CLIMATE WORKSHOP

Subcontractor Engagement

AIM

The aim of this workshop is to have a group discussion about creating a climate in which everyone feels empowered to raise concerns, ask questions and speak up. In order to create this climate, this workshop will help participants to understand the concept of psychological safety, the various levels and factors which enable or inhibit such a climate.

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR ENGAGEMENT

People need to feel comfortable speaking up, asking (even naïve) questions, and disagreeing with the way things are in order to create and develop ideas that make a real difference. This doesn't mean that everyone needs to be "nice" all the time. For people to learn, ask questions, raise issues, admit mistakes and suggest ideas we need a climate which lowers social friction (interpersonal risk taking) and increases intellectual friction (speaking up and learning). We call this psychological safety. Psychological safety is being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career. It can be defined as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. In psychologically safe teams, team members feel accepted and respected.

The definition of psychological safety might be quite simple at first sight, but it's important what kinds of behaviors we actually mean with this.

In practical terms, psychological safety:

- It is about respect and permission for candor, not just about mutual trust.
- Is about the freedom to share thoughts, not saying anything you want at any time.
- Is about expressing concerns, not letting your emotions go as you please.
- Is about creating a space where people feel supported, not a space free of any inner discomfort.
- Is about taking measured risks after considering possible scenario's, not taking risks and hoping for the best.
- Is about considering everything, not tolerating everything.
- Is about allocating tasks and coaching when needed, not taking a "laissez-faire" approach.
- Is about giving respect and permission and asking accountability in return, not writing out a "blank cheque".
- Is about raising standards together, not lowering them to what is accepted to be "comfortable for everyone."

Having a good understanding of the influence and importance of psychological safety is paramount. Setting high standards and making "zero compromise" alone is not sustainable and without investing in psychological safety, it will even have an adverse effect on safety performance as not only learning opportunities are not seized, but also mistakes are being covered up.

HOW TO WORK TOWARDS MORE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Expecting everyone to feel instantly engaged and empowered to raise issues, contribute with ideas and to admit and learn from mistakes isn't realistic. Psychological safety doesn't happen by magic and it doesn't happen overnight. It is a journey with incremental steps that yield incremental wins. And a journey can only be successful when you have a map. The figure below maps out the journey towards high psychological safety.
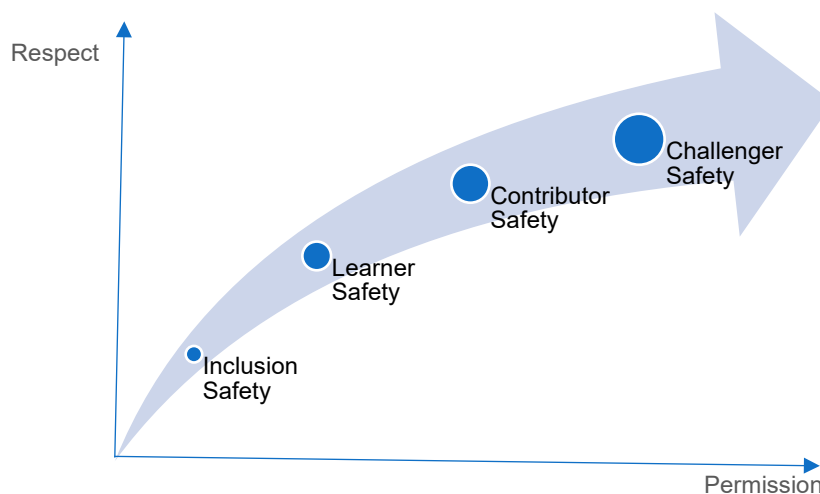
Even though the four stages are incremental and build on each other, this process should not be seen as per definition linear. Inclusion Safety is the foundation on which the rest of the stages build. This is a stage which will (or should) be common for all our subcontractors. The next stages can be "staggered". Meaning that for instance on technical level you will be comfortable with granting Contributor Safety (for example with a highly specialized subcontractor), but in the field of health and safety, the same subcontractor will "only" be granted Learner Safety.

