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Organisational Workbook

Secure Base

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Secure Base

Making sure health and social care practitioners have a secure base from which to operate is critical to organisational resilience and is the first Key Foundational Principle. A secure base provides:

- A sense of protection, belonging, safety and feeling valued and cared for. It also fosters a culture of trust and mutual support, whether practitioners are on-site or working remotely.

- A constructive challenge for practitioners to explore fears and threats relating to their role and area of practice and organisational change.

- A 'safe space' that provides support, gives renewed energy and provides resources for wellbeing and improved practice.

Psychological safety is the foundation of a healthy and productive organisational culture. It refers to the belief that an individual will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. Such organisations acknowledge that practitioners need a secure base that offers constructive yet supportive challenge, enabling them to develop and thrive in their roles. In psychologically safe organisations, members feel accepted and respected, able to express their emotions openly and empowered to share knowledge freely. Psychologically safe organisations organisations provide emotional containment, ensure a culture of high support and high challenge, reduce stress and increase confidence among practitioners. They believe they will not be penalised for making a mistake, and errors provide opportunities for learning, creativity and growth. Several studies have found that nurturing psychological safety is crucial for effective teams and organisations (Frazier et al., 2017; Kessel et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2017).

Alexander (2019) found that organisational restructure motivated by cost improvement and streamlining of services could lose focus on the working context of employees. Participants reported experiencing fragmented teams, loss of connection and increased isolation from imposed organisational change.

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Key to professionals feeling equipped and supported to fulfil their roles was their sense of *situational connection*; a working context in which collegiate relationship-base practice was valued and facilitated. Situationally connected organisations recognise the value of relationships between colleagues in creating a secure base, the role of teams in providing containment for individuals and the need for teams to feel anchored within the organisational structure to provide psychological safety. Homeworking can present challenges for peer support and functioning of the team as a secure base, reducing opportunities for members to share experiences and feeling understood by others (Cook et al., 2020). This issue is considered in KFP5 Wellbeing.

Box 1.1 provides some examples of questions that you could use in a psychological safety audit in your organisation.

Box 1.1: Conducting a psychological safety audit

The following questions can help you gain insight into the extent to which people feel psychologically safe in your organisation. It can also be used at the team level.

- If you make a mistake in this team, will it be held against you?

- Do people in this organisation feel able to bring up problems and tough issues?

- Do people in this organisation sometimes reject others for being different?

- Is it safe to take a risk in this organisation?

- Is it difficult to ask colleagues for help?

- Would anyone in this organisation deliberately act in a way that undermines efforts?

- When working with colleagues, are unique skills and talents valued and utilised?

Four quadrants of psychological safety have been identified (see Fig 1.1): learner safety, collaborator safety, challenger safety, and inclusion safety (see below). This can serve as a framework to guide interventions to enhance perceptions of psychological safety within your organisation.

Learner Safety

It's safe to:

- Discover
- Ask questions
- Experiment
- Learn from mistakes
- Look for new opportunities

Collaborator Safety

It's safe to:

- Engage in an unconstrained way Interact with colleagues
- Have mutual access
- Maintain open dialogue
- Foster constructive
- debate

Challenger Safety

It's safe to:

- Challenge the status quo
- Speak up
- Express ideas
- Identify changes
- Expose problems

Inclusion Safety

It's safe to:

- Know that you are valued
- Treat all people fairly
- Feel your experience, and ideas matter
- Include others regardless of title/position
- Openly contribute

Fig. 1.1: Four quadrants of psychological safety

Box 1.2 describes ways to foster psychological safety in your organisation. Psychological safety also links to KFP3 Learning Organisation and KFP5 Wellbeing and illustrates their interconnectedness: strategies that are effective for one can also be used to support others.

Box 1.2: How to make your organisation psychologically safe

- **Lead by example and use self-disclosure:** Leaders are role models and what they do sets standards for behaviour across the organisation. Ask people for feedback on what you are doing well and not so well; acknowledge your mistakes openly. Be receptive to different opinions; be approachable and encourage people to ask you questions.

- **Promote compassionate, curious management:** Model and encourage a management style that is collaborative and compassionate, and open to understanding new perspectives.

- **Encourage open communication and active listening:** Seek and be receptive to feedback from practitioners and create opportunities for open dialogue such as via regular team meetings or feedback sessions. This lets people know their opinions matter to you. Make meetings 'phone free' so people can give their full attention to the matter in hand.

Demonstrate understanding by repeating what has been said; encourage people to ask questions; make sure everyone has a chance to speak, especially those who are more reticent. The section on mindful listening in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation provides in-depth guidance on improving listening skills.

- **Create a safe environment:** Make sure people feel comfortable voicing their opinions and can speak their mind without being embarrassed or punished. Work with practitioners to develop some ground rules for personal interactions – e.g. no interruptions, all ideas are accepted equally, never blame or judge.

- **Addressing conflict effectively:** Develop mechanisms for conflict resolution to manage disagreements constructively. Ensure individuals feel safe in reporting conflicts without fearing retaliation, and empower them to challenge discriminatory, uncivil, or disruptive behaviour. Managing conflict is discussed further in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

- **Promote inclusivity:** Cultivate a diverse and inclusive workforce where every individual feels valued and respected, and different perspectives are welcomed in decision-making processes. Foster a culture that actively encourages and addresses questions, concerns and ideas.

- **Encourage a sense of justice and equity:** Implement policies and procedures that prioritise fairness. Consider three aspects: distributive justice (ensuring employees perceive outcomes as equitable, meaning that rewards, opportunities, and resources are distributed fairly across the organisation), procedural justice (ensuring the decision-making process is deemed fair, transparent, and unbiased) and interactional justice (focusing on how individuals are treated when decisions are made, including the respect, dignity and consideration they receive from managers and colleagues). Organisational justice is discussed further in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

- **Keep an open mind:** Trying to see things from a different perspective can provide solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Encourage teams to share feedback widely and help them respond to input from others without defensiveness; encourage individuals and teams to view feedback as a way of strengthening and expanding their ideas and processes, rather than criticism.

