

Link between Psychological Safety and DEIB

Understanding Psychological Safety, Microaggressions, and Lateral Violence.

1. Psychological Safety

What Is It?

Psychological safety is when people feel safe to:

- Speak up
- Ask questions
- Share ideas
- Admit mistakes without fear of punishment, embarrassment, or exclusion

Why It Matters:

In a culturally safe workplace:

- Employees feel empowered to contribute.
- People support each other, take risks, and challenge bias.
- Concerns can be raised early, preventing harm and improving teamwork.

Psychological safety also means:

- Honouring cultural values, traditional knowledge, and lived experience.
- Acknowledging intergenerational trauma and the impacts of colonization.
- Creating a space where identity and voice are respected.

2. Microaggressions

What Are They?

Microaggressions are small, often unintentional comments or actions that:

- Reinforce stereotypes.
- Disrespect cultural identity.

- Exclude or marginalize individuals.

Types of Microaggressions:

- **Verbal:** “You speak English so well!” (implying someone is an outsider).
- **Behavioral:** Ignoring someone's input in a meeting while acknowledging others.
- **Environmental:** Lack of representation in workplaces or media.

Why It Matters:

- They accumulate and cause emotional harm.
- Preventing microaggressions builds a respectful, inclusive workplace.

3. Lateral Violence

What Is It?

Lateral violence is harm directed at peers, often in the form of:

- Gossip, sabotage, exclusion.
- Undermining or public shaming.
- Passive-aggressive behavior.

Root Causes:

- Internalized oppression.
- Intergenerational trauma from colonization.
- Lack of safe outlets to express frustration or grief.
- May appear as gatekeeping or questioning someone's “authenticity”.
- Can damage community trust and cultural strength.

Examples:

- Excluding a colleague from key conversations.
- Spreading rumors about a coworker’s family background.
- Dismissing indigenous employees’ views because they didn’t grow up on reserve.

Why It Matters:

- Lateral violence breaks down teams and communities.
- Healing and support are necessary for decolonization and workplace wellbeing.

How DEIB Connects It All

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) is more than policy—it's the foundation for:

- Healing from systemic and historical harm.
- Protecting each other from microaggressions and lateral violence.
- Building cultural strength through inclusion and accountability.
- Empowering every voice, from Elders to youth.

What You Can Do

- Listen actively and without judgment
- Reflect on your words and behaviors
- Speak up when something isn't right
- Support others when they take risks or raise concerns
- Engage in continuous learning about culture, trauma, and inclusion
- Practice kindness, humility, and respect—always

Creating a psychologically safe workplace is a shared responsibility. Every employee plays a role in ensuring that others feel included and respected. When we actively listen, acknowledge different perspectives, and address biases, we create an environment where everyone feels safe to contribute.

Creating a Respectful and Inclusive Workplace

Understanding Negative Workplace Behaviors

Negative workplace behaviors, such as gossip, exclusion, or disrespect, can harm individuals and disrupt team unity. By addressing these behaviors through a cultural lens, we create a safer and more harmonious work environment.

Common Negative Workplace Behaviors

- **Harassment and Bullying:** Intimidation, threats, or repeated negative actions toward colleagues.
- **Gossip and Exclusion:** Spreading rumors or deliberately leaving colleagues out of important conversations or social interactions.
- **Disrespectful Communication:** Using a harsh tone, interrupting, or dismissing others' contributions.
- **Microaggressions and Bias:** Subtle or indirect discriminatory remarks or behaviors.
- **Lateral Violence:** Conflict among peers, such as passive-aggressive behavior or undermining colleagues.
- **Resistance to Collaboration:** Refusing to work as a team, freezing someone out, withholding information, or failing to contribute effectively.

Impact of Negative Behaviors

- **Emotional and Mental Well-being:** Increased stress, anxiety, and burnout.
- **Decreased Team Morale:** Loss of trust and a sense of belonging.
- **Lower Productivity and Engagement:** Employees feel disengaged and less motivated.
- **Higher Turnover Rates:** Employees may leave due to a toxic work environment.

