

Leadership practices to foster psychological safety



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Leadership practices to foster psychological safety

IT'S ALL ABOUT
HOW
THE POWER IS USED

Me as a leader

How I show up under pressure

P2

ME AS A LEADER



My team

How we work together

P11



When individuals believe it is safe enough to take risks to speak up with ideas and challenge the status quo, this has been conceptualised as psychological safety. Psychological safety is dynamic and context specific; it shifts over time, across groups, teams and situations. Through our Reimagining Leadership project, we have learned about everyday leadership practices that can foster psychological safety.

The practices and resources shared here are designed to support your understanding and reflection, they are not a one size fits all solution.

For more complex or sensitive situations, we strongly recommend seeking support from your Organisational Development, Human Resources or Wellbeing team.

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Me as a leader

Psychological safety starts with how I show up, especially under pressure.

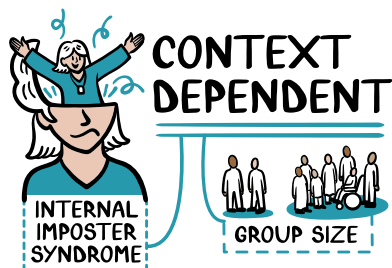
ME AS A LEADER



Leadership practices...

Contextual awareness

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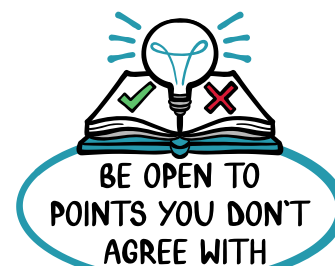
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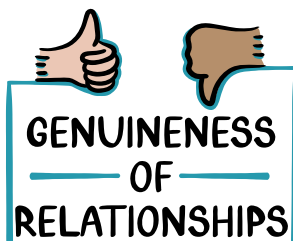
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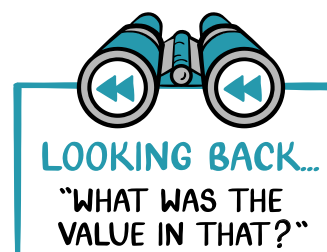
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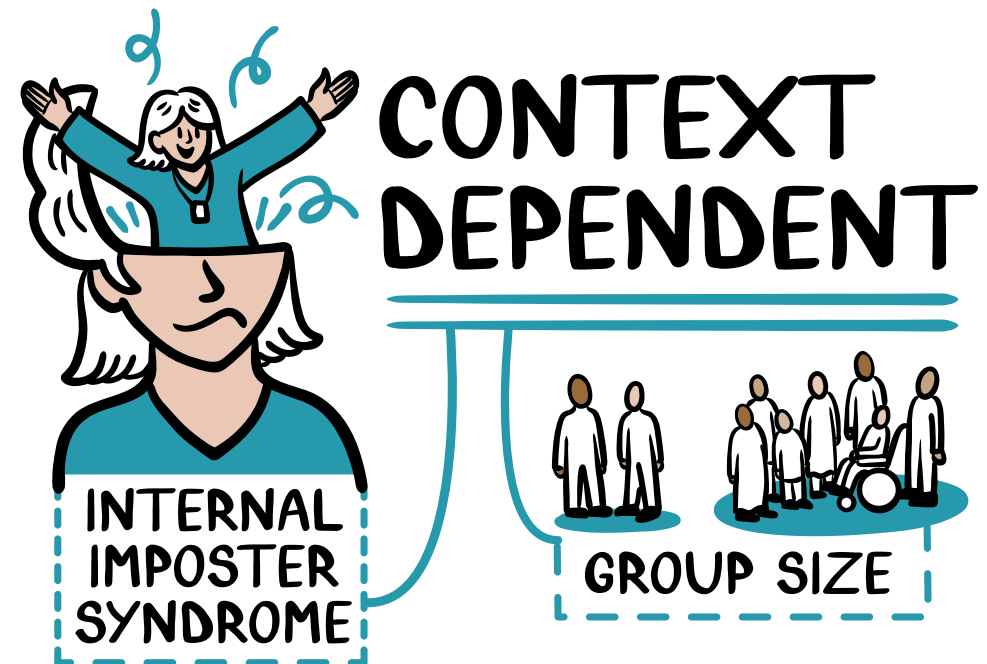
Contextual awareness

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Contextual awareness is understanding the wider pressures and influences on teams (organisational, societal, or personal) and recognising they may be shaping how people show up and whether they feel able to share ideas, challenge and fully contribute.

It supports psychological safety by helping you respond with empathy rather than judgement. It enables you to actively consider that hesitation or silence may have causes beyond the immediate situation, reducing misinterpretation, building trust, and creating conditions where people feel understood and safer to contribute when they're ready.