- **Regularly assess and adapt:** Actively seek practitioners' feedback on the organisational culture and adjust if necessary. Invite innovation and suggestions for improvement. Continuously evaluate and enhance communication channels and leadership practices.

- **Provide resources for wellbeing:** Provide resources and support for mental health and wellbeing and cultivate an environment where seeking help is encouraged and destigmatised.

- **Distinguish between psychological safety and accountability:** Acknowledging personal fallibility and dealing with errors and failure openly and productively are key to a psychologically safe workplace. Nonetheless, it is important to be constructively supportive rather than offer a 'crutch', as organisations that are too psychologically safe can stifle creativity and sanction poor performance.

Consistently implementing these strategies will enable leaders to create a psychological safe climate, enhancing employee engagement, nurturing creativity, and enhancing overall organisational effectiveness. In health and social care teams, establishing psychological safety is crucial for cultivating a supportive and collaborative environment, enabling individuals to flourish. This requires a team culture where members can freely express their thoughts, voice concerns, and contribute ideas without fear of judgment or reprisal, and where diverse perspectives are encouraged and valued.

Biggart and colleagues (2017) used Schofield and Beek's (2014) Secure Base model to provide insight into how social care organisations can develop a 'safe haven' where practitioners feel supported and able to flourish. They identified five key dimensions for a secure base at the team level: availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and team membership (see Fig. 1.2 below).

Practitioners who feel secure believe:

- There are people they can turn to within the team

- Their team is emotionally containing

- Their team provides an opportunity to moderate negative feelings caused by stress.

Although this work was based on research at the team level, it can also be applied at the organisational level.

Fig. 1.2: Key dimensions for developing the team as a secure base (Biggart et al., 2017)

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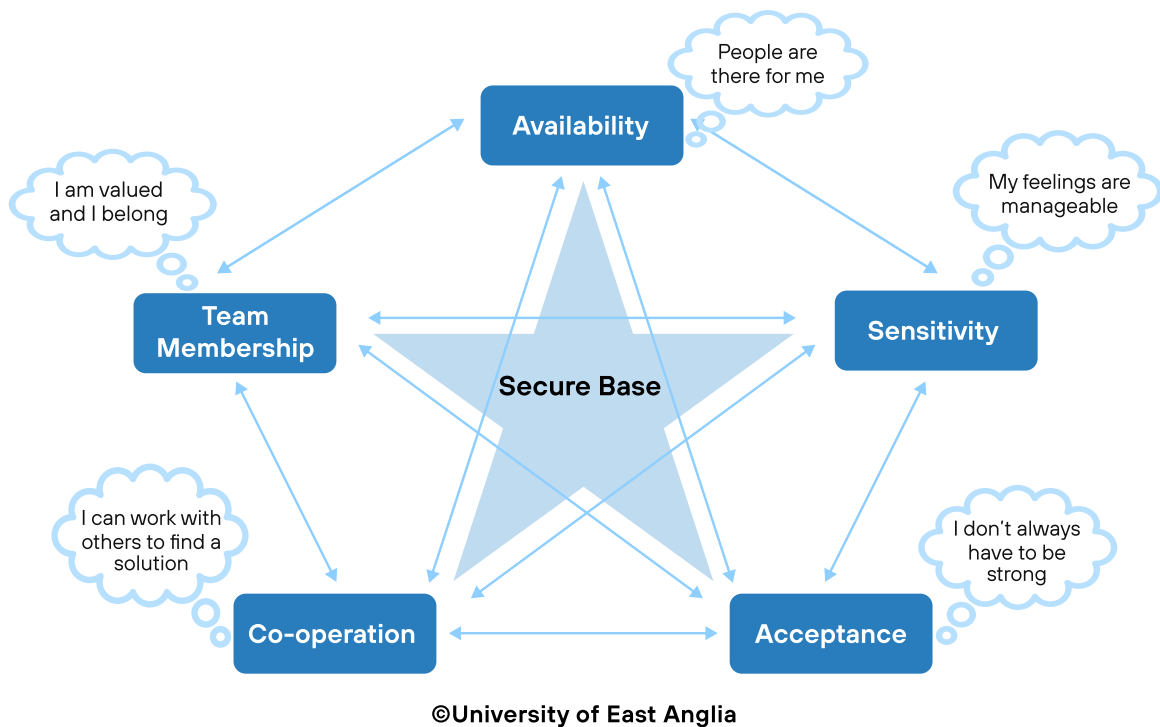
The secure base model offers a useful framework for guiding the development of a secure and supportive environment for team members, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and psychological safety.

Trust is one of the golden threads that helps build a resilient organisation. Trust is a critical component of a secure base and crucial for psychological safety, but it can be complex and fragile. There are three different kinds of trust:

- Strategic: trust in leaders to make the right decisions, allocate resources effectively, fulfil the organisation's mission and help the organisation succeed.

- Personal: the trust people have in their own managers, the extent to which they treat practitioners fairly and consider their needs when making decisions.

- Organisational: the trust people have in the organisation itself, e.g. that processes are well designed and consistently and fairly applied

These three types of trust are distinct but linked in important ways: for example, if a manager violates the personal trust of their employees, organisational trust will also be compromised. Trust is particularly important during crises and all three types will help people feel safe, remain mentally healthy and able to support people accessing services effectively.

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The key foundations of trust are behaviours such as consistency, clear communication, and a willingness to tackle difficult issues. It is also crucial to be aware of the factors that can destabilise trust in an organisation. Some examples are:

- *Inconsistent messages*, for example, telling people what they want to hear rather than carefully considering priorities and how they should be articulated to practitioners clearly and honestly.

- *Inconsistent standards,* where some practitioners may get preferential treatment or be allowed to 'bend' the rules.

- *Misplaced benevolence,* where incompetence or inappropriate behaviour is tolerated or even overlooked entirely.

- *False feedback,* where not being honest about some practitioners' shortcomings will devalue praise given to others for genuinely good performance.

- *Failure to trust others*, characterised by a reluctance to delegate and help others develop professionally.

- *The elephant in the room,* where ignoring difficult situations creates assumptions that something is being concealed and, in turn, fuels rumours and gossip.

See here for more information.

