



GUIDE: 5 TRAITS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE MANAGER

Safeguard your organisation's mental health.

Contact us to discuss how.

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If you're concerned that you or someone you know
may be at risk of suicide, please call one of these numbers:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: **1300 659 467**

www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au



REAL NUMBERS EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

In a recent Australian study, 91% of workers believed that mental health is important in the workplace, but only 52% feel their workplace is mentally healthy. And just over half of employees surveyed feel that their senior leader values good mental health at work.

Further, 21% of Australian employees who work in mentally unhealthy workplace conditions have taken time off, citing depression, anxiety, and stress. These numbers clearly indicate a disconnect between managerial practice and employee mental health. However, with good leadership, companies can turn poor numbers around to make improvements in employee wellbeing and engagement.

It is important to consider just what it is for employees to feel safe in the workplace. At the most basic level, employees want to feel that they, and their work, feel valued, accepted and respected.

In such an environment, employees understand that errors don't permanently count against them. By contrast, in psychologically unsafe work environments, employees spend much of their day on professional eggshells, hoping not to make a mistake, or incur uncertain consequences from their leaders.



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY HAZARDS ARE OFTEN “INVISIBLE,” COMPARED TO PHYSICAL SAFETY RISKS

The idea of psychological safety management in the workplace is not new. The concept first arose in the 1960s as more of an academic musing. In the 1990s, companies began to acknowledge the importance of creating a mentally healthy working environment on a more practical level. Organisations around the world have continued to work toward creating a psychologically sound environment since then.

Since psychological health is not necessarily as tangible or visible as physical health, it is easier to slip by unnoticed. An employee with chronic stress or an underlying mental health issue is more

difficult to spot without proper awareness, but there is just as much scope for job impairment and long term negative effects for the employee. Notwithstanding the economic losses to the organisation through absenteeism, presenteeism, and diminished customer service.

Just like any physical hazard in the workplace, it is important to recognise, acknowledge, and avoid mental hazards with the same level of vigilance. Psychological risks in the workplace can do as much harm to the individual as a faulty ladder or slippery floor.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ALLOWS FOR MUTUAL RESPECT AND PROFESSIONAL INNOVATION

Amy Edmondson of Harvard, who is a leading academic in the field of leadership and management, states that psychological safety has surfaced as “**a critical factor in understanding phenomena such as voice, teamwork, team learning and organizational learning.**”

Professor Edmondson further discusses the fact that no employee—or manager, for that matter—wants to be perceived in a negative light at work in her Ted Talk:

Building a Psychologically Safe Workplace. She discusses some of the inhibitive coping tools that bright employees come up with to deal with these fears:

-  **Does Not Want to Look Ignorant.** The employee chooses not to ask questions.
-  **Does Not Want to Seem Incompetent.** The employee does not admit weakness or errors.
-  **Does Not Want to Appear Intrusive.** The employee withholds sharing new ideas that may effectively solve problems and streamline processes.
-  **Does Not Want to be Perceived as Negative.** The employee does not question, challenge, or critique the status quo, even if it might benefit the organisation to do so.

Any time employees withhold thoughts and opinions from colleagues, everyone is robbed of small moments of learning. Without these moments of learning—even if tinged with professional and amicable dissent—innovation cannot exist.



WMHI RESEARCH: 7 PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:



Psychologically Safe Managers are the Key to Mental Health and Innovation

A psychologically safe manager is one who, in the day to day process of managing, identifies risks that may affect the mental and emotional well-being of the team, and makes every reasonable effort to protect the mental health of their team members. In keeping with the physical safety analogy, psychologically safe managers seek to do no psychological harm, and work to create a work environment free from psychological harm. Moreover, the psychologically safe manager looks for opportunities to strengthen the team so members can handle increasingly difficult challenges.

THE 5 TRAITS OF A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE MANAGER

'Based on our extensive research and coaching thousands of leaders, The WMHI has identified the following five traits of the psychologically safe manager. Executives and HR teams can use these traits as indicators of managers who will diligently work to keep employees' mental wellbeing in mind for their good, as well as for the benefit of the company, clients and colleagues.



They Provide Clear Direction.

Each manager develops a vision for his or her team that aligns with the organisation's vision. A psychologically safe manager communicates this vision clearly, thoroughly, and regularly to all employees. Clear and confident leadership from a department manager, delivered in an upbeat, cheerful, and uniform manner to the entire team, cultivates an environment where everyone understands what it takes to succeed. With

this direction, employees learn the value of their respective role and how it leads to their team's and organisations' success, as well. When the entire team "owns" the vision and the plan, everyone can work together with more ease and less friction. Psychologically astute managers will encourage the team to engage in the development of the vision, welcoming new ideas while keeping the project and its objectives on course.

They Set Reasonable Expectations.

Workplace insecurities often arise from an employee's uncertainty of what is expected of them. A good leader will set reasonable expectations and make those expectations clear without having team members

guess. If there are negative consequences to an employee taking initiative, in the absence of any other guidance, that employee will think twice next time about trying something new or innovative.

They Empower Their Team Members

A psychologically safe manager ensures that they're adequately resourcing their team to achieve the desired outcome for a project. These resources include time and budget for completion, the cognitive load for each employee, and the freedom to speak up if they see issues that may alter the course of the project. There is tolerance for failure and

learning from errors for everyone on the team. Informed mistakes are particularly important since they can shed light on underlying issues or result in breakthroughs. Any type of success—individual or simply completion of the project—warrants appropriate rewards. The ideal manager has and shares stories about what success looks like in general, and for the project at hand.

They Give Thorough Feedback, Good or Bad

Psychologically safe managers give feedback on behavioural issues without waiting for an annual review. A long wait to address a problem can cause resentment and a feeling of being blindsided. The sooner the manager discusses the issue—with tact

and consideration—the sooner the employee can course-correct. When given in the right spirit, the employee can maintain dignity and will appreciate the manager's investment in their development. The manager's approach, with an emphasis on fostering mutual respect, is the key with this trait.

They Engage Hearts and Minds.

A psychologically safe manager reinforces the team's cohesion and their connection to the mission of the team. The arms length psychological contract where employees simply gave their labour in return for wages, is going the way of the dodo, particularly as millennials move up through the organisation.

Employees increasingly need to buy into the purpose of the organization and know that it's aligned with their values and purpose. Psychologically safe managers never play employees off against each other as a way of drawing attention away from their own shortcomings.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE LEADERS ARE MADE NOT BORN.

Introducing the Leaders Masterclass.

The costs of a psychologically unsafe work environment are significant:

- ✓ Up to \$10,000 a year per case of depression
- ✓ \$578 a day in sickies
- ✓ 2.5x annual salary in turnover costs
- ✓ Harassment & bullying complaints
- ✓ Workplace suicide
- ✓ Increased conflict and undermining of leadership

70% of performance management can be avoided by the psychologically safe management.

The Leaders Masterclass is an interactive 1 day workshop that teaches leaders how to be psychologically safe.

- ✓ Develop the knowledge and practical skills needed to manage employees with mental health issues on an ongoing basis
- ✓ Tackle performance management issues confidently before they escalate
- ✓ Create a resilient and high performing team in spite of any mental health issues
- ✓ Build a team culture with mental health protective factors to minimise risk to the team
- ✓ Speak to us today about running a private Leaders Masterclass workshop for your leaders.

LEARN MORE

Call us on
+61 2 8935 3885
or head to
www.wmhi.com.au/leaders-masterclass

