



How to Build Psychological Safety

FINDINGS FROM THE LATEST WORKHUMAN SURVEY DATA





What is psychological safety?

Have you ever witnessed something at work that just didn't sit right with you? Did you voice your concern or keep it to yourself? How easy is it sharing feedback with your colleagues?

Your answers to these questions are largely dependent on the amount of psychological safety present in your team. Harvard professor Amy Edmondson defines psychological safety as “a shared belief that I can bring my full self to work, that I will not be humiliated or made to feel less good about myself if I speak up with ideas, with questions, with concerns, and yes, even with mistakes.”

And as the world of work evolves, psychological safety only becomes more critical. In fact, Google's People Operations team conducted an internal study of more than 250 attributes of more than 180 Google teams. **They found the number one driver of successful teams is psychological safety – feeling safe to take risks and be vulnerable at work.**

Why does psychological safety matter?

Psychological safety is linked to several metrics top of mind for any HR or business leader. According to Gallup, moving the needle on psychological safety can lead to:

27%

reduction
in employee
turnover

40%

reduction in
safety incidents

12%

increase in
productivity

“Nearly all of the work we do today is what you might call knowledge work,” says Edmondson. “When people lack a sense of psychological safety, they will be reluctant to share, use and integrate their knowledge – so it’s absolutely mission-critical to building a healthy and effective team.”

The current workplace landscape

Let's bring this concept to the current work landscape. Post-pandemic, there are growing concerns about the cost of living. What impact do those sentiments have on psychological safety in our organisations? Are there opportunities to improve?

The Workhuman® iQ research team set out to answer these questions and more in a survey of more than 2,200 full-time employees in the U.K., Ireland and North America. Respondents were asked whether they had:

- **Felt mentally exhausted**
- **Got through their working day on “autopilot” without really thinking**
- **Found it tough to focus**

The bottom line?

Employees are finding it difficult to remain engaged; the data reveals:

54%

were mentally drained after each workday

58%

said they worked on autopilot

44%

found it tough to focus

These numbers are the aggregate of countless individual stories of challenges endured over the past few years. But there's more to the story. Workhuman iQ data has also found that women are more stressed and burned out than their male colleagues, particularly working mothers. It appears mothers were most adversely affected by the disruption in childcare these past few years, leading to what some are calling a "she-cession."

The state of psychological safety

When employees are burned out, stressed and disengaged, are they able to speak up and bring their full selves to work? Do they feel they have a level of social support that's critical for innovation and engagement to flourish?

To answer these questions, each person's level of psychological safety was given a rating based on their answers to these seven statements:

- If I make a mistake at work, it is often held against me.
- People at this organisation are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
- People at this organisation sometimes reject others for being different.
- I feel safe to take a risk at this organisation.
- It is difficult to ask other employees at this organisation for help.
- No one at this organisation would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
- Working with members of this organisation, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.

A global Workhuman iQ study of more than 3,000 employees found the average rating for psychological safety to be 3.47 (on a scale of 1 to 5). Here are some key insights:

1

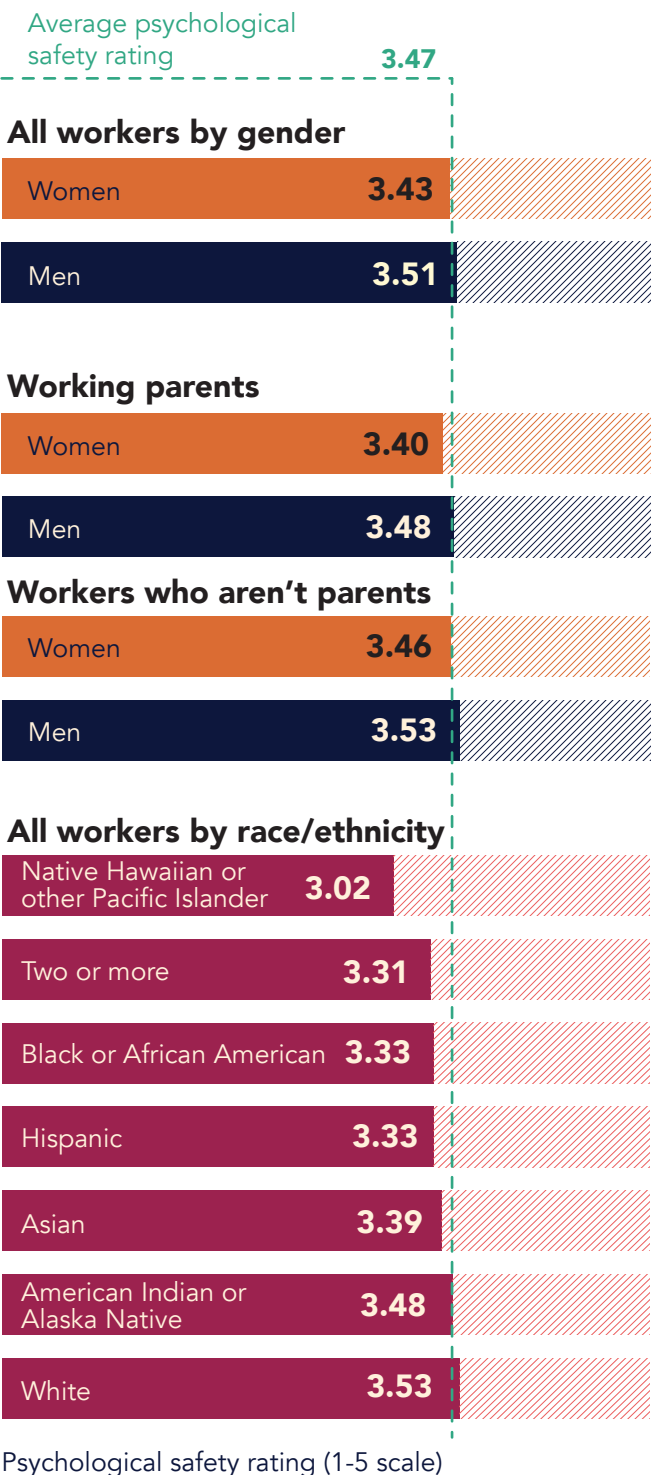
Men experience higher psychological safety.

2

Working parents have lower psychological safety compared to workers who aren't parents.

3

White employees experience the highest levels of psychological safety.



Imagine how much time and resources would be salvaged if organisations could move the needle on psychological safety – if all employees, and especially underrepresented groups, felt more comfortable sharing ideas and contributing to the success of your organisation.

Based on the data from this survey, there are two practical ways you can boost psychological safety.

ONE

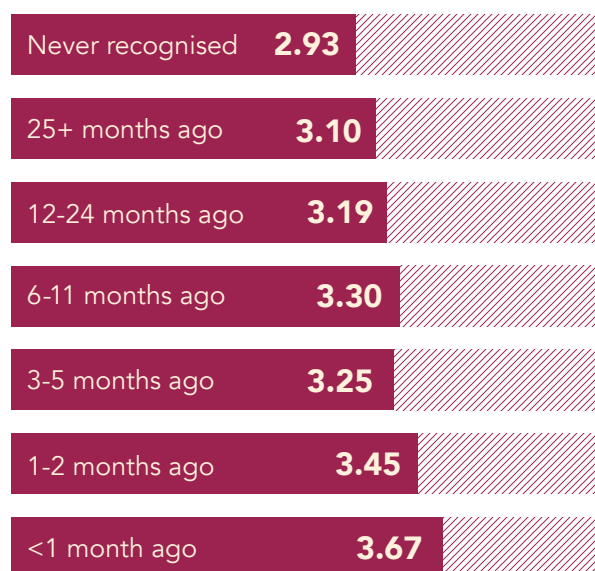
Say “thank you” more often.

Our research finds only 51% of workers have been thanked in the last month. And yet data reveals psychological safety is highest for employees recognised within that time frame.

To make gratitude a habit, set time aside each week to think about which of your colleagues stepped up to deliver for the business. Then