Rebuilding damaged trust can be a long and arduous process but the following actions can be useful:

- Identify what happened, what occurred and whose trust was violated.

- Assess the damage, ensuring that you adapt your response to the needs of different groups within the organisation affected by the breach of trust.

- Own up quickly, by letting people know that you are aware of the situation and committed to taking remedial action. Make a firm commitment to act within a particular timeframe and provide regular updates on progress.

- Identify the remedial actions required, define what repaired trust would look like and focus on the changes needed to organisational systems, people and culture. Then make the changes planned.

See here for more information.

Also see guidance on ensuring a sense of fairness, justice and equity in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Compassionate leadership

Compassionate leadership is a style of leadership that emphasises empathy, understanding, and care for the wellbeing of employees or team members (West, 2021; West & Chowla, 2017). It involves a leader who not only focuses on achieving organisational goals but also on the personal and professional growth of those they lead.

Key traits of compassionate leaders include:

- **Empathy:** Understanding and sharing the feelings of others. Compassionate leaders are able to put themselves in their employees' shoes and see situations from their perspectives.

- **Active Listening:** Compassionate leaders listen attentively to their team members, showing genuine interest in their concerns, ideas, and feedback.

- **Supportiveness:** They provide support and encouragement to their team members, helping them overcome challenges and develop their skills.

- **Fairness and respect:** Compassionate leaders treat everyone with fairness, dignity, and respect, regardless of their position or background.

- **Trust:** They build trust with their team members by being transparent, reliable, and consistent in their actions.

- **Flexibility:** Compassionate leaders are adaptable and understand the individual needs and circumstances of their team members.

- **Conflict resolution:** They address conflicts and disagreements in a constructive and empathetic manner, striving to find solutions that benefit everyone involved.

As shown in Fig 1.3 below, compassionate leadership involves four key behaviours (Atkins & Parker, 2012).

Fig. 1.3: Aspects of compassionate leadership

	EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP	INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP	COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP	SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

Effective Leadership

Attending

- Direction. A clear shared inspiring purpose or vision

Understanding

- Alignment: Clear goals for people and teams aligned and springing from the vision

Empathising

- Commitment: Developing Trust and motivation

Helping

Inclusive Leadership

- Clear, shared inspiring purpose or vision
- Positively valuing difference
- Frequent face to face contact
- Continuous commitment to equality and inclusion
- Clear roles and strong team

Collective Leadership

- Everybody has leadership responsibility
- Shared leadership in teams
- Independent leadership across boundaries
- Consistent leadership styles across the organization

Systems Leadership

- Shared vision and values
- Long term objectives
- Frequent face to face contact
- Constructive and ethical conflict management
- Mutual support and altruism across boundaries

Overall, compassionate leadership creates a positive work environment where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to perform their best. It can lead to higher levels of engagement, productivity, and employee satisfaction (Ramachandran et al., 2023).

Knowing yourself: enhancing emotional literacy as a leadership trait

To create a secure base, leaders should recognise the importance of managing their own emotions and responding effectively to those of others. Emotionally literate (or emotionally intelligent) leadership is one of the golden threads that underpin organisational resilience. Everyone would like to think of themselves as an emotionally literate leader, but we can all succumb to focusing on processes and targets at the expense of relationships and humane responses to people's work pressures and personal difficulties. Emotional literacy is a capacity that can be

developed, however. Self-awareness is a key step in developing and consolidating emotional literacy: a helpful quick quiz that tells you how emotionally literate you are as a leader can be found here. Use the reflective checklist in Box 1.3 to help you assess your emotionally intelligent leadership skills and highlight any areas for development.

Box 1.3: How emotionally intelligent am I?

- *Is my style participatory?* Do I make sure I get 'buy-in' from practitioners for new ideas and change? Do I engage with people in a truly participatory manner to inform decision-making processes?

- *Do I put people at ease?* Do people find me easy to engage with? Am I culturally competent in understanding that I may need to adjust my communication style?

- *Am I self-aware?* Am I aware of my strengths and limitations, and do I share this information with others, showing that it is OK not to be good at everything and to have 'off days'? Do I ensure there are people around me who are better at things I am not so good at? If not, do I know where to seek help?

- *Do I model good work-life balance?* Do I make sure people notice that I take time out for myself? This shows I appreciate the importance of self-care and that I can manage my work in a healthy and sustainable way.

- *Am I able to remain composed?* If I make a mistake, do I remain calm, recover, stay optimistic and learn from the experience?

- *Can I build and mend relationships?* Am I able to negotiate work-related difficulties without alienating people? Can I agree to differ, or do I hold a grudge?

- *Do I show tenacity?* When faced with obstacles, do I take responsibility for leading a plan, while also taking on the views of others?

- *Am I decisive?* When needed, can I make a decision and stick to it? Am I able to review the effectiveness of my decisions and adapt them if required?

- *Do I confront difficulties with practitioners?* Am I able to act with authority if required, without being authoritarian? Do I treat people fairly, even when they disagree with a course of action I endorse?

> • *Can I manage change and uncertainty effectively?* Can I implement change initiatives, reduce anxiety and overcome resistance?

Supporting and modelling emotion regulation: check your 'inner chimp'

Dr Steve Peters, author of the best-selling book The Chimp Paradox (2012), helps us understand why, even as emotionally intelligent human beings, we are sometimes prone to think or respond in an overly emotional or irrational way. The chimp brain is a psychological theory that is related to how we have evolved over to time to respond to threats in our environment. For example:

- Jumping to conclusions, or thinking in 'black and white' terms

- Paranoid thinking

- Experiencing a sense of inner turmoil that makes us overreact if we feel threatened or undermined.

Peters distinguishes between the 'human brain' (which enables us to be compassionate and to react calmly by using both emotions and rational thinking) and the 'chimp brain' (where we react without thinking, say things we do not mean, sulk or 'lose it' when faced with opposition). Our chimp brain is ever-present and reacts five times faster than the human brain, but we can train ourselves to be aware when it is making an appearance. The aim is not to kill your chimp brain but to tame it – being able to calm ourselves and use logic to reassure it makes us emotionally literate leaders and professionals.

