



SUCCESS AND LEADERSHIP

6 ways leaders can create psychologically safe workplaces



Fleur Heazlewood [Success and Leadership](#) [September 18, 2023](#)



Leaders and organizations are required under the [Work Health and Safety Act](#) April amendments to now provide both a psychologically safe working environment and manage psychosocial hazards. This includes providing a healthy working environment, actively managing the work causes of stress before they get out of hand, and providing support for mental health issues.

We are not currently managing psychological safety well.

Mental health is a safety risk in the workplace with over [90% of Australia's mental health compensation claims](#) linked to work-related preventable pressure and stress. We are also seeing [record numbers](#) of people experiencing chronic stress and burnout.

Psychological safety exponentially boosts performance.

The good news for leaders is that while providing a psychologically safe and healthy working environment takes upskilling and effort, it also brings a range of performance benefits. People who feel valued and supported at work perform better, are more engaged, and stay longer.

[Google's Project Aristotle research](#) that was conducted across countries and cultures found that the number one success factor with their highest-performing teams was psychological safety. [Amy Edmondson](#), a professor at Harvard Business School, has over 20 years of research that consistently shows that psychological safety fosters learning, innovation, and high performance within organizations.

Psychological safety in teams encourages open and authentic interpersonal behaviors, increases job engagement and satisfaction, supports coping with pressure and stress on the job, and creates a supportive and inclusive team climate, all key elements that contribute to healthy high performance.

Six tips for developing psychological safety with your team:

1. Create a positive and inclusive work environment:

- Top and tail the team's week with opportunities for idea sharing, debating multiple options, and providing positive and constructive feedback on people's input.
- Encourage people to share when they need help and reward offers of help.

2. Foster open communication:

- Create rituals in weekly team meetings where people can discuss concerns and challenges and get help.
- Start individual 1-on-1 meetings start with a well-being and workload check-in and collaborate on changes.

3. Encourage breaks and boundaries:

- Take a regular lunch break for yourself and encourage lunchtime out for your team.
- Create team meeting rules that incorporate short meeting 20-minute times as the default and a midday meeting ban to support breaks.

4. Give recognition:

- Express appreciation for individuals in and the team on a regular basis.
- Acknowledge effort, improvement, helping out others in the team.
- Celebrate progress and achievements both large and small.

5. Promote mental health and wellbeing:

- Upskill your mental health conversation skills and make wellbeing check ins part of your everyday meetings.
- Support the public and company health messages and awareness campaigns with conversations rather than cupcakes.
- Engage the team in wellbeing activities that all can take part in.

6. Support social and self-care:

- Support time out for exercise.
- Be flexible with time for personal appointments
- Organise regular team social catchups and learning opportunities within work hours.

You know you have psychological safety when there is a shared belief amongst all team members that it is safe to express themselves, share diverse ideas, debate different opinions, and take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences.

It takes positive and consistent leadership for a team to trust that they can share when they are struggling, ask questions when they don't understand, make mistakes, and speak up when they notice something is wrong.

While it takes time, it is important that we persevere in building and maintaining a mentally healthy working environment. Because when we don't manage the interpersonal dynamics well, leave those who are unwell to struggle, allow interpersonal conflict to fester or accept poor performance, we undermine both our own health and performance and that of our overall team.

The good news is that mental health and wellbeing skills are something that can be learned and added to our leadership skills toolkit. It also provides us with a performance advantage.

And [research](#) clearly shows that people who feel valued and supported at work perform better, are more engaged and stay longer. To put it simply, people who are well do well.

Written by [Fleur Heazlewood](#).