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Article

Embedding social pedagogy and psychological safety with virtual teams

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Abstract

This article shares learning from the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership at University of Central Lancashire, studying social pedagogical theory and concepts and how our working practices with Wellbeing Teams and Community Circles currently align with social pedagogy. An exploration of social pedagogy as a way of working is presented, describing key concepts and how these are currently embedded into how we work and where we can develop further, delving into the opportunities and challenges of virtual working. This article investigates what is meant by psychological safety and key concepts including *haltung*, self-management, the diamond model, 3Ps and the common third, and how they can be achieved with virtual teams.

Keywords *haltung*; values; psychological safety; virtual working; social pedagogy; self-management

Introduction

This article shares learning from the MA in Social Pedagogy Leadership, which I completed at University of Central Lancashire in August 2020. For the final assessment the choice was to undertake a dissertation or an innovation project. I chose the innovation project, exploring how social pedagogical ways of working can be applied within the workplace. The full innovation project can be accessed at http: //www.thempra.org.uk/cath-barton-social-pedagogy-leadership-and-digital-relationships/.

My innovation project had always been to explore ways of working together, using digital means, that support us to live our values, embed social pedagogy, create meaningful belonging, build great relationships and places of psychological safety where colleagues can flourish in their roles. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the way we work, with a far greater dependence on digital connections in terms of support and connection with colleagues. While many of my working relationships rely on digital means (and will continue to do so), the pandemic has created an additional view for exploring psychological safety with virtual teams. This article picks up the themes of my innovation project and defines how we work in a social pedagogical way and embed psychological safety while working virtually.

Community Circles and Wellbeing Teams

My role is Community Circles Lead, working with Community Circles and Wellbeing Teams. Community Circles (http://www.community-circles.co.uk) is a national charity helping people stay connected to whatever matters to them via the assistance of their local community, building a circle of support around an individual and connecting people through shared interests. Wellbeing Teams (http://www.wellbeingteams.org) offers a radical new model for delivering home care and support, to help people live well at home and be part of their communities. The work we do is underpinned by our values: compassion, responsibility, collaboration, curiosity, creativity and flourishing. Our beliefs about the world, social care and the people we support shaped these values:

- We believe that loneliness should not be an inevitable consequence of getting older
- We believe that older people can live well at home and be contributing members of their community
- We are passionate about older people living well in communities where everyone matters.

(Sanderson, 2017, n.p.)

My role is also to support the development of Circles Connected; our local offer supporting people to connect around shared interests and creating opportunities for relationships to flourish (https://www.community-circles.co.uk/get-a-circle/circles-family/).

Community Circles and Wellbeing Teams partner with a variety of organisations across the UK, which can present challenges in terms of face-to-face relationships; this has been further affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions. I rely on digital platforms, such as Zoom and Slack, to support working together, coaching and mentoring colleagues, and we operate as self-managed teams, characterised by a lack of traditional hierarchy and bureaucracy, with a well-defined structure and processes with clear responsibilities and maximum autonomy. Self-management is emerging within a variety of organisations and industries and there is a growing interest in the benefits of self-management within health and social care. For self-management to be successful, there needs to be a focus on building deep relationships that lead to trust (Gill, 2018). According to Edmondson (2019), creating psychological safety is essential for supporting learning, innovation and growth in the workplace and is the key factor in employees' level of satisfaction. In this article I explore how this can be created effectively with virtual teams.

According to APS (2020), 'Groups and teams are not the same thing'. John Ameachi states that people who work together know job roles, where to go to find information and each other's accountabilities, yet often 'they are strangers to each other' (APS, 2020, n.p.). A team is radically different to a group in that a team has insights into the way people work together, an almost intangible connection that is not written in a policy or procedure, but rather an understanding that comes from authentic relationships. 'Meaningful connections are vital to our psychological and physical well-being. So much so, in fact, that many scientists now believe it's impossible to be healthy *unless* we feel connected to others' (Friedman, 2014, p. 105). Can this be achieved with virtual teams?

The use of social pedagogy in practice

Social pedagogy is concerned with well-being, learning and growth, working alongside individuals in a holistic way to support them to fulfil their potential, and also with communities to enable participation and inclusion. Social pedagogy is not only *what* we do but *how* we do it, underpinned by theories to support a way of working which flexes and adapts, depending on the individual and circumstance, to support positive change and well-being. The holistic nature of social pedagogy, the strength-based approach and the unconditional regard for the value of all human beings (Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Wigfall and Simon, 2006) has much synergy with the way we work and with my own values. Equality is at the heart of social pedagogy, not a theory to implement or to impose on people, but rather an approach that supports power with, not power over, and that influences not only our work but the way we live. According to Eichsteller and Holthoff (2012), 'Social pedagogy is not merely how individual practitioners should work, it is also how the team, the organisation and the wider system need to function as an interlinked system, based on similar principles, philosophies and visions' (n.p.). Social pedagogy is not a process to implement or solely an approach for the people we support but rather an 'art form, [not] a skill to be acquired, social pedagogy is expressed through the professionals' haltung' (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012, p. 5).

Haltung is a German word that roughly translates as ethos or mindset. According to Charfe and Gardner (2019), *haltung* can be imagined as a compass that guides our actions and behaviours, towards a way of working underpinned by 'profound respect for human dignity' (p. 34). *Haltung* is not something to adopt for a given situation but rather an ethical stance we take based on our deep-rooted values. For me, *haltung* is reflected in our values; the fundamental beliefs of a person or organisation and the guiding principles which determine our behaviour.