Box 1.4 Learning to tame your 'inner chimp'

- We can only regulate our emotions if we also have an opportunity to express them; this can help us process socially inappropriate feelings such as frustration, anger and disgust. So, it is important to vent, to allow your inner chimp to have its voice in a safe space. Find people (within and outside the workplace) that you can vent with safely. The section on your Personal Board of Directors (see KFP3 Learning Organisation) will help you with this.

- We can then begin to address our emotional reaction calmly and allow the human part of our brain to determine a more rational reaction to the situation.

- Remember, being angry is perfectly natural and a logical response to some situations, but not always proportional or functional. Quick Win 1.1 offers some tips on how to manage anger more effectively.

- When we need to divert our inner chimp, it helps to count to ten or to use a breathing technique (see Quick Win 1.2) before we voice our reactions.

- Techniques to challenge unproductive thinking (see the KFP5 Wellbeing section) can also be useful in calming our inner chimp. Strategies to help manage inter-personal conflict are discussed in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

- Encouraging practitioners to find an appropriate person to vent to (and recognising their need to do so) is important – although, as a leader, remember that you may not be the appropriate sounding board.

Try the following exercises to manage your inner Chimp:

- Describe a recent situation in which you allowed your emotions to control your reaction to something that someone else said or did. How did their words or actions trigger you, and how did you respond?

- How did you feel afterward? Did you get the result you wanted from your reaction? Why or why not?

- How could you have managed your Chimp better to allow your Human (your rational brain) to stay in control?

If you speak to someone else using your Chimp (emotional side), they will most likely respond with their Chimp. Try to speak to other people from your Human (rational side) to their Human and leave your Chimps out of the conversation. The following exercises may be helpful:

- Think of a recent argument that you had in which your Chimp drove your words or actions. When you addressed the other person with your Chimp, how did her Chimp respond?

- How did your Chimp respond when her Chimp spoke to you? Were you able to prevent it from doing so? Why or why not?

- How could you have used your inner Human to better respond to the other person's Chimp when it addressed you?

Quick Win 1.1: Managing and resolving conflict

Ask yourself the following questions:

- *Do I need to get angry about this?* Trying to avoid being angry does not mean suppressing your feelings, as this can result in shame, depression and (possibly) more anger. Instead, try to change your outlook and ask yourself whether what has just happened is something you need to be angry about.

- *How does anger affect you?* Think back to previous situations when you have been angry at work and ask yourself how it affects aspects of your life, both good and bad. Identify the impact on you, your relationships with colleagues, your job performance, your wellbeing and energy, how you feel outside work, and your relationships with family and friends.

- *Was anger an appropriate response*? Did your anger arise from an accurate or logical reading of the situation, or your own interpretation of it? Talk the situation through with somebody you trust who is neutral to the situation (see your Personal Board of Directors in KFP3 Learning Organisation).

- *Is your anger out of proportion?* Minor things can trigger significant anger. Acknowledging that anger is often a response to something else (e.g. being tired, hungry or angry with someone or about something else) can help you contain your feelings.

- *Am I taking this personally?* We often become stressed and angry in situations that tap into deep-seated feelings of not being good enough or having failed in some way. Be aware of your emotional triggers and challenge your initial reactions.

- *How can I frame the problem more clearly?* Jot down the relevant details, including the points you and the other person/people made during the encounter, and any misunderstandings you think might have occurred. Read it aloud to try to see the situation more objectively.

- *How did I feel and what did I want?* How were you feeling before and during the situation? Was your anger triggered by unmet needs? Did you project your anger onto other people because they misinterpreted what it was you wanted?

- *Identify your objective: What do you want from this situation? Define your goal in a way that other people can understand. Do you wish to resolve it directly, or tackle an underlying problem?*

- *Be realistic:* Having unrealistic expectations of others can set them up to fail, whereas unrealistic expectations of yourself can lead to self-blame and self-punishment.

- *How can I move on?* Shift your focus from what was done to you to what you can do to fix it. Sometimes the best response is just to chalk it up to experience and let it go. This does not mean you have 'lost' a battle.

- *Acknowledge and respect differences:* Trying to take another person's perspective helps you see issues in a different light.

- *Get moving:* Physical activity can help deal with anger, so go for a brisk walk away from the working environment.

Quick Win 1.2: A breathing exercise for reducing feelings of stress

Paying attention to your breathing is an effective way of calming yourself at times of stress. It only takes a few minutes and can be done anywhere, without other people noticing. Practising this technique regularly will help you get the most out of it, so try to build it into your daily routine.

- As you are likely to be doing this at work, it is best to practise by sitting in a chair that supports your back. Make yourself as comfortable as you can with your feet flat, roughly a hip-width apart so you feel grounded.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable without forcing it. Try breathing in gently through your nose and out through your mouth. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.

- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.

- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

Based on NHS advice (full details can be found here).

As discussed earlier in this workbook, feeling supported provides practitioners with a secure base and is an important component of organisational resilience. An effective leader is available to offer support and encourage open, reflective communication, feedback and discussion. Nonetheless, making yourself available at any time to discuss any topic is clearly not feasible. Quick Win 1.3 outlines how a boundaried open-door policy can help practitioners feel more supported and enhance their sense of security.

Quick Win 1.3: Making open-door policies work

'Open-door policy' implies that leaders encourage practitioners to come into their office at any time to discuss any issues or concerns. This can be effective, as the leader will be seen as accessible and an open flow of communication will be encouraged. You will also be more aware of day-to-day problems and able to resolve minor issues before they escalate. Nonetheless, an open-door policy must be well defined, otherwise you may spend a lot of your time listening to concerns without people reaching solutions autonomously. Without boundaries and guidelines, you may also unwittingly develop a culture of dependency, where practitioners are reluctant to solve problems themselves. Alternatively, they may be reluctant to bother you with their problems – especially if they think you are busy. The steps provided below should help you reap the benefits of open communication while minimising the disadvantages:

- *Set boundaries by managing expectations of your availability:* For example, an open door means people are free to drop in, a closed door means you are unavailable. Before they come to you with a problem, you could ask people to work through some preliminary issues. For example: a) How would they express the problem in a few sentences? b) Does it affect only them, or others too? c) Can they think of two or three options that might solve the problem?

