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# Mental Health Community of Practice: Culturally safe workplaces *in practice*

## In-person workshop

14 October 2026, 10:00am-12:30pm AEDT

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# Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledgement of artist

Healing Hands – Cover artwork by Dion Devow of DDesigns

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NIAA

## Presenter

# Steve Meyer

**Senior Psychologist, Employee Health and Wellbeing**
**National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)**

- Extensive cross-cultural experience across government, community, and international settings.
- Background in psychological counselling, education and professional training, particularly trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice.
- Focus on relational leadership, psychosocial safety, and building capability in diverse and high-stakes environments.

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# Learning aims

- Explore practical approaches to cultural safety and its relationship with psychological and psychosocial safety.
- Reflect and share knowledge on how workplace culture, leadership, systems and processes can support safe, inclusive and high-performing workplaces.
- Develop practical actions to strengthen cultural safety at the personal, team and organisational systems levels, including through existing organisational processes.

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# Shared expectations

- Openness to a diversity of perspectives
- Ask questions
- Maintain confidentiality
- Take breaks and move/stretch as needed
- Anything else to include?

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# Session outline

**55 min |** Part 1: Understanding cultural safety in practice

**15 min |** Break

**50 min |** Part 2: Influencing systems and embedding change

**30 min |** Part 3: Action planning and peer learning

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# Small group discussion – structure

Form small groups of 5-7 people.

Introductions:

- **Name**
- **Role**
- **One thing you most want to get out of today**

Assign a Slido scribe and rotate the role for each reflective question.

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# Reflection

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***How do you define cultural safety?***

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# Defining cultural safety

- Cultural safety is the experience of being respected, valued and able to participate fully without fear of exclusion, discrimination or harm.

- Cultural safety is determined by the people experiencing the workplace, not by the intentions of others.

## Cultural safety

Feeling respected, included and able to bring your full identity to work.

## Psychological safety

Feeling safe to speak up, contribute ideas, ask questions and raise concerns.

## Psychosocial safety

Work is designed and managed in ways that reduce risks to psychological health.

## Together

These elements interact to shape employee **wellbeing**, **engagement** and **performance.**

**Wellbeing**

**Engagement**

**Performance**

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# Reflection

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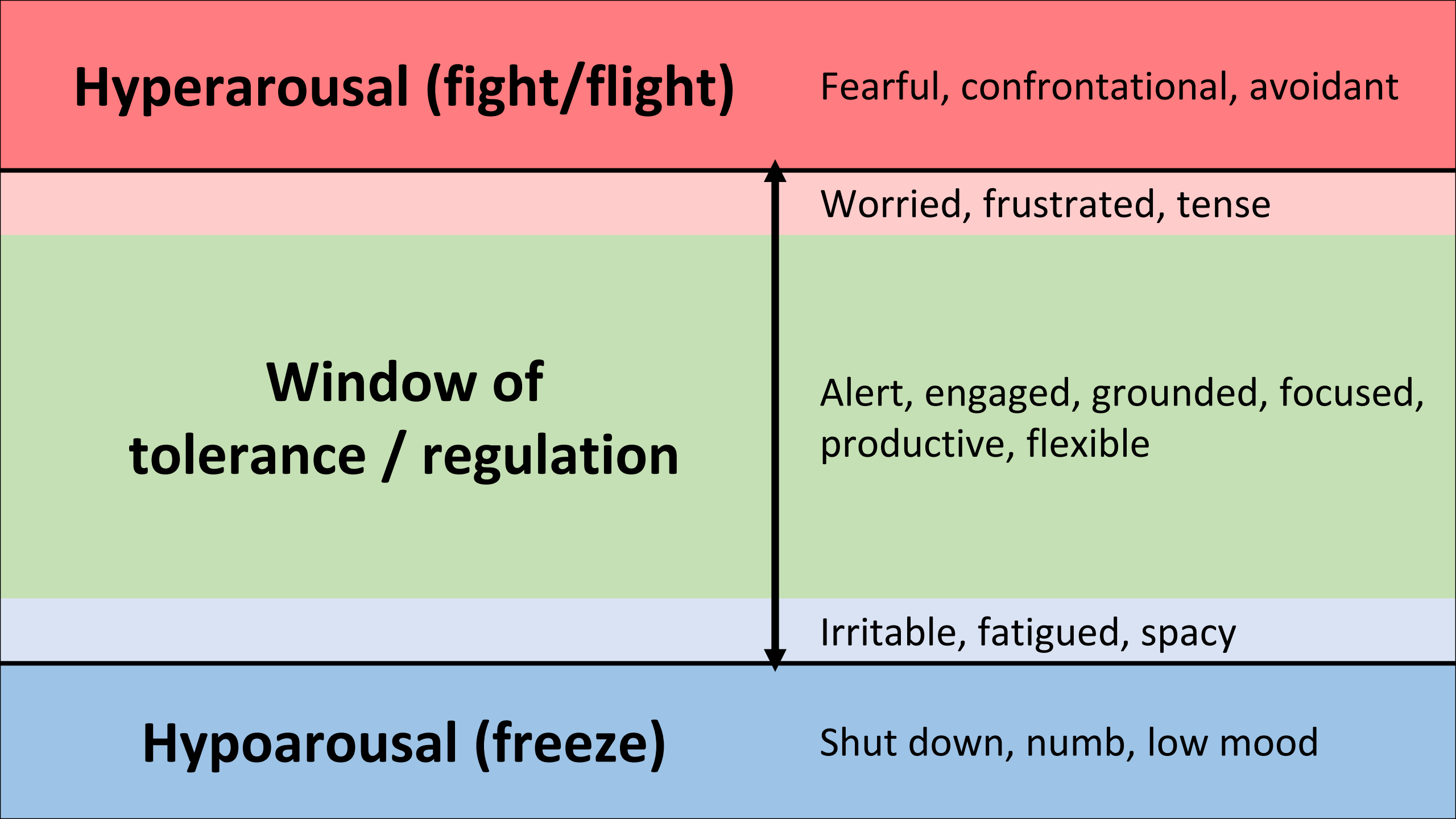
## *What helps and hinders safety?*