Earlier on, we stated that psychological safety is not just about mutual trust. As the graph shows, the level of psychologically safety is determined by a combination of respect and permission. Trust increases with each level as a direct result of the level of psychological safety.

Inclusion Safety

Diversity is a fact, inclusion is a choice. Inclusion is about intent, the intent to accept the worth of someone and not the worthiness. This is not word play or semantics. The act of accepting someone to be part of a team, regardless of social status is the first step, simply because it creates equality needed to lower social

friction and increase intellectual friction. Or in other words: to make people feel they belong to the team in order to make them participate in the team.

Respecting a subcontractor as a team member and giving permission to interact with us not merely as an "executor of works" but as part of the team leads to the absence of (the threat of) harm. This in its turn leads to more trust and candor.

Learner Safety

With Learner Safety, we create a learning process with low social friction and low emotional expense. This requires levels of respect and permission that go beyond inclusion safety because the learning process itself introduces more interpersonal risk, more vulnerability and more exposure to social harm. With Learner Safety, you must put yourself out there to ask questions, solicit feedback, float ideas, experiment, make mistakes and even fail.

Learning and growth are motivators for people to engage. But what is the direct and practical link between learning and health and safety? The answer lies in how we defined "health and safety": it's not the absence of adverse events (incidents, accidents, near-misses), but the presence of capabilities.

It is common knowledge that accidents don't happen "out of the blue". They're never acts of God. If you look at just about any accident that would happen on a project, it is always preceded by a number of smaller events with a similar causal path. Before a load falls during a standard lifting operation because the slings used were compromised for instance, typically you will see already weeks to months before the event observations of dangerous situations and near-misses (incorrect use of slings, use of damaged slings, slings which are used without being formally checked, …). This is what we call weak signals and it's these weak signals which we need to detect in order to lower the probability of an adverse event occurring. Failure or making a mistake isn't an exception, it's an expectation. This might seem counterintuitive, but it's really not when you understand that failures are learning opportunities. We need to create an environment where people can fail or make mistakes in a safe manner, before the failure or mistake becomes the cause of a mishap.

Contributor Safety

Inclusion Safety is given by choice. Learner Safety is granted. Contributor Safety on its turn is an earned privilege based on demonstrated performance. It means that our subcontractor is no longer seen as a liability, but as an asset, a net contributor delivering a positive return on investment. In this stage of psychological safety value creation and performance are central concepts.

Obviously we'd like our subcontractors to fully master the execution of their activity. But merely pursuing this this is not enough. Because the nature of our business is complex and dynamic – think of changes in planning or methods, coactivity and last minute adaptations to the actual execution of works – we also need our subcontractors to be able to respond to adaptive challenges. This increases directly the level of health and safety performance as "improvisation" becomes a process which can happen in a more controlled manner. Innovation should in this stage be understood as "reactive": being able to deal with and manage

change in a safe manner. Proactive innovation, or deliberately choosing for change in order to improve, is something which happens in the next level of psychological safety.

Challenger Safety

Challenger Safety is the place where respect and permission intersect at the highest level. It is the "stage of the brave": a climate in which exploration and experimentation without any fear happens. It's where challenging the status quo and disruptive thinking happens. It is fairly simple to explain what Challenger Safety is, but it's far more difficult to create it. For any leader, this stage is what some organizational psychologists would call the ultimate cultural quest.

"Challenging the status quo" and "disruptive thinking" are emotionally loaded concepts which might sound very dramatic. But in fact Challenger Safety can be visible in modest, but brave acts. Think about a worker who at a certain moment felt confident and empowered enough to suggest a solution which improves the safety of his workstation. The workstation was not intrinsically unsafe, so you can't say this was an adaptive response. The solution suggested by the worker was also quite simple, so again no disruption there. The fact that at a certain point, he stepped outside of his "job" and started to think creatively to improve a situation is what was disruptive. Challenging the status quo was done by challenging his role and responsibilities.

