

42. Creating a safe working environment

Challenge

Everyone has the right to work in a safe working environment. Good employment practices and duty of care for a safe workspace are laid down in the Dutch Civil Code. In recent years, several incidents of misconduct made it to the media. While the #metoo movement is more focused on sexual harassment, focus shifts to unacceptable behaviour in a more general way. Besides the fact that everyone has the right to a safe working environment, so called psychological safety also leads to increased productivity, innovation and profits [1]. These are good reasons to proactively safeguard such an environment. As a Compliance Professional, what can you do to support your organisation on this topic?

Solution

As a Compliance Professional you are responsible for supporting management within your organisation to safeguard an integrity-led culture and to understand and manage integrity risks. This goes beyond creating and communicating a code of conduct and a reporting procedure (based on whistleblowing regulations). Misconduct and unacceptable behaviour also poses an integrity risk. A safe working environment, where it is clear which behaviour is or is not tolerated and where to speak up and address issues, contributes to preventing irregularities, integrity violations and abuses. This tool provides a number of practical exercises for Compliance Professionals to stimulate a safe working environment. Compliance Professionals can use these examples themselves or provide practical advice to managers on what they could do to stimulate a safe working environment.

1. Examples of methods to support a dialogue about inappropriate behaviour:

- Check-in and check-out at meetings: use the beginning and end of a meeting to check with everyone how they feel and if anyone wishes to share anything. This creates room for people to speak up if something is on their minds.
- Discuss possible 'biases': for example, use an image where a person is typical/stands out in different ways and discuss what associations result from this within the group (check the website www.bayeterossmith.com). There are also several short Ted Talks on YouTube on this subject that you can watch and discuss together.
- Challenge & contradiction during team meetings: during team meetings, appoint someone to take on a role as the devil's advocate. This person's sole task is to ask critical questions. Make sure to rotate this role and appoint someone else for the next meeting.
- When chairing a meeting, proactively ask for different opinions. And if you notice any form of resistance, address this actively to ensure people can speak their minds. [2]
- Across the line: draw a line on the floor (with tape) or sketch an imaginary line online and make a statement that is relevant to the team or group. Everyone stands on the line. For example: I think it's okay if my colleague gives me a hug when we have achieved a big success. Then ask who agrees with the statement: those who do agree will take a step forward or raise a hand in an online meeting. People who disagree / do not recognize themselves, take a step back or do not raise a hand. And as a follow up question for example:



What if this is not a colleague but your manager? Ask for each movement / hand why people make this choice and who wants to explain this. As a facilitator, ask about people's unclear points. Where do people draw a line for (un)acceptable behaviour? Does the group agree? Can the group make a choice? Please not that is about group-dialogue and for the group to understand where everyone's boundaries lie. The group does not have to agree.

- Mindshift (Gytha Heins), communication style also influences culture:

From	To
Speak to	1. Discuss 2. Agree and 3. Address
One-way street: talking to	Two-way street: talking with ...
Questioning	Exploring
What's wrong with you?	What I need. And what do you need?
You are the problem, you have something to learn	I am part of the problem too, what can we learn from this?
Or (e.g. empathetic or direct, your fault or mine)	And (e.g. empathetic and direct, your fault and mine)
Playing darts	Puzzling

- Postcards: collect a set of postcards with appealing images and/or texts (make sure there are approximately 3x as many cards as participants you want to use them for, to ensure there is enough choice). Everyone chooses a card that appeals to the context of the team, the work, the way of working (together) etc. Ask everyone to explain the chosen card and what it says about the dynamics of relevant themes within the group. Ask if there are things that could or should be done differently, and how? Discuss what you can agree on going forward and what is needed going forward.
- Word cloud: in an online meeting, ask the participants to indicate with a word or a few words what they think, feel, wish, etc. This can be immediately displayed in the online environment in a word cloud which is directly visible to everyone. A word cloud is often a good start of a dialogue.
- I wanted to say something, but...: discuss the following question during the work meeting:
 - Have you ever experienced sitting in a meeting or observing a situation at work and thinking... I wanted to say something, but. ...? or, I wanted to ask something, but...?
 - Think about a situation for 1 minute and then discuss with each other - What happened then? - Who was involved? - What did it do to you? What would you do differently next time? [3]

2. Discuss with managers the key elements of psychological safety [3] and ask what they see/look for in their teams and what they can do to stimulate this:

- Inclusion: everyone feels at home, energetic, informal atmosphere, personal attention, eye contact, lively conversations, being yourself. Question for managers: Is it possible to be excluded from your team(s)?
- Sharing: dilemmas, successes and mistakes are shared and learned from. Question for managers: Do you see that employees 'share' or do you see that employees in your team(s) shield their work from others?
- Delivering: absolute desire to make a difference, high demands and expectations, everyone participates enthusiastically, holding each other accountable for progress. Question for managers: Do employees deliver or do you see employees in your team(s) who often wait for others to take action first?
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- **Challenging:** being vulnerable, daring to confront, seeking intellectual tension. Question for managers: Do employees in your team(s) dare to be vulnerable and be asked critical questions?
- **Positivity:** radiating enthusiasm and optimism, 'detoxing' negative atmosphere, supporting each other. Question for managers: Is the energy balance in your team on the positive or negative side?

3. Seek cooperation with HR and discuss for example:

- Have we added the right competencies to our leadership profile?
- Is building a safe working environment part of our leadership training and assessment cycle?

4. Some other suggestions that can help managers to create a safe working environment effectively:

- Manager sets a good example by making her-/himself vulnerable, sharing her/his own concerns and mistakes during the regular team meeting and also invites others to share their concerns and mistakes;
- Manager asks team members if it is clear enough how everyone can contribute to the strategic goals and the teams KPI's;
- Manager asks if team members experience sufficient recognition, understanding and appreciation;
- Manager asks what team members need in practice to achieve inclusivity;
- Manager asks "What is needed to achieve safety together?";
- Manager discusses incidents that occurred to learn and improve;
- Manager practices giving and receiving feedback with own team (do you dare to take similar risks?);
- Manager invites a Confidential Advisor to inform to the team on speak up procedures;
- Manager takes a course in 'looking without value judgement' / (better) listening;
- Manager asks what team members need to be the 'leader' they want to become;
- Manager opens an old-fashioned 'suggestion box' where improvement proposals are allowed (even anonymously).

Actors

- Compliance professional
- HR
- Confidential advisor
- Managers
- Staff

Techniques

- Facilitation and discussion techniques
- As a Compliance Professional, ensure that you gain knowledge of psychological safety. For example, read the book 'The Fearless Organization' by Amy Edmondson.

Role of compliance professional

Facilitation, transfer of knowledge, source of information.



Literature and background information

- * Amy Edmondson: "The Fearless Organization"
- * Naomi Ellemers and Dick de Gilder: "The exemplary organization"
- * Jitske Kramer: "Deep democracy"
- * Christien Smit "game: "Is this possible?" respectively "Is this good?"
- * Dekoers.nl: Course map 'Should be possible, right?'
- * Gytha Heins: 'Address? Just do it!'
- * Self-test bias: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp>
- * Bias images: <https://www.bayeterossmith.com>

Footnote 1: Amy Edmondson: "The Fearless Organization"

Footnote 2: Deep Democracy/wisdom of the minority, Jitske Kramer

Footnote 3: Joriene Beks and Hans van der Loo: Psychologische Veiligheid (Psychological Safety).