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RESOURCES

Web article: Academia in crisis needs new forms of Leadership | Wonkhe - [CLICK HERE](#)

Website: Resources from the Academy of Brain-based Leadership - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Pause and prepare

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Pause and prepare before key interactions, so you arrive in the present and intentional rather than carrying the pressure or emotions from earlier activity and interactions.

Centering yourself in advance helps you show up in a calm and focused mindset. By putting distractions and stress to one side, you are less likely to react emotionally or defensively. This creates a calmer and more attentive leadership presence, helping others feel listened to, respected and safer to engage openly.



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Book: Leader work: using insight, intuition and imagination to develop leadership practice, pages 34-37 | Paul Hibbert - [CLICK HERE](#)

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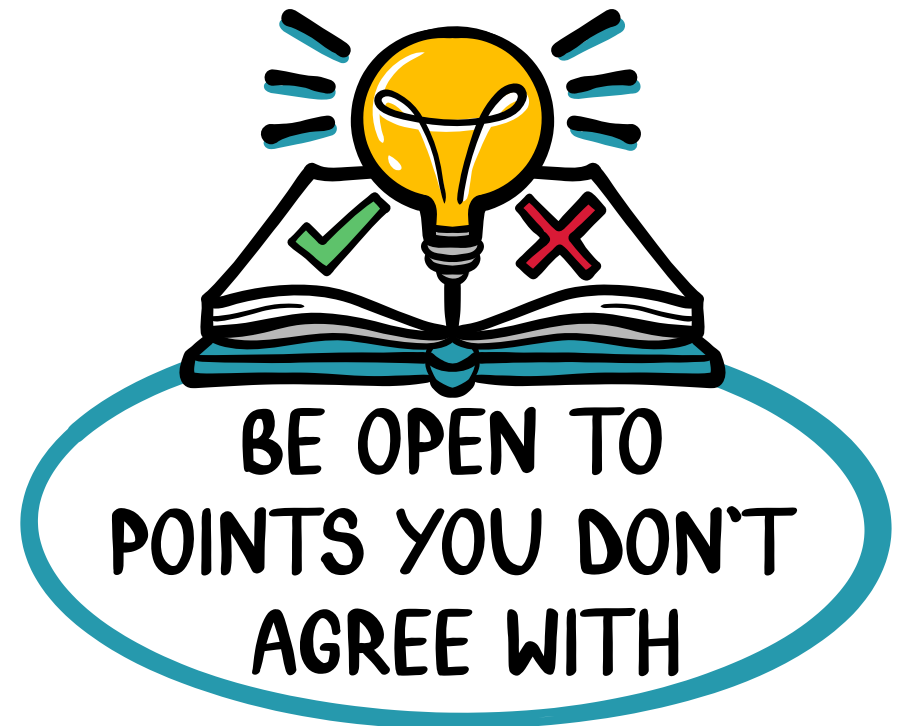
Stay curious

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Stay curious, especially when you feel challenged or disagree, assume and demonstrate positive intent, ask questions to understand others' perspectives, worries and assumptions.

Showing curiosity helps to reduce judgement and defensiveness. When you seek to understand before responding (i.e. ask open questions and show genuine interest in different viewpoints) you signal that uncertainty, difference and challenge are welcome. This helps to make it safer for others to share concerns, question assumptions and offer ideas without fear of being criticised or dismissed.



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Journal article: Psychological Safety Learning behavior in work teams | Amy Edmondson
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Notice and name contribution

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Notice and name contributions acknowledges you value colleagues sharing a different perspective or seeking clarification and the emotional effort required to work in this way.

Noticing and naming someone's contribution when they speak up, not just when they get things right, reinforces that input matters. When you thank people for ideas, concerns or challenges, even when it's uncomfortable, you reduce fear of judgement and encourage ongoing openness, while still maintaining clear accountability.