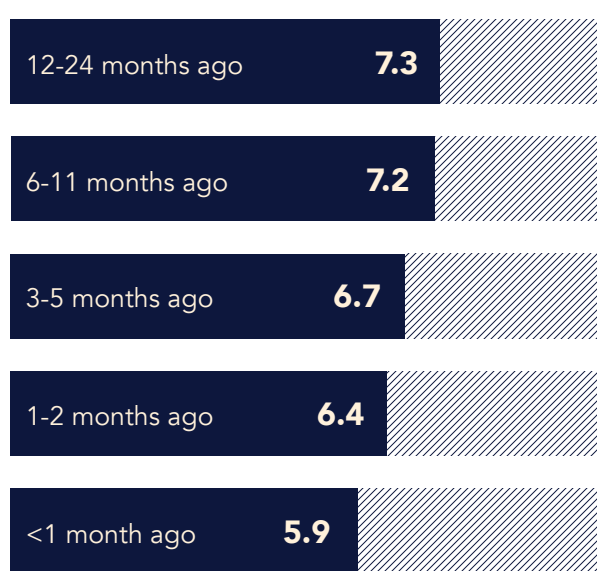
take the time to tell that person you appreciate them – and be specific about what you appreciate. You might even be helping buffer stress in the process. For male working parents in particular, recognition is related to significantly lower stress levels.

Psychological safety highest for employees recognised within the last month



Psychological safety rating (1-5 scale)

Stress levels lowest for male working parents when recognised within the last month



Stress rating (1-10 scale)

TWO

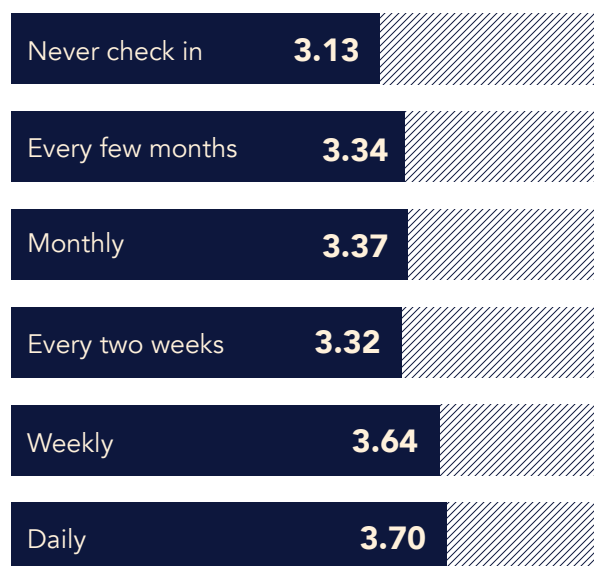
Check in with employees more frequently.

In today's age of hybrid work, where priorities constantly shift, check-ins become even more critical. Psychological safety is highest for employees who check in with their manager at least once per week and lower for those who check in less frequently. And yet, only 29% of

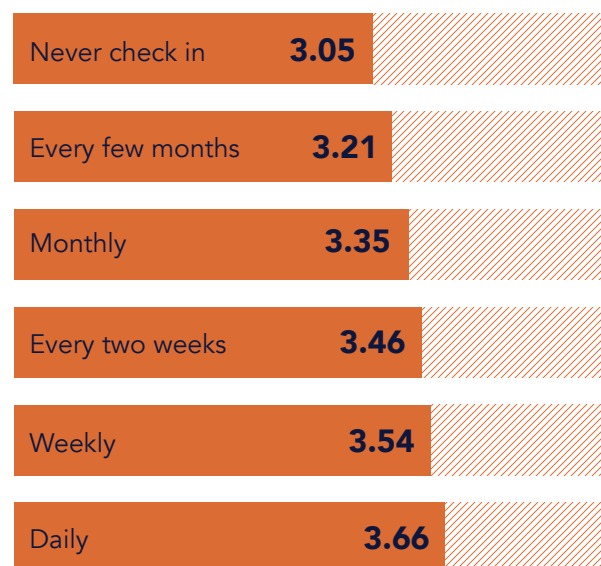
respondents said they check in with their manager every week.

When done right and set up in a regular cadence, check-ins become an opportunity to build trust and set a foundation of positivity for the manager-employee relationship.

Frequent manager check-ins are associated with higher psychological safety for men and women.



Men Psychological safety rating (1-5 scale)



Women Psychological safety rating (1-5 scale)

In summary

At its core, psychological safety is about feeling comfortable bringing your whole human self to work. For employers, it's about empowerment – trusting the humans you've hired to do the jobs they were hired to do. Allowing them to use their voices and show up in their teams. These two simple tactics – recognising more frequently and establishing a cadence of check-ins – can go a long way in creating an inclusive and psychologically safe environment for your people.



To learn more about how Workhuman Cloud® can help build a culture of trust, contact us today.

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