- *Listen carefully:* Let people speak without being interrupted by phones, email or others dropping in. Use mindful listening techniques (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation). To make sure you have fully understood the problem, summarise what you think the worker has said. Drive the conversation from a problem focus to a solution that is generated by the employee themselves (see c above); if necessary, schedule a follow-up meeting rather than a vague request to 'stop by at any time'.

• Be aware of time: If possible, try to solve any issue the first time to avoid affecting your own productivity. More complex problems, and those involving other people, will probably need you to schedule a meeting.

Flexible and 'Agile' Working

'Agile' working has become common in some areas of health and social care. People may work at home, in public areas such as libraries and coffee shops, or even in their car. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant proportion of the UK population were forced to work at home with little preparation or support. Remote working is popular but although it has benefits, such as increased flexibility for practitioners and financial savings for organisations, not having a physical 'base' or having to share a workspace (e.g. hot-desking) can threaten psychological safety and a sense of belonging to the team and the organisation. It can even increase the risk of burnout (Stone et al., 2018). Most organisations do not provide practitioners with guidance on how to manage the psychosocial risks of agile working, or even recognise the need to do so (McDowall & Kinman, 2017).

Many organisations have continued homeworking after the pandemic, with a 'hybrid' approach that alternates between working remotely and on site being particularly popular. Leaders should therefore think carefully about the downside as well as the advantages of introducing new working patterns and consider how they will provide support. When developing policies and practices for homeworking, it is also important to consider the implications for the team, as well as individuals and to consider how to support collective as well as individual wellbeing and productivity.

There is little research on the implications of agile working for health and social care practitioners, but a study by Jeyasingham (2018) used several data sources (diaries, photographs and interviews) to explore practitioners' experiences when working away from office spaces. The findings highlighted a sense of ambivalence: agile working offered practitioners a 'superficial' sense of control, but concerns were raised about data security, the risks of working in public spaces, and lack of opportunity to interact with others. Based on interviews with managers of child protection social workers, Daley (2023) highlighted some key issues related to introducing hybrid working practices. There were thought to be implications for the social work task (such as moving work online, and the potential impact on work quality), the individual (such as workers' wellbeing and work-life balance), and the team (such as opportunities for connection and communication and modelling best practice).

Another recent study, also with social care practitioners, highlighted the creative ways that practitioners used to engage remotely with people who access services during the pandemic (Pink et al., 2021). The authors argue that social care work is likely to remain a 'hybrid digital practice' with benefits for practitioners and families, but it is crucial to assess how best to use technologies to support their practice and judgements. Also identified is the need to consult people who access services about their experiences of virtual social care practice (Cook & Zschomler, 2020).

Research conducted during the pandemic has highlighted the multi-faceted impact of digital working on service users. Digital working can enhance accessibility to services, offer more flexibility and convenience and broaden the scope of available resources, information and support. Nonetheless, there can be technological barriers, reduced opportunities for personal connections, and privacy and security concerns. Some vulnerable or marginalised groups may be further marginalised if they face challenges in accessing or navigating digital platforms.

It is crucial for leaders of social care organisations to carefully consider the needs, preferences, and circumstances of service users when implementing hybrid and digital working practices. The aim should be to maximise the positive impacts while mitigating potential drawbacks. Steps should also be taken to ensure internal communication processes, and multi-agency collaboration are not compromised.

A Research in Practice guide acknowledges the challenges stemming from shifting work practices during and after the COVID pandemic and their implications for child and family social work. The guide offers valuable insights, recommendations, and best practices to help leaders navigate the evolving landscape of social work. It specifically addresses the implications of remote and on-line working on service delivery. See here.

When introducing flexible or hybrid working, it is crucial that leaders ensure that practitioners have opportunities to communicate with managers and engage with colleagues on a regular basis – whether this is face to face or online. All too often, insufficient attention is given to what happens at the end of the working day, when people are unable to return to a physical base or may return to find there is no one to check in with. Health and social care practitioners need a sense of community and value the secure base provided by their team, particularly during stressful times. They may need an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, debrief or just have a chat before finishing work for the day, which can be an effective way to maintain boundaries between work and personal life. Informal as well as formal opportunities for communication are also needed.

Quick Win 1.4 offers guidance on how to use technology to 'check in' with colleagues when working remotely.

Quick Win 1.4: Keeping in touch using technology

'Checking in' is a challenge when people are working remotely, so using technology to create opportunities to interact online can be helpful. For example, 'virtual coffee breaks' using Zoom, Teams or similar applications can work well. The 'Fika' approach (see below) and other techniques such as Schwartz rounds (see KFP5 Wellbeing) can also be adapted for online use to help people feel connected.

It is important to schedule the break, as colleagues are not going to bump into each other accidentally. A strong internet connection and a quiet background (or a headset) will help you hear each other. Bringing your own coffee is essential. And consider the creative use of icebreakers to help get conversations started.

But remember, the use of virtual technology for communication is most effective if people have previously met face to face. Leaders should ensure that systems are in place to ensure that new starters are well integrated into the team andteam and receive appropriate emotional (as well as informational) support. Guidance on signs of struggle for people who are working remotely can be found in KFP5 Wellbeing).

Although working at home can be beneficial, it can be a challenge for both organisations and employees. Employers have the same health and safety responsibilities for home workers as for any other practitioners, so risks should be recognised, assessed, and managed. The following issues should be considered:

- Which roles can and cannot be done remotely?

- Who may or may not want to work remotely? How would this impact on other team members and people who are being supported?

- What work activities will they be doing (and for how long)?

- Can these activities be done safely (paying particular attention to psychosocial risks)?

- How will any concerns be identified and managed?

- How will leaders keep in touch with practitioners?

- Are any groups of people at greater risk of the negative effects of homeworking?

- Do you need to put control measures in place to protect them?

Box 1.5 sets out tips for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of people working at home.

Box 1.5: Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of homeworkers

Organisations should:

- Promote safe and healthy working practices.

- Manage stress and mental health, identifying specific risk factors.

- Provide support and regular check-ins.

- Encourage routine and structure.

- Review and, if necessary, revise goals and targets; involve staff in this process.

