability and accepting and acting upon feedback where necessary. This example of growth reverberates throughout the team, letting others know that they can and should take constructive feedback on board. Belbin helps teams situate this feedback thoughtfully. We exclude overly-positive and overly-negative responses, and we identify potential areas for development along with helpful advice, based on our decades of experience in guiding teams.

7. As a leader, balance the needs for guidance and autonomy.

Each team member needs something different from their leader. Some need work delegated in detailed, specific terms. Others will resent intrusion and seek to be left to their own devices. Understanding how your Belbin Team Roles influence your leadership style gives you the tools to meet your team members' individual needs and help them reach their full potential.

Are you ready to begin building the environment your team needs to thrive? Contact us today to discover how Belbin Reports can promote psychological safety and deliver better performance.

www.belbin.co.nz or info@belbin.co.nz



References: ^[1] *What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team*, NY Times. ^[2] *Are You Psychologically Safe?* Bernard Coleman III, Forbes Coaches Council, Forbes