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Web article: Gratitude at work: Why is Gratitude in Leadership Important | CCL
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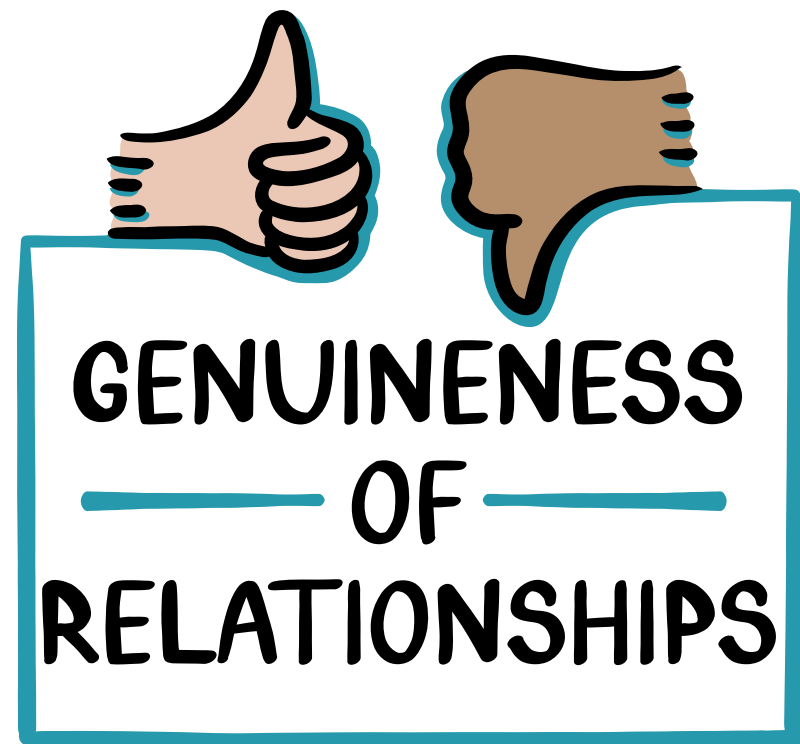
Show care in the moment

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Show care in the moment, is to acknowledge when something is difficult, at work or outside of work, to listen properly and avoid rushing to fix it.

Responding to people with care and without judgement or solution helps them feel valued as individuals, not just for what they deliver. When you acknowledge pressures, listen actively and respond with kindness, people are more likely to be honest about challenges and ask for help, rather than staying silent.



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Web article: Compassionate Leadership | The King's Fund - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Own and share your mistakes

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Own and share your mistakes by openly acknowledging when something hasn't worked, focusing on what can be learned and done differently next time. Being open to challenge, consistently appreciating when concerns are raised, and showing that work is something to test, review, and adapt, not get right first time, signals that learning and improvement are valued over perfection.

When leaders visibly model these behaviours, it sets the tone for the team. Openly sharing your own mistakes can reduce fear, shame, and defensiveness for others. This signals that it is constructive to acknowledge uncertainty and imperfection, making people more likely to speak up, reflect honestly, and raise concerns.



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Podcast: Episode 663: How to grow from your errors | Coaching for Leaders
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Say when you don't know

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Say when you don't know and ask for input: "I'm not sure, what do others think?", to actively demonstrate that more than one person's input is required to navigate the complexity and uncertainty within our working environments.

Acknowledging your leadership vulnerability openly reduces the pressure for you and others to appear like you have all the answers. This helps to make it safer for people to speak up, ask questions and share ideas without fear of looking incompetent.



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Book: The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth. | Amy C. Edmondson - [CLICK HERE](#)

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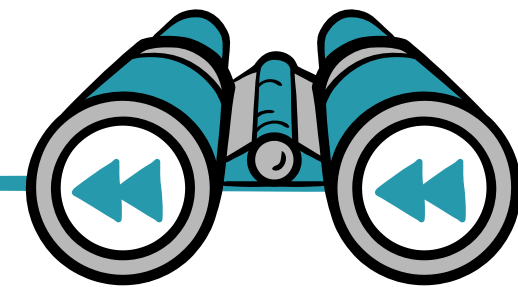
Reflective practice

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

Reflective practice is how we learn from experience both in the moment and afterwards, by noticing and questioning our actions and assumptions and staying open to different perspectives and challenge, even when this feels uncomfortable. It includes recognising when we feel uncertain or unsafe, understanding what may be driving that response, and identifying the support needed to stay engaged.

It involves awareness of behaviour and its impact, including tone, body language and reactions, alongside attention to who is speaking, who may be holding back, and how safe the conversation feels. This practice supports psychological safety by enabling you to act on your reflections. Consistent reflective practice helps to develop conditions where trust builds and people feel respected, included and safe to speak honestly.



LOOKING BACK...
**"WHAT WAS THE
VALUE IN THAT?"**

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Book: The Reflective Practice Guide | Barbara Bassot - [CLICK HERE](#)

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My team

How we work together

When it's safe to speak up and the purpose is clear, people are more likely to contribute.



Leadership practices...