- Trust staff and avoid excessive monitoring and measuring of productivity such as remote tracking.

- Be aware of 'Zoom fatigue' and place limitations on online meetings where possible.

- Promote informal support mechanisms, such as virtual coffee mornings, book clubs, etc.

- Provide guidance on setting physical and psychological boundaries between 'work' and 'home'.

- Discourage 'e-presenteeism', as the pressure to be 'present' can be greater when working at home.

- Role model healthy behaviours, such as switching off from technology and avoiding presenteeism.

A range of useful resources is available to help organisations support the wellbeing of homeworkers. A toolkit provided by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) offers guidance on key issues such as stress and mental health and lone working without supervision, the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) provides a questionnaire and guide to help support people to continue working from home. The HSE Management Standards framework can also help employers assess the psychosocial risks of homeworking and inform interventions. Wellness Action Plans are discussed in KFP5 Wellbeing, but one is available here to help identify the individual behaviours, thoughts and actions that may affect the wellbeing of homeworkers and the support that their manager and colleagues can put in place. Another guide from the same source is available here for people who are working in a hybrid style.

Hot-desking is a form of agile working and a common source of dissatisfaction for practitioners. A survey (Stevenson, 2019) found more than eight out of ten social workers felt hot-desking was not compatible with the work they do. More than six out of ten who were currently hot-desking said their experience was 'entirely' or 'largely' negative. Most also said they had not been properly equipped or supported to hot desks.

Leaders may be considering introducing hot-desking as part of a hybrid work model, where people may work at home for part of the week and share office space for the rest of the time. At the time of writing this resource, steps must be taken to ensure that hot desks are COVID- secure, so clear guidance should be provided to practitioners and cleaning materials should be available. More generally, hot-desking can be effective if managed carefully, but losing a familiar workspace and being separated from team members can make people feel isolated and demotivated, and their well-being and performance can suffer (Ayoko & Ashkanasy, 2019; Morrison & Macky, 2017; Webber, 2019). So, introducing hot-desking requires more than simply providing practitioners with laptops and asking them to share desks. Quick Win 1.5 addresses issues that should be considered before you introduce hot-desking. In organisations that are already using hot-desking, Quick Win 1.5 can be used to check that conditions are optimal.

Quick Win 1.5: How to make hot-desking work in your organisation

- **Planning:** Consider carefully how long it will take to move to hot-desking, the resources you need and the budget you have. Identify your desired outcome and how you will measure its success or failure. Ensure you assess the impact at the team level, as well as the individual level.

- **Enhance buy-in:** Involve practitioners in developing your hot-desking policy from the start. Asking for feedback and ideas will increase acceptability and minimise resistance. A steering group can provide creative ideas to inform hot-desking policy and help you monitor progress over time.

- **Manage the change:** Explain the reasons for introducing hot-desking. Highlight the benefits but acknowledge potential disadvantages. Listen to concerns – e.g. about how hot-desking might impact on working relationships, workforce well-being and job performance. Consider how it may impact on people's sense of belonging and commitment and how this might be addressed.

- **Expect disruption:** Even if people have been working remotely, hot-desking will be a major change, and will take a while to bed in. Policies may need to be revisited and adapted.

- **Confidentiality:** Emphasise the need for privacy of data by never leaving computers unattended when email or confidential documents are open.

- **Hot-desking in practice:** Ensure you have the appropriate technology and sufficient workspaces. People can waste precious time searching for a workstation or getting to grips with unfamiliar or unreliable technology (this can also be a source of anxiety). Decide whether desks will be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis, through an informal desk-sharing system, or via apps to formally book desks and rooms.

- **Try zoning:** Consider providing larger office space where team members can hot-desk alongside their leaders (rather than in undesignated areas). This will encourage discussion of work issues and enable leaders to provide updates and offer support.

- **Inclusivity:** Chairs and computer monitors need to be easily adjustable to accommodate people's individual needs and preferences. Consider the needs of those who require specialised equipment, such as adapted keyboards and chairs.

- **Create a variety of spaces:** Wherever possible, offer workspaces for different types of tasktasks, such as breakout rooms, cubicles for one-to-one meetings or private phone calls, and quiet areas to facilitate deep concentration.

- **Personalising space:** Studies show that an inability to personalise our working areas with things that define our identity can be stressful. Think of ways to provide people with a sense of ownership by encouraging them to add personal touches to their workspace. They could bring personal items that are small and portable, vote on a choice of pictures for the walls, or put personal photographs on a noticeboard.

- **Clean desk policy:** Workspaces and computers should be kept free of personal or confidential material. People may be less inclined to keep shared desks clean and tidy than their own personal workspaces. Provide a shared space where they can eat lunch away from their desk.

- **Accept that hot-desking may not work:** People often gravitate to the same spaces and some people may stake out their territory by 'adopting' a desk as 'theirs'. As well as causing resentment, a hot-desking space can easily revert to the traditional arrangement of practitioners having permanent desks.

Some guidance on introducing flexible working practices is provided here.

There is also evidence that working remotely using technology can threaten employees' work-life balance, by extending working hours and allowing the job to 'invade' their home environments (Kelliher et al., 2019). Guidance on how to support work-life balance for remote workers as well as people on-site is provided in KFP5 Wellbeing. People working with traumatic material (such as traumatising conversations, images and written or auditory testimony) may experience particular working at home. Guidance is available to help employers assess the risks and fulfil their duty of care.

Feeling that we belong at work is essential to our sense of security and commitment to an organisation, so creating a sense of belonging among practitioners is crucial to building a resilient organisational culture. It is especially important to encourage a sense of belonging among newly recruited colleagues, those who have changed teams, and those who have returned to work after sickness, a career break or maternity leave. People who have been working remotely during the crisis, especially those who have started a new job or joined a new team, may have particular difficultiesdifficulties in developing a sense of belonging to their team and to the organisation in general. Letting new people know about work etiquette and 'how we do things around here' in an open and kindly way encourages a sense of belonging. As a leader, consider assigning a 'buddy' to new recruits to advise on basic issues, such as where to get lunch or where the loo is. Overlooking these simple things can cause anxiety in new recruits. For new starters who are working remotely, introducing virtual mentoring and shadowing can offer opportunities for the incidental learning that is often overlooked when people are not on site.

