
Exercise: The Canary Test

Psychological Safety Reflection for Leaders

Use this quick diagnostic to assess whether people in your organization feel safe enough to speak candidly, challenge ideas, surface risk, and admit mistakes.

What Psychological Safety Is: The belief that people can speak up with ideas, questions, concerns, and mistakes without fear of humiliation or punishment. → When psychological safety is low, silence often replaces candor, and leaders lose access to the truth they most need to hear.

The Canary Test

Rate each statement from 1–5

1 = Never • 2 = Rarely • 3 = Sometimes • 4 = Often • 5 = Always

Statement	Score
1. My team brings me bad news early, before it becomes a crisis.	
2. People openly disagree with me in meetings.	
3. My employees admit mistakes without fear of punishment.	
4. New or unconventional ideas are offered freely.	
5. People ask “why” questions, even about my decisions.	
6. My quieter team members still contribute meaningfully.	
7. My team pushes back when they believe a decision is wrong.	

Score Guide

- **28–35** → Strong psychological safety. Protect it and reinforce it.
- **18–27** → Moderate safety. Some openness exists, but silence may still be costing you insight.
- **Below 18** → Low safety. People may be filtering, withholding, or self-protecting instead of speaking candidly.

Reflection Questions

Circle or jot notes on the prompts below:

1. **Which statement scored lowest for you?**
2. **What is one leadership behavior of yours that may be contributing to that score?**
3. **When was the last time someone on your team stayed silent — and it cost the organization something?**

Three Questions to Ask Your Team This Week

Ask one person on your team — especially someone who tends to stay quiet:

- “What’s one thing we’re not talking about that we should be?”
- “When did you last feel like your idea wasn’t welcome here?”
- “What would you tell me if you knew I would not get defensive?”

The rule: Your *only* response is: **“Thank you. Tell me more.”**

Reminder

Silence is not proof of alignment. It may be evidence that people have decided it is safer not to speak.