*Individual and team level*

*Organisational culture*


Hyperarousal (fight/flight)
Fearful, confrontational, avoidant
Worried, frustrated, tense
Window of tolerance / regulation
Alert, engaged, grounded, focused, productive, flexible
Irritable, fatigued, spacy
Hypoarousal (freeze)
Shut down, numb, low mood

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# Reflection

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**Turn to the person next to you and discuss:**

- What are your signs that you're beginning to move outside your window of tolerance? What do you notice in others?
- What helps you return to your 'green zone'?

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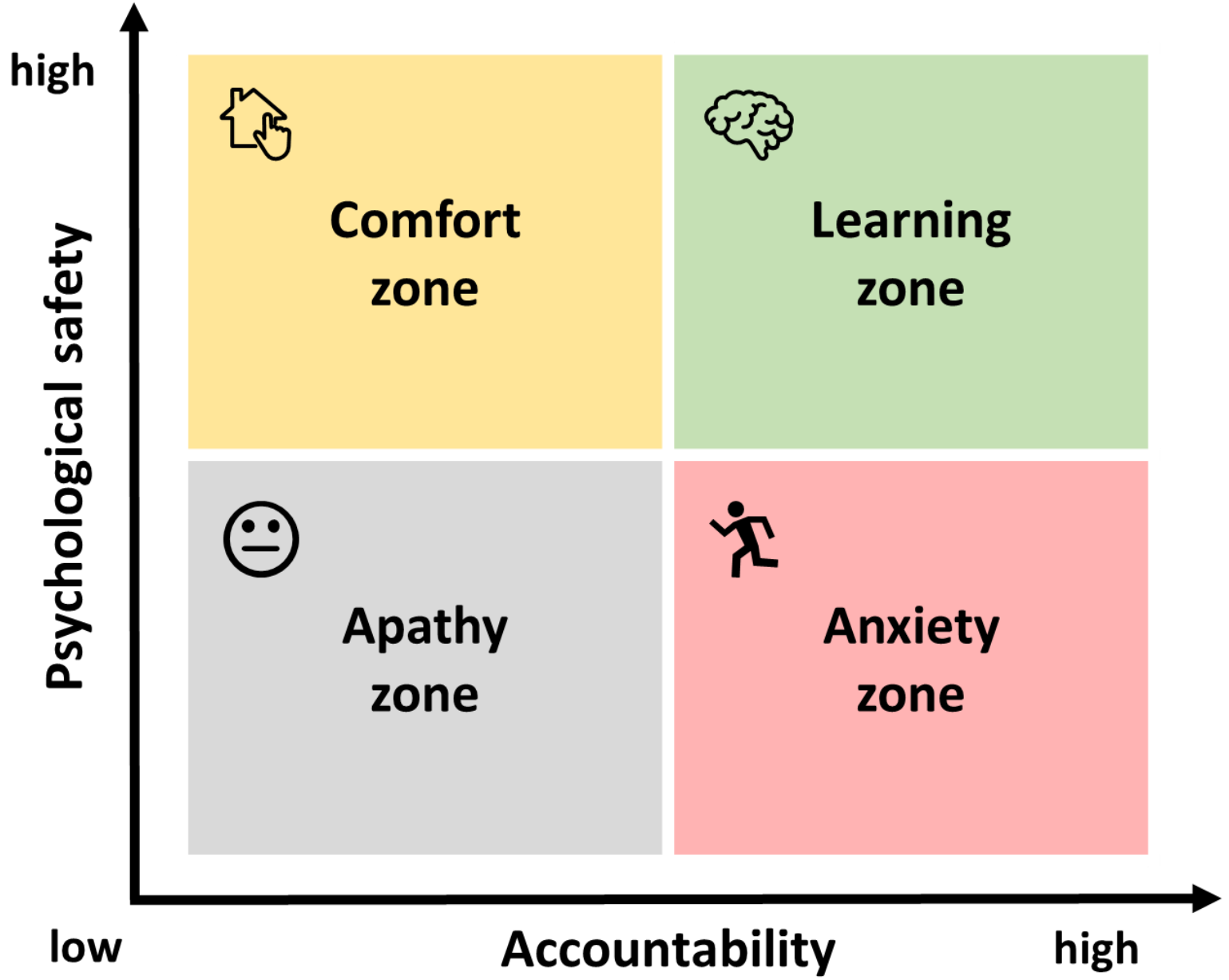