As health and social care practitioners our professional identity protects our wellbeing and resilience, even during times of stress and trauma. Feeling we belong helps maintain identity, as well as helping us feel psychologically safe and engaged. Box 1.5 uses findings from research (adapted for health and social care) to identify factors that can help build a culture of belonging in the workplace.

Box 1.5: How to foster a sense of belonging

Check out how people feel about working in your organisation

As a leader, it is tempting to believe everyone loves working under your leadership or to become defensive if indicators suggest otherwise. But being open to listening about people's experiences of work is crucial to making them feel heard and understood. The ISort Tool will provide insight into the extent to which people feel that they belong in your organisation and will help you to identify priorities for change. It is important to remember, however, that listening without taking action can alienate people, which is the antithesis of fostering a culture of belonging.

Getting practitioners to speak freely can be a challenge. They may be wary of authority figures or may tell you what they think you want to hear. So, to learn what people really think, begin by identifying issues that seem to cause silence, then invite them to lunch or other informal settings to discuss them in a neutral space. You can also consider using employment engagement surveys to establish the feelings of under-represented groups.

Develop trusting work-based relationships

The importance of trust in developing a secure base is highlighted above. To develop trust, people need to feel truly appreciated for what they bring to an organisation; KFP2 Sense of Appreciation has tips on how to achieve this. Simply put, if people are to feel that they belong, then they must believe that their abilities and contribution are recognised and valued. An employer who invests in employees' professional development will be repaid by increased commitment and loyalty, as well as improved performance. There is evidence that practitioners who have a trusting relationship with a mentor are better able to take advantage of critical feedback and learning from their practice. KFP3 Learning Organisation outlines the features of a peer coaching/mentoring scheme that can be used to develop relationships characterised by trust, with minimal cost and set-up time, to encourage a solution focus to workplace issues.

Act on inclusion

Studies in different occupational settings show that making people feel valued for who they are enhances retention. When practitioners see leaders and co-workers who 'look like them', they are more likely to feel they fit in. It is therefore important to ensure your workplace represents the community you serve. Excluding people may be unintentional but can profoundly undermine a sense of belonging. Being culturally competent is an important leadership capability. Guidance on enhancing culturally competent leadership is in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Knowing there are people who may not come forward with ideas and encouraging everyone to have a voice underpins a sense of belonging. Actively encouraging inclusion is more than inviting people to meetings; it means sharing documents beforehand and providing opportunities for people to contribute, even if this takes more time and effort. Writing down ideas on Post-it notes, for example, can encourage contributions from people who are less comfortable speaking out in larger groups.

Tailored listening

Another way to show practitioners that their contributions are valued is simply to listen, respectfully and attentively (Heathfield, 2019). How this is done should be tailored to a team member's personality: quieter people prefer someone who 'pauses, listens, and creates a space', while more outspoken people value the opportunity to bring their thoughts to the here and now.

Encourage people to bring their 'whole selves' to work

For people to feel they belong, they must be their authentic selves at work. This means accepting that health and social care practitioners (like all human beings) are vulnerable and imperfect and will need extra support and compassion from time to time. The importance of leaders 'role modelling' self-care and self-compassion is outlined in the KFP5 Wellbeing. It also helps if leadersleader's role-model humility and ask for help when required.

A shared vision makes all the difference

If practitioners find their work meaningful and have a collective sense of purpose, they will feel they belong. Ensuring that the organisation's mission and vision and shared values and behaviours are discussed during induction of new practitioners is emphasised in KFP3. Helping more experienced practitioners reconnect with why they came into health and social care work in the first place, and how their own values match those of the organisation, can be developed through exercises in Appreciative Inquiry, which are outlined in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation.

The ability to have inclusive conversations is also crucial to enhance a sense of belonging (Winters, 2020). Ten foundational conditions are identified foster equity, empathy and belonging across different dimensions of diversity. These are:

- Be aware of the challenges faced by minority groups and the efforts those in positions of authority must make to recognise and be sympathetic to these struggles.

- Co-produce team norms for what is considered to beis a "safe space."

- Prioritise trust, respect and professionalism within the team.

- Allocate time and space for individuals to feel, understand and process their emotions.

- Use appropriate language to convey the importance of inclusive conversations as an essential element of change.

- Acknowledge and communicate to team members that feelings of safety and bravery can vary among different identity groups.

- Actively listen to and validate the experiences of diverse identity groups.

- Recognise that not everyone possesses the appropriate vocabulary to articulate their thoughts, emotions or observations; therefore, be open to the fact that some colleagues may need to learn.

- Be mindful of your biases that might contribute to an inequitable environment. Awareness is the first step towards change.

- Become an ally for minorities and marginalised groups.

More information on having inclusive conversations can be found here.

Supporting neurodiversity at work

Between 15 and 20% of the workforce is estimated to be in a neurominority (Doyle & McDowall, 2022). People who are neurodiverse, such as those with autistic spectrum disorders, dyslexia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, can face particular difficulties in the workplace. They may experience difficulties with memory and concentration, managing intense emotions as well as communication challenges. People who are neurodiverse can be at greater risk of mental health difficulties and be more susceptible to occupational burnout.

Supporting neurodiverse individuals at work involves creating an inclusive environment where they can thrive. Here are some tips:
- Learn about different neurodivergent conditions, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc. Understand the strengths, challenges, and common accommodations for each.

- Offer flexible work hours or remote work options to accommodate different needs and preferences. Be aware that people who are neurodiverse may need additional support if they work remotely.

- Use clear, concise language and provide written instructions when possible. Be patient and allow time for processing information.

- Establish routines and provide clear expectations. Structure can help individuals stay focused and organised.

- Provide accommodations such as noise-cancelling headphones, quiet spaces, or assistive technology to support productivity.

- Recognise and appreciate the unique strengths and perspectives that neurodiverse individuals bring to the team.

- Create an environment where individuals feel comfortable advocating for their needs and preferences.

- Offer training to employees on neurodiversity awareness and sensitivity. This can help reduce stigma and foster a more inclusive culture.