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

The questions in this workshop can help you and your team to assess and create a climate in which psychological safety can thrive by removing factors which (unintendedly) create fear to dissent and speaking up as well as by modeling the behavior we wish to see.

The aim is to share personal stories and learn from introspection and interaction and to learn how to turn these (sometimes unintended and maybe even unconscious) acts and habits into behaviors that help creating a climate in which people feel empowered to speak up.

ASESSING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ON YOUR PROJECT

The first thing to do, is to get an idea where the level of psychological safety sits on your project. The following questions on a very specific topic will allow you to get a general view.

- Who on your project raises issues with Life Saving Rules?
    - Number of issues raised by HSE:
    - Number of issues raised by project team:
    - Number of issues raised by subcontractor supervisors:
    - Number of issues raised by workers:
- If you see a certain group of people raising relatively little to no issues, is this because these people are unwilling, unaware or can you think of another reason?
- If you see a certain subcontractor (supervisors and workers) raising more issues than other subcontractors, why would this be?

INCLUSION SAFETY

The following questions can help you and your team to recognize existing prejudices. These prejudices, even unconscious, lead to acts of exclusion (not treating a subcontractor as a team member). Sometimes these acts are very subtle and maybe not even intended. They are however experienced as such and will increase social friction.

- Do you treat people that you consider of lower (social/hierarchical/…) status differently than those of higher status? If so, why?
- How do you acknowledge and show sensitivity and appreciation for cultural differences that exist on your project?
- Do you feel BESIX, regardless of its responsibilities as main contractor, is superior to other companies that operate on your project? If so, why?
- What conscious bias do you have? Does that sometimes lead to – even unintended – (soft) acts where you maintain boundaries?
- If inclusion feels natural to you, can you give examples of how you make subcontractors included as a team member?

LEARNER SAFETY

The following questions can help you and your team to create a climate in which Learner Safety can thrive by removing factors which (unintendedly) create fear to dissent and to be the bearer of bad news as well as by modeling the behavior we wish to see.

- Have you ever had a teacher or a mentor that had more confidence in your ability to learn than you had yourself? How did this influence your learning performance?
- From what did you ever learn the most? A success or a failure? And if you consider both as learning opportunities, which one occurs more frequent?
- How do we deal with failure within the team? How do we deal with failure outside of the team (read: with subcontractors)?
- How do you (as a team) react to an incident? Or a Life Saving Rule breach? Or bad news in general? What effect do you think your reaction has to people who are involved or are the bearer of bad news?
- What behavior do you model yourself? A leader who has the answers and therefore commands trust or a leader who's open to learning and therefore invites trust? Why?

CONTRIBUTOR SAFETY

The following questions can help you and your team to create a climate in which Contributor Safety can thrive by removing factors which (unintendedly) create fear to dissent and to be perceived as someone "disruptive" or "contraire".

- Have you ever worked in a company or team where contributor safety wasn't granted to you even though you had earned it? How did that make you feel? How did it influence your performance?
- On balance, when we're interacting with our subcontractors, do we do more telling or more asking? When do we tell and when do we ask? Why?
- Which of our subcontractors are we granting contributor status? Which of our subcontractors not? And why?
- Giving guided autonomy means also sharing power. How does that make you feel?
- What would be the return you'd expect when you grant guided autonomy? What would be risks? How can you mitigate these risks without compromising the permission to contribute?

CHALLENGER SAFETY

The following questions can help you and your team to create a climate in which Challenger Safety can thrive by removing factors which (unintendedly) create fear to dissent and to be perceived as someone "disruptive".

- When was the last time you were brave and challenged the status quo? Why?
- To what level do you allow others to challenge you (or your ideas)?
- Do you get defensive or take things personally when someone gives you constructive feedback or suggests an alternative course of action?
- Can you really discuss issues based on their merits in a stressful environment instead of resorting to personal criticism?
- Can you bring humility to your team interactions and put down all your ego defense mechanisms?