



January 2021, Leadership and Workplace Mental Health

WorkSafe (August) 2020, WorkWell Leadership Research: Supporting leaders to create psychologically safe workplaces: KPMG for WorkSafe. [Executive Summary](#) and [Final Report](#).

Objectives

1. Identify the most effective approach to engage leaders to maximise opportunities for behaviour change.
2. Identify the key leader capacities and mindsets required to both address the impact of work-related factors on mental health and safety, and to create workplace cultures that promote psychological health, safety and wellbeing.

Methodology:

- 2 global literature reviews
- 2 sets of interviews with leaders from 30 different Victorian organisations
- Statewide survey to leaders of Victorian public, private and not-for-profit organisations.

Objective one: Identify the most effective approach to engaging leaders to maximise opportunities for behavior change.

Key findings

- The idea of a psychologically safe workplace is not a commonly understood concept amongst leaders
- A necessary first step of change is to developing programs and initiatives that show the value of psychological safety in the workplace and drive leadership commitment
- Leaders need to first understand the vision and case for change, then implement change. Three of the most effective mechanisms for implementing change in teams and organisations are:
 - Self reflection
 - Establishing a level of autonomy
 - Collaborative problem solving
- Leaders are most motivated when interventions are targeted at the organizational level, for example offering flexible working conditions. Organisational interventions should be visible and successfully implemented in support of individual actions by leaders.

Key points for leaders

Leaders influence psychological safety through:

- *direct actions* – support and communication



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- *indirect actions* – the behaviors they model and emotions they exhibit

Psychological safety in the workplace is influenced by:

- inclusive leadership and listening to many voices
- failure friendly leadership / facilitating discovery and learning rather than providing solutions.
- Inspiring trust by communicating openly, honestly, and frequently.

Objective two: Identify the key leader capacities and mindsets required to both address the impact of work-related factors on mental health and safety, and to create workplace cultures that promote psychological health, safety and wellbeing.

Key findings

- Building leader capacity, skill and mindset translates directly into positive psychosocial safety at work this results in performance improvement on the individual as well as at the organizational level.
- When considering leader capacity, skills and mindset, it is important to identify characteristics that:
 - create a positive team culture
 - help to identify, prevent and manage the work-related factors.
 - The relevant characteristics of capacity, skill and mindset are emotional intelligence, and effective communication can cultivate an environment of empathy, openness and vulnerability which are linked to positive psychosocial safety.
- Key capacity, skill and mindset are:
 - Legitimacy
 - Communication
 - Mindfulness / attentiveness
 - Openness/ willingness
 - Non-stigmatising
 - Trust and vulnerability
 - Growth mindset
 - Self awareness
- Need development opportunities that build their skills through problem-based learning, mental health literacy training, role playing exercises and simulations, top-tier leader role modeling, mindfulness training.

Key Points for Leaders



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Leaders should be aware of the role they play in connecting employees to support services and building the knowledge to be able to flexibly use optimal competencies, skills and mindsets when required and that are situation specific.

Leaders should be open and aware of their personal circumstances and how this is expressed in their actions and behavior, and to seek support to manage their own mental health as appropriate.

Helpful approaches to build psychological safety focus on motivational, relational and social cognitive aspects that promote communication within a team, knowledge transfer, and development of problem-solving skills.

Leaders are uniquely positioned to notice and nurture their own wellbeing and that of their teams.

Leaders are also in a good position to recognise potential problems or opportunities in their work environment and initiate change that will benefit fellow employees and organisations and drive behaviour change to support psychologically safe workplaces.

Leaders can help employees find meaning at work, encourage autonomous decision-making and promote intellectual stimulation. This can reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.

Leaders should be transparent. This fosters trust and engagement and promotes a shared organisational vision for the future which in turn supports staff to feel more like part of a team and develop a deeper connection to work.

Leaders should prioritise collaborative methods of working since a cohesive team, with similar values and goals, enables work demands to be better managed. This, in turn, has positive effects on the psychological wellbeing of the workforce.

See page 5 to 12 of executive summary for a table of leadership actions required for positive impact.