- Encourage teamwork and collaboration, recognising that diverse perspectives can lead to innovative solutions.

- Offer feedback in a clear and constructive manner, focusing on specific behaviours and solutions rather than personal characteristics.

- Support a healthy work-life balance by encouraging people to take breaks and offering support for managing stress.

- Model inclusive behaviour and demonstrate respect for all team members, regardless of neurodiversity.

- More information on supporting a neurodiverse workforce can be found [here.](#) Resources for neurodivergent social workers can also be found here. Information on neurodiversity at work for NHS employers can be found here.

- One way to foster a sense of belongingness, psychological safety and security in organisations is to encourage people to become active bystanders. Box 1.6 below provides some guidance on how this can be accomplished.

Box 1.6: Becoming an Active Bystander

There is a growing movement that encourages us all to be active bystanders. Originating from work in preventing sexual violence, it is now widely used to urge us all to not sit back but to call out inappropriate behaviour to ensure we all feel safe and secure in our workplace.

In organisations we are all bystanders; situations unfold around us and it is often easy to let things pass us by, even if they make us feel uncomfortable or uneasy. The occasional unacceptable comment can subsequently become normalised and before we know it a culture where people feel excluded or unsafe is established.

Becoming an active bystander (as a leader, a colleague or a member of the communities we live in) means not letting something that has made us feel uneasy pass us by without taking action. By doing so we can create a culture where unacceptable behaviour or attitudes are challenged and a safer more inclusive structure is encouraged.

To become an active bystander means that we need to safely intervene. This can involve actions such as not laughing at a sexist or inappropriate joke, pointing out that while a person's behaviour was not intentional it was experienced as being a micro-aggression, and talking to colleagues about how their behaviour impacts on others.

Quick Win 1.7: Building social connectedness using Fika

Fika, or sharing coffee and sweet treats with colleagues, is an important everyday activity in Sweden that encourages peer-to-peer support and develops the capacities that underpin emotional resilience. It is a retreat from the stress of the day and an opportunity to bond with colleagues. Fika helps build team spirit and motivate employees.

Evidence suggests that developing a working culture that acknowledges the importance of regular breaks away from the desk can make a real difference to wellbeing and performance (Trougakos & Hideg, 2009). So, think about how groups can be brought together for a Fika break. If coffee and cake are not appropriate, a group walk would also embody the spirit of Fika. The important thing is to create opportunities for people to connect and refrain from talking about work. All you need is a space where people feel comfortable to gather and chat. Fika can be done online as well as face to face; tips can be found here.

Remember work is not just what we do behind our desks: problem-solving, reflective conversations, and peer-to-peer learning can all emerge from informal conversations about something completely different. This is likely to happen during a Fika break.

Building an effective network of teams helps to consolidate organisational resilience. When individuals can openly discuss their strengths and concerns, collective resilience is strengthened, and team members also feel empowered to share emotionally distressing experiences.

Fig. 1.4: Enhancing team resilience

The characteristics of a resilient team are discussed in the section on understanding resilience. Figure 1.4 shows a helpful framework for building team resilience, which was developed by Cooper and colleagues (2013). The Core Actions and Quick Wins included throughout this workbook will help you apply this framework to your own organisation. To use it effectively, it's important also to consider the following questions:

- Where are the stressors / burnout risks in my organisation?

While a formal wellbeing audit can identify the key stressors in an organisation (see KFP5 Wellbeing for further information), research suggests that for health and social care practitioners, high workloads, low control and support, and bureaucracy are much more stressful than the type of work that is done. As a leader, it is important to consider how these hazards can be minimised as, over the long term, they will drastically increase the risk of health problems, sickness absence and poor retention among your workforce. Providing support, security and a sense of purpose can help practitioners manage demands and remain healthy and motivated.

- What is the impact of my leadership style?

Flexibility is a key aspect of resilience. Leaders need to have a flexible leadership style. It is possible to overuse your strengths: for example, as leaders are powerful role models for expected behaviour in an organisation, being overly conscientious and working long hours is likely to encourage others to do the same. Similarly, being overly sympathetic to everyone may encourage people to see you as a 'soft touch'. Coaching and 360 Degree Feedback (see KFP4 Mission and Vision) can help you gain insight into your leadership style and reflect on how it could be developed.

- What is the impact of personal resilience on team resilience?

Helping people to enhance their individual resilience can increase the resilience of the team and the whole organisation. KFP5 Wellbeing offers some ideas for how you can improve the personal resilience of those with whom you work.

Some further guidance on how to build effective teams to provide a sense of security is set out in Box 1.7.

Box 1.6: Becoming an Active Bystander

- How do we build a sense of trust within a team? How will we know trust exists within that team?

The importance of trust and how it can be destabilised was highlighted earlier in this section. The collective learning that can be gained from when people make a mistake and when they are successful should be considered and shared. Trust is evident when people readily ask for help, admit to mistakes and skill gaps, and are prepared to disagree with the views of others. You will know trust when you see it: people will proactively help each other, be prepared to show vulnerability, and support each other when there are temporary spikes in workload. They will also provide mutual support during organisational and personal crises.

- How do we build commitment?

For teams to work effectively, people should be aware of how their role contributes to the mission and vision of the wider organisation (see KFP4 Mission and Vision). In other words, they must be able to see where their contribution fits into the wider endeavour. So, leaders at the team level should – preferably with the input of their team – develop a strategy, with goals and objectives, that is explicitly linked to that wider enterprise.

- How do we build a culture of shared responsibilities?

Stress is often triggered when people have a lot of responsibility but feel they lack autonomy over how they do their work. Responsibility without authority is an acknowledged source of stress, so engaging the team in considering how problems can be shared and resolved collaboratively can enhance a sense of autonomy. Opportunities to increase autonomy can be explored using Appreciative Inquiry and World Café approaches (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation, KFP4 Mission and Vision and KFP5 Wellbeing).

- How do we build a team that recognises individual strengths?

An effective team needs a wide range of skills and experience. Encouraging a culture in which people ask for a second opinion or for someone to help them do a joint piece of work will ensure that people are recognised for their individual skills and strengths, while increasing the expertise and resilience of the team as a whole.