*Psychological safety is not about always being comfortable.*

**The four zones of psychological safety**
(Amy Edmondson)

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| Dimension | Person A | Person B | Potential misunderstanding |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Feedback** | Prefers structured, formal feedback sessions. | Appreciates quick, informal feedback and continuous check-ins. | A lack of immediate feedback might make Person B feel undervalued, while Person A might see constant feedback requests as needy. |
| **Hierarchy** | Values clear hierarchy and titles. | Prefers flat structures and collaborative decision-making. | Person B may bypass formal channels, which Person A may interpret as insubordination. |
| **Response times** | Expects prompt responses during business hours. | Works flexibly and responds outside traditional hours. | Delayed replies might be seen by Person A as disengagement or lack of respect for deadlines. |
| **Preferred communication channels** | Tends to favour phone calls or face-to-face meetings. | Prefers instant messaging, collaboration tools, such as Teams or emails. | Person B might think a phone call is unnecessary, while Person A sees it as essential for clarity. |
| **Tone and formality** | Prefers formal language in emails or meetings. | Often uses casual language, emojis, or abbreviations. | A casual tone might be perceived by Person A as disrespectful or unprofessional by Person B. |

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# Place-based approaches to cultural safety

Especially in a geographically dispersed team, consider:

- local challenges and opportunities for wellbeing
- availability of local support services and accessibility of social networks
- community dynamics
- relationships between staff and communities.

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# Considering organisational subcultures

Cultural safety extends beyond ethnicity and demographics. Organisations have their own cultures and subcultures, influenced by factors such as:

- organisational history
- psychosocial environment and nature of the work
- geographical location
- individual personalities that make up the team.

**Recognising and respecting these subcultures promotes safety and engagement.**

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# Reflection

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## Embedding cultural safety:

## *What do we mean by 'systems of work'?*

## Systems of work include:

- Policies
- Processes
- Procedures
- Governance
- Decision-making practices
- Informal workplace norms

## Key systems for wellbeing:

- Onboarding and induction
- Case management – including injury, illness and return to work
- Psychosocial risk management
- Performance management
- Capability development
- Census action plans

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# Psychosocial risk management lens

## Cultural safety is an essential part of psychosocial risk management.

| Psychosocial hazard | Cultural safety consideration |
|---|---|
| High job demands | Is cultural load increasing workload or emotional demands? |
| Low support | Do staff feel culturally supported by managers and colleagues? |
| Poor organisational change management | Are cultural impacts considered during change processes? |
| Low role clarity | Are cultural responsibilities clearly defined and recognised? |
| Inappropriate behaviours | Are discrimination, exclusion and microaggressions being addressed? |
| Poor workplace relationships | Do team practices support culturally safe interactions and communication? |

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# Embedding psychosocial safety at scale

| | |
|---|---|
| **Individual** | • Wellbeing and inclusion literacy<br>• Self-awareness<br>• Practical wellbeing skills<br>• Job crafting |
| **Team** | • Psychological safety and sense-making<br>• Reflection and learning<br>• Workload and change conversations |
| **Organisation** | • Good work design<br>• Leadership capability<br>• Psychosocial risk management<br>• Organisational listening |

## The shift

**From:** Helping people cope with work

**To:** Designing work, leadership and change to better support people and performance

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# Key message

**Safety is created through systems and relationships.**

- Daily interactions
- Leadership behaviours
- Team norms
- Workplace systems
- Organisational culture

**Creating safe workplaces requires action at multiple levels.**

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# Reflection

Discuss a change to cultural safety that you have influenced or observed in the workplace.