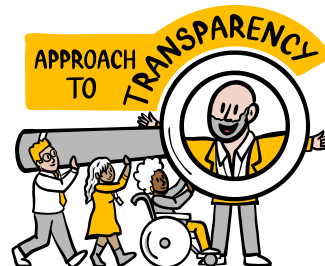
Intentional design

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Make the way you work explicit

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Share ownership for the team climate

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Intentional design

Intentional design shapes how contributions happen, for example changing group size and structure to make it easier for people to participate (moving between whole group, small groups, pairs or individual reflection) or establishing alternative methods to contribute, for example before or after a meeting, email or anonymous polls.

It supports psychological safety by lowering the perceived risk of speaking up by making contribution more manageable and accessible for people. Creating multiple ways for people to engage increases participation, includes quieter voices and makes it easier for people to share more openly. When people experience that a range of views are welcomed and shared across the group, not left to a few individuals, they are more likely to contribute their thinking and challenge assumptions.

Leadership practices...

My team



RESOURCES

Journal article: Facilitating psychological safety in science and research teams | Megan S. Jones et al - [CLICK HERE](#)

Web article: Dunbar's Number, Psychological Safety and Team Size | psychsafety.com - [CLICK HERE](#)

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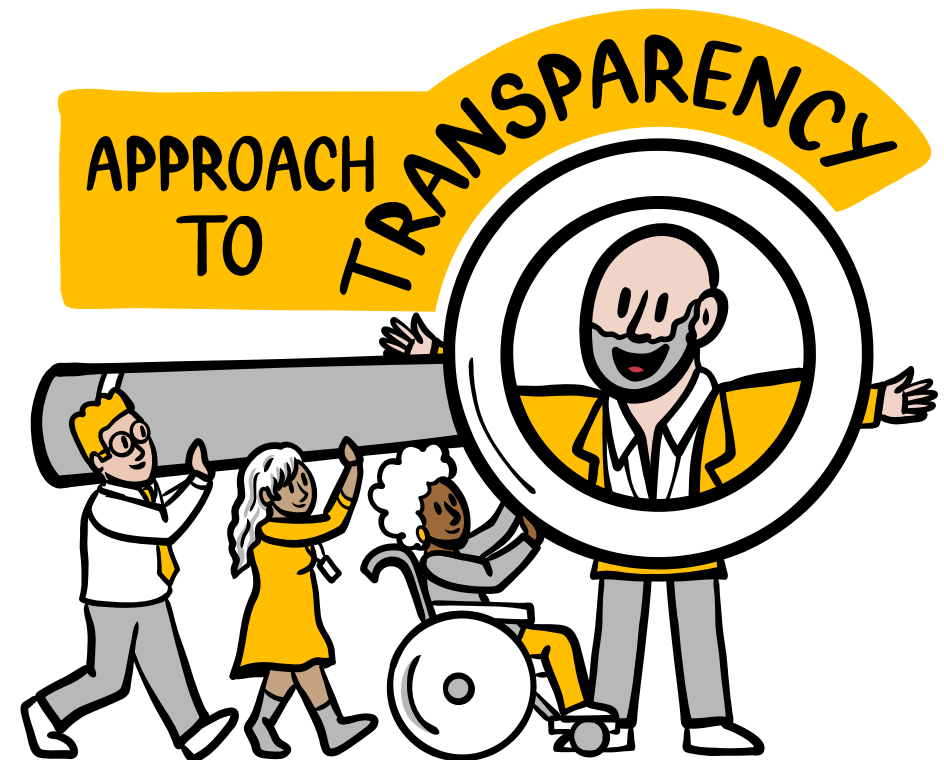
Make the way you work explicit

Leadership practices...

My team

Make the way you work explicit involves agreeing and revisiting how the team or group works together, and why that matters, sometimes called contracting and re-contracting. It includes setting clear, shared expectations (for example, team charters, ground rules and working agreements), being explicit about purpose and roles, and clearly establishing that different perspectives are needed to support the quality of work.

Making ways of working explicit removes guesswork and helps people understand what is expected. This builds clarity, reduces uncertainty, and enables people to contribute more confidently, improving both openness and the quality of thinking within the team.



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Book: The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth. | Amy C. Edmondson - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Situational awareness

Leadership practices...

My team

Situational awareness is paying close attention to what's happening in the room (who is speaking, who isn't, and where there is tension) and adjusting in the moment.

It supports psychological safety by demonstrating that people's experiences matter and won't be ignored. By acknowledging what's really going on and making space for everybody's voices, you reduce the risk of speaking up and make it easier for people to contribute openly.



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Podcast: Episode 459: How to increase your awareness | Amazing If - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Conversational turn-taking

Leadership practices...

My team

Conversational turn-taking is a practice that supports equal participation opportunities within a group, establishing explicit expectations about when to speak, and how speaking rights are passed between people.

