

MAKING LEADERSHIP WORK

EPISODE 1 –WHY LEADING OTHERS IS HARD.

- Across many workplaces around the world, the introduction of psychosocial hazards into the workplace lexicon has created some confusion and discomfort for leaders. New workplace regulations have been introduced at the international level (ISO 45003), and various national workplace health and safety organizations have adopted local versions of this that require workplaces to protect the psychosocial (emotional and social) wellbeing of their people. In Australia, the Safe Work Australia Code of Practice outlines 14 psychosocial hazards workplaces need to mitigate and minimize to protect the mental health and wellbeing of their people.
- A psychosocial hazard is something that can occur in the workplace as we go about our jobs, and can negatively impact on our emotional and social wellbeing. And while every job typically involves some psychosocial hazards, they can become hazardous to workers when they occur at a frequency or an intensity that is harmful to their wellbeing.
- There are four categories the hazards are grouped into; Work Design, Social Support, Work Condition, and Work Experience.
- The term 'psychosocial hazards' is being introduced into workplace vocabulary now because the ways we work in organizations has shifted dramatically over the last 30 years, with the advent of laptop computers, mobile phones, the internet and globalization. Add the complexities of a global pandemic, public health lockdowns, traumatic conditions for frontline workers, and hybrid working for others, and we have been left with a reality of new workplace challenges we have never experienced before.
- And while wellbeing researchers like Dr. Amy Edmondson from Harvard University have been using the term psychological safety for at least a decade, the term 'psychosocial hazards' relates to the social and emotional hazards we experience in a workplace, or, more simply, things that stress us out emotionally and socially and make work harder than it needs to be.
- Psychosocial hazards presenting in the workplace have been increasing at an alarming rate. In Australia, between 2014 and 2018, even before workplaces felt the negative impacts of the global pandemic, we were seeing a 53% increase in psychosocial injury claims, which is a significant leap when we compare it to increases in physical injury claims during that period of only 3.5%. Even more concerning, these psychological hazard claims were costing businesses more than physical hazard claims (AU\$85,000 vs. AU\$21,000) and resulted in more time off work (175 days vs 44 days).
- While organizations having more responsibility to care for the mental health and wellbeing of their people isn't a bad thing, as this legislation has been designed with a risk management lens, if workplaces focus narrowly on only what the code and legislations suggest that they do, they will find they aren't actually promoting wellbeing with their people. When workplaces focus only on mitigating risks and minimizing hazards, they miss the greater opportunity to help their people thrive and be well at work.
- Recently, The Leaders Lab undertook research that asked Australian workers to rate their workplace culture along two dimensions of safety (high to low) and care (high to low). When these were plotted along horizontal and vertical axes, there were four quadrants for the worker responses to be plotted into. This provided the picture of how workers viewed their workplace. Was it caring AND safe? Or just safe? Was it low in care but reasonably safe?

- The startling finding from this element of the research was that people who worked in organizations they perceived to be caring AND safe reported the highest levels of performance, psychological safety and wellbeing. These people, also reported the lowest frequency of psychosocial risk across all of the hazards.
- And perhaps most importantly, when people reported that their work was difficult, but their work environment was caring, their frequency of psychosocial risks was significantly lower than workplaces where there was less care demonstrated.
- The findings from this research support the importance of people feeling their organization respects them, they feel valued, seen and their contributions are appreciated, as these elements foster psychosocial safety and are protective against psychosocial risks.



WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

- How is your workplace managing the psychosocial risks present for your people? Do leaders see this legislation as a more 'tick a box' exercise? Or, is your workplace seeing it for the opportunity to create a psychologically safe environment where your employees will feel safe, cared for and able to thrive?
- Can you experiment with how you could implement the CARE acronym more frequently in your workplace?
 - **Compassion** – Is there a way you can show compassion to your people by creating a safe space for learning?
 - **Appreciation** – can you show greater appreciation for your team, their individual strengths and day-to-day work (and not just the big projects)?
 - **Responsibility** - Are there new ways you can encourage responsibility within your team, for each other, for the business, but also the planet?
 - **Emotional Wisdom** - Are you demonstrating emotional wisdom, giving people permission to experience their emotions instead of 'leaving them at the door' and respecting their contribution to a more emotionally wise culture?
- Can you experiment with frequency of care expressed to see whether it makes a difference? Research suggests that it is when leaders often engage in practices to demonstrate care that it has the best impact on their team. Review your leadership practice – are you guilty of trying to tick that box? Is there room for you to shift more towards embedding care as a regular way of working?



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- You can download your copy of **The Leaders Lab 2019-2022 Australian Workplace Report**.
- Download a FREE poster outlining the business case for investing in psychosocial safety [here](#)
- Be in the know and check out the original source of the psychosocial hazards outlined in the **ISO 45003** [here](#).
- To build your knowledge about psychosocial safety – grab a copy of our new book – **The Leaders Blueprint: Fostering Psychosocial Safety**.