Consider:

- How did it gain traction?
- Who were the key stakeholders?
- What barriers were overcome?
- What evidence supported the change?

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# Translating theory to practice

What helps your workforce embed cultural safety knowledge and learning **into their everyday work?**

- The importance of maintaining a continuous conversation with your workforce – providing a reflective space to integrate experiences and surface individual and team experiences.
- The art of facilitation – sustaining a safe and structured environment for learning and collaboration.
- How do you **balance power** in your interactions with staff?

# Influencing systems – what helps change succeed?

### Build relationships and networks

Invest in building social capital with staff.

### Influence without formal authority

Manage upwards, downwards and outwards.

### Use evidence and data

Make a business case for change.

### Facilitate reflective conversations

With staff cohorts across the organisation on topics relating to safety, wellbeing and performance.

### Create meaning

Provide an opportunity for staff to make sense of and meaning from their experiences through reflective practice.

### Enable cultural safety

Utilise good work design and job crafting as key enablers – including leave and attendance at significant cultural events.

# Influencing systems – what helps change succeed?

### Clear messaging and access to support

Regular, clear messaging about available staff supports and options for access.

### Visibility and celebration

Visibility of staff diversity networks and days of significance.

### Cultural supervision and mentoring

Availability of cultural supervision and mentoring networks.

PEOPLE
INSIGHTS
ACTION

LASTING IMPACT

### Linking action and risk

Linking Census action planning and psychosocial risk management.

### Practical guidance

Guides for staff and managers with examples of language to use when designing culturally safe work.

### Champions and allies

Identifying champions and allies, and beginning with business areas that are ready to engage with safety and wellbeing initiatives.

# Considering the HR life cycle

1 **Attraction and recruitment**

Attract and hire the right talent

2 **Onboarding and induction**

Set people up for success

3 **Performance management**

Enable high performance

4 **Capability development**

Build skills and capabilities

5 **Retention and engagement**

Keep people healthy, motivated and connected

6 **Workforce/succession planning**

Plan for today and tomorrow

7 **Exit and offboarding**

Ensure a positive and productive transition

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# Allyship in action

**Practical allyship includes:**

- **Listening to understand** before advocating.
- **Respectfully challenging** exclusion, bias and discriminatory behaviour.
- **Creating space** for diverse voices, perspectives and lived experiences.
- **Seeking feedback** and reflecting on the impact of your actions.
- **Being open** to learning, correction and personal growth.
- **Offering** a safe, respectful and judgement-free environment for colleagues to share their workplace experiences.
- **Recognising and acknowledging** days of cultural, community and social significance, and proactively supporting inclusive office/team activities and learning opportunities.
- **Using your influence** to promote equitable participation, access and opportunities for all colleagues.

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# Reflection

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**Turning insight into action – over the next month:**

- **One personal action:** What will I do differently to strengthen cultural safety in my workplace?
- **One team action:** What can my team implement?
- **One systems action:** What organisational process could be improved?

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# Key message

***Questions and reflections***

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# Comcare Safe Work Month Program 2026

## Safe work is for life: leadership, trust and mentally healthy work

**1 October 2026**

This opening session will launch National Safe Work Month and explore why safe and healthy work matters, and how organisations can create the conditions for people to speak up early, raise concerns, feel heard and access support.

## Building mentally healthy and culturally safe workplaces

**6 October 2026**

Led by Senior Clinical Psychologist Nasalifya Namwinga, this webinar will explore the protective workplace factors that support cultural safety, psychological health and reduce the risk of harm.

## Mental Health Community of Practice (in person workshop in Canberra)

**14 October 2026**

This interactive, in person workshop will explore what culturally safe workplaces can look like in practice. Participants will share challenges and successes and identify practical actions that can support meaningful change.

## Creating sustainable workplaces through SMART work design

**15 October 2026**

This session will explore how managers can use SMART work design to manage psychosocial risks to create sustainable workplaces. It will also consider the role of managers and organisations in creating the right conditions for people to shape their work in positive and sustainable ways.

## Worker insights from Comcare's Psychosocial Inspection Program

**22 October 2026**

Drawing on insights from Comcare's Psychosocial Inspection Program, this session will explore how workplaces can identify and understand the way psychosocial hazards interact and take practical steps to manage and review them.

## From consultation to action: HSRs, managers and safety in practice

**28 October 2026**

This HSR forum will explore how HSRs, managers and workers can work together to support psychological safety, navigate change and turn workplace concerns into practical improvements.