By being deliberate about how airtime is shared more voices are heard, not just the most confident. Using simple structures to open up dialogue, for example, go round the room, invite input by name, allow people to pass. This lowers the pressure to compete for space and makes it easier, especially for quieter voices, to contribute.



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Project link: Reimagining Leadership Project | Newcastle University - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Listen carefully

Leadership practices...

My team

Listen carefully means focusing on understanding rather than responding or fixing. It involves listening without interrupting, managing your internal reactions, and clearly signalling, through your language and tone, your intention to hear and learn.

Listening carefully shows that people's voices matter. When leaders listen without interrupting or overriding contributions, it helps build respect and trust. Slowing the conversation down, by asking one question at a time, allowing silence, and acknowledging input (e.g. summarising or pausing before responding), helps people feel heard and taken seriously. This can help reduce anxiety about speaking up, reinforce that sharing ideas or concerns is valued and encourage more open contribution over time.



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Web article: Active Listening from Center for Creative Leadership | CCL - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Encouraging diverse views

Leadership practices...

My team

Encouraging diverse views is a core everyday practice that builds and fosters psychological safety. The way that you and your team listen, speak, respond, and involve each other signals that everyone's voice is valued and respected. It's not just about agreeing ways of working; it's about consistently bringing them to life, so that people experience inclusion, respect, and openness moment-to-moment, enabling everyone to contribute fully.

Creating non-judgemental spaces where people are actively encouraged to share their views, in ways that suit them, helps demonstrate that seeking different perspectives matters and that alternative thinking is welcomed.



RESOURCES

Web article: (Don't) Look me in the Eye: The Challenge of Eye Contact | psychsafety.com - [CLICK HERE](#)

Web article: Reading the Air: High and Low context communication in teams | psychsafety.com - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Learning from mistakes

Leadership practices...

My team

Learning from mistakes is the practice of openly recognising when something hasn't worked, discussing it, and using it to inform what to do differently in the future. It involves treating mistakes as useful information rather than failure, appreciating when concerns are raised, and focusing on 'what can we learn?', rather than, 'who is at fault?'

This approach helps diminish fear, shame, and blame from error, replacing them with curiosity and learning. When leaders and the wider team respond to mistakes with openness and inquiry, people are less likely to hide issues or become defensive. Instead, speaking up, reflecting honestly, and raising concerns become a normal part of the work. This builds trust, normalises learning, and creates an environment where colleagues feel safer to take interpersonal risks.



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Podcast: Episode 663: How to grow from your errors | Coaching for Leaders
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Share ownership for the team climate

Leadership practices...

My team

Share ownership for the team climate by ensuring responsibility is collective. Agree explicit expectations for respectful behaviour, inclusive practice and constructive challenge to be upheld by the team.

This supports psychological safety as it doesn't rely on the leader alone: everyone plays a part in maintaining agreed ways of working so that people feel more confident speaking up. It reduces fear, prevents unhelpful dynamics from taking hold, and creates an environment where people can expect their voice to be heard and supported.



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RESOURCES

Web article: How to use Team Canvas | Team Canvas - [CLICK HERE](#)

Web article: Team Charter Canvas | Design a Better Business - [CLICK HERE](#)

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Resources

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Me as a leader

My Team

P3	Contextual awareness	Web article: Academia in crisis needs new forms of Leadership Wonkhe Website: Resources from the Academy of Brain-based Leadership
P4	Pause and prepare	Book: Leader work: using insight, intuition and imagination to develop leadership practice, pages 34-37 Paul Hibbert
P5	Stay curious	Journal article: Psychological Safety Learning behavior in work teams Amy Edmondson
P6	Notice and name contribution	Web article: Gratitude at work: Why is Gratitude in Leadership Important CCL
P7	Show care in the moment	Web article: Compassionate Leadership The King's Fund
P8	Own and share your mistakes	Podcast: Episode 663: How to grow from your errors Coaching for Leaders
P9	Say when you don't know	Book: The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth. Amy C. Edmondson
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General resource

Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

My Team

An overview of psychological safety

What is psychological safety? | psychsafety.com

Disclaimer and Acknowledgement of Sources

This work draws on a range of external resources from different sectors, research, and good practice guidance to support learning and development. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and relevance, the content has been adapted for the specific context and should not be considered a definitive or exhaustive source.

All original authors, organisations, and publishers retain full ownership of their work. We gratefully acknowledge and thank them for their valuable contributions, insights, and generosity in sharing knowledge that has informed this toolkit.

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Collaborators

Thank you

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Paula Hill, Liz Kemp, Dawn Roxburgh, and Amy Stabler.

June 2026

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Leadership practices...

Me as a leader

My Team

