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40. TEAM DYNAMICS: ACHIEVING TEAM PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

How do I create the psychological safety my PLC+ team needs to take risks, speak honestly, and grow together?					
When					
	Before Meetings	✓	During Meetings		After Meetings
How Often					
	Planning	✓	Implementation		Reflection

STRATEGY-AT-A-GLANCE

Intentionally building psychological safety within PLC+ teams supports open dialogue, trust, and continuous improvement. Psychological safety empowers team members to speak up, take risks, and engage authentically—which is crucial for collaborative environments where innovation and learning are key. Grounded in research from Edmondson (2018), this strategy offers a step-by-step approach for leaders and teams to create the conditions that allow every voice to be heard.

RECOGNIZING THE NEED

At Willow Creek Middle School, the seventh-grade PLC+ team is meeting to discuss declining assessment scores. Ms. Alvarez quietly mentions that she’s tried a new strategy, but it hasn’t worked—but no one responds to acknowledge or support what she’s said.

Mr. Bennett suggests redesigning the approach. However, he also worries aloud about the boundaries of his role in the PLC+: “I’m not sure if I’m overstepping.”

Ms. Lin, the newest teacher, hesitates before sharing her observations, as if she is fearing judgment. The conversation stalls, and the team realizes that without a foundation of psychological safety, even the best data and plans cannot lead to growth.

ACTIVATING WITH THIS STRATEGY

What do we need, as humans, to feel safe? Psychological safety is the belief that individuals can express themselves without fear of embarrassment, rejection, or punishment. It is not difficult to picture PLC+ team interactions and immediately see the need for this very thing. Timothy Clark’s (2020) four stages of psychological safety—Inclusion, Learner, Contributor, and Challenger—are a helpful framework that can guide activators as they work to build trust in stages. Additionally, Amy Edmondson’s (2018) work reinforces that psychological safety is especially important

in collaborative, creative, and high-stakes environments like PLC+ teams. The following steps outline how to activate these stages within your team's regular routines and conversations.

Approach	How to Activate
Inclusion Safety	<p>Make sure every member feels welcomed and valued.</p> <p>Learn and use each other's names, listen actively, ask twice as much as you tell, and avoid competitive comparisons.</p>
Learner Safety	<p>Promote a growth mindset.</p> <p>Model vulnerability by sharing what you're learning and mistakes you've made, and invite others to do the same.</p> <p>Ask for feedback regularly.</p>
Contributor Safety	<p>Clarify team roles, and celebrate progress, including small wins.</p> <p>Encourage shared ownership of team goals and create an environment where input is expected, not optional.</p>
Challenger Safety	<p>Reward thoughtful risk-taking and respectful disagreement.</p> <p>Challenge ideas without blame or defensiveness, and make it safe to identify inefficiencies and speak truth to power.</p>

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SUCCESS CHECKLIST

✓	Activation Task
Note Potential Challenges	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PLC+ team members rarely speak or seem hesitant to share ideas or concerns.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conversations are dominated by one or two voices, limiting diverse input.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Team members avoid risk taking, disagreement, or open discussion of challenges.
Activate	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Model vulnerability by admitting mistakes and asking for help or feedback in meetings.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create regular opportunities for all voices to be heard, such as structured protocols or turn-taking strategies.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Affirm and celebrate contributions, especially when they reflect honest reflection, learning, or constructive challenge.
Reflect and Refine	
<input type="checkbox"/>	How do team norms and behaviors support or hinder psychological safety?
<input type="checkbox"/>	When was the last time someone challenged an idea in our team—and how was it received?
<input type="checkbox"/>	What can I do as a leader or teammate to help others feel safe sharing openly?

Notes