Strategies for Addressing Negative Behaviors

1. **Self-Awareness and Reflection:** Assess how your actions impact colleagues. Be open to feedback and willing to adjust.
2. **Respectful Communication:** Speak clearly and kindly, listen actively, and encourage constructive feedback. Address issues with professionalism and empathy.
3. **Conflict Resolution:** Address concerns early, have open discussions, and seek mediation when necessary. Seek mediation or involve leadership when necessary to prevent escalation.
4. **Promote Inclusivity:** Ensure everyone has a voice and feels valued, regardless of position or background. Foster an environment where diverse perspectives are respected.
5. **Establish Clear Expectations and Hold Boundaries:** Set and reinforce clear expectations around workplace behaviour. Consistently hold individuals accountable for their actions in a respectful and kind manner, ensuring that policies and standards are upheld.
6. **Accountability at All Levels:** Shift from simply leading by example to ensuring accountability at the employee level. Promote a culture where everyone is responsible for maintaining respect and addressing negative behaviours.

Steps for Conflict Resolution

1. Identify the Issue

Objective: Pinpoint the root cause by identifying the underlying issue driving the disagreement and establish a shared end goal that aligns with the interests of all parties involved, not just the surface-level disagreement.

Actionable Steps:

- Gather fact focused to avoid confrontation and get honest perspectives.
- Ask open-ended questions like “What do you think caused this issue?” or “When did you start noticing the problem?”
- Look for patterns: Is this an isolated incident or a recurring issue?
- Avoid assumptions; focus on objective behaviors, not personal traits.

- Use tools like a 5 Whys analysis (asking why five times) to drill down to the root cause.

Key Tip: Document key points neutrally to track progress and reduce bias.

2. Use Active Listening

Objective: Create a safe space where each party feels acknowledged.

Actionable Steps:

- Make eye contact, nod, and provide verbal affirmations like “I see” or “Go on.”
- Use paraphrasing: “So what I hear you saying is...”
- Avoid interrupting—even if you disagree.
- Observe non-verbal cues: body language, tone, and facial expressions often convey underlying emotions.
- Ask clarifying questions if anything is vague.

Key Tip: Make a conscious effort to listen without preparing your reply while the other person is talking.

3. Engage in Open Dialogue

Objective: Foster honest, respectful communication between parties.

Actionable Steps:

- A manager may bring both sides together in a neutral setting with agreed-upon ground rules (e.g., no interrupting, no blame).
- Encourage the use of “I” statements instead of “You” statements to express feelings without accusing.
 - Example: “I felt excluded during the project meeting” vs. “You ignored me.”
- Let each party take turns sharing their perspective fully.
- Focus on interests, not positions. Uncover what each side truly needs.

Key Tip: Frame discussions around shared goals to reduce the feeling of opposition.

4. Seek Mediation if Needed

Objective: Bring in a neutral third party when direct dialogue stalls.

Actionable Steps:

- Involve HR or a respected team leader to facilitate discussions. They can help define the process, keep discussions on track, and diffuse emotional tension.
- Confidentiality and neutrality are essential.
- Not all feelings or perspectives may be fully resolved, but it's important to establish a respectful way to move forward.

Key Tip: Don't shy away from hard conversations.

5. Commit to Positive Change

Objective: Translate resolution into lasting behavioral and structural improvements.

Actionable Steps:

- Ensure clarity about what changes are being made and who is responsible for what.
- Establish check-in points (e.g., weekly follow-ups for a month) to ensure the resolution is holding.
- Identify learning opportunities.
- Encourage a culture of feedback, accountability, and psychological safety.
- Celebrate improvements and progress, even if small.

Key Tip: Model the behaviors you want to see.

Commitment to a Respectful Workplace

Addressing negative behaviors requires ongoing effort and commitment from all employees and leadership. By fostering respect, inclusivity, and open communication, organizations can build a healthier, more productive workplace where everyone feels valued and empowered.

Self Reflection

- In what small ways can you help create a culture where everyone feels heard and valued?
- What are some ways we can ensure that everyone—regardless of their background or identity—feels safe to speak up?
- Can you recall a time when someone's idea or concern was dismissed? How could that situation have been handled differently to promote psychological safety?
- What systems or practices could help ensure people feel safe reporting inappropriate behavior?
- Have you ever witnessed a microaggression? How did it affect the group dynamic?
- Have you ever witnessed inappropriate behavior but stayed silent? What prevented you from speaking up?
- How do negative behaviors (such as gossip, exclusion, or unprofessional conduct) affect team morale and productivity?
- What steps can we take as a team to promote a culture of respect and accountability?
- What does being a respectful colleague look like in practice?
- How can we respectfully hold one another accountable when someone crosses a line?
- What boundaries are important for you at work, and how can we honor each other's boundaries better?