Le Fevre (cited in Sanderson, 2017) explains how beliefs and values lie deep within our unconscious mind: 'values are energy laden ideas that sit in the limbic area of the brain where there is no language. The limbic functions in terms of what it feels rather than what it "thinks" or "knows". Together our beliefs and values function as a kind of background operating system' (n.p.).

If we consider an iceberg, what we can see above water is the behaviour (*what* is done) and the attitude (*how* the behaviour is done). What is not visible is what lies underneath the water, our values and beliefs. 'Our beliefs about the world prompt us to value certain things above other things' (Le Fevre cited in Sanderson, 2017, n.p.), which together drives our behaviour. Our organisational values are our behaviour guide and they influence the way we work to support people well. In addition they have a bearing on how we work with each other and are evident in our team agreements and our accountabilities to one another.

As well as our organisational values, we each have our own individual values. Research shows that people who are consciously connected with their priority values are better equipped to lead with authenticity and suffer less from stress than people who are unaware of their personal priority values (Le Fevre cited in Sanderson, 2018a). Foremost among my values is that of belonging, which is described as having a place or sense of home, and experiencing belonging and acceptance. I want to be able to explore meaningful belonging and create a space where geography is not a barrier to supportive, authentic relationships and my leadership role is not compromised through lack of face-to-face connection. All our colleagues complete their own individual values inventory, which influences their one-page profile, and together we explore what needs to be present in their role to nourish their values.

Thinking back to the iceberg, our values and beliefs that lie below the waterline are not visible to those around us. It is the role of the social pedagogue to consider what cannot be seen – yet needs to be understood – in order to work in a holistic way that builds authentic and trusting relationships. Our perceptions, interpretations and realities are influenced by our histories, experiences, social context and views of the world. We recognise the rich history and experiences that are unique to each individual we support and consider their historical stream when exploring together what matters to people, what they want to achieve and what good support looks like for them. Working in this way extends to our colleagues; exploring histories through completing work timelines at induction, developing one-page profiles to reflect what matters to individuals and what matters to us as a team through our team plans. While working virtually does not allow for office conversations, which supports the building of relationships over time, the values that underpin our work and the way we work put relationships at the heart of all we do – caring deeply for our colleagues is our default setting.

Completing individual values profiles goes some way to exploring what matters to colleagues within Community Circles. We explore what has worked and not worked with previous roles through completing our work timeline and this information is brought together in our team plan. Part of this plan draws our individual values together and we then identify, based on our values, what behaviours we want to see and our agreements and commitments to each other. For example, some of our team values are *sharing, listening and trust*: to actively hear and sense another's thoughts and feelings, to express your own thoughts and feelings in a climate of trust. This has influenced one of our team agreements: We will listen to each other's thoughts, feelings and ideas with open minds and open hearts. We share our mistakes with each other, actively contributing to creating a culture of shared learning, transparency and trust.

Haltung and values are the foundations of the way we work – our moral compass that underpins what we do to support people well and how we support our team members. We operate as a self-managed team and here I explore this way of working and consider how these practices can support psychological safety.

Laloux (2014) began to explore the evolution of organisations and how they operated, coding them by colours based on previous work by Wilber (1996): red represents organisations built on fear and led by command; amber represents organisations with formal roles within a hierarchical pyramid; orange is characterised by achieving profit and growth focusing on beating the competition and green represents a classic pyramid structure with a focus upon culture and empowerment. The next stage in evolutionary development is teal. Teal organisations embody self-management, enable people to bring their whole selves to work and have an evolutionary purpose. Self-management is characterised by 'a lack of traditional hierarchy and bureaucracy' (Dignan, 2019, p. 16), and according to Lee and Edmondson, 2017), self-managing organisations 'radically decentralise authority in a formal and systematic way throughout the organisation' (p. 35). According to Laloux (2015), surveys show that many workplaces 'are places of drudgery, not passion or purpose' and this is reflected through all levels of organisations, 'not just the powerless at the bottom of the hierarchy', but also leaders experiencing a feeling of emptiness despite a front-facing view of success. 'All of us [are yearning] for better ways to work together – for more soulful workplaces where our talents are nurtured and our deepest aspirations are honoured' (Laloux, 2015, n.p.). Self-management is a natural fit to how we work, where well-being and relationships are at the heart of what we do and the foundations for social pedagogical practice, with a focus on mindsets, trust, culture and values, supported by processes and systems for efficient working.

Laloux (2020a) shares that there are five key processes of self-management: decision making; roles rather than job descriptions; transparency of information; performance management and conflict resolution. In self-managing organisations decisions are made through clear processes, rather than layers of hierarchy. The advice process is one way we use decision making underpinned by trusting relationships, recognising that we have a collective purpose to act in the best way based on the purpose and values of the organisation. There needs to be a space of psychological safety to be successful in supporting this way of working where conversations are clear and kind. Rather than static job descriptions our roles are fluid – linked to overall purpose – reflecting the gifts and talents of the individual and considering where and how people want to develop, shifting from comfort zone to learning zone. The learning zone can be viewed as the unknown space at the edge of our comfort zone, the space where we are stretched and where learning takes place. Too far out of our comfort zone lies the panic zone, where learning is impossible because the space is characterised by fear and anxiety. Having a space of psychological safety supports us to reflect with colleagues, exploring where their individual zones of comfort, learning and panic lie, so that coaching and support can be tailored. In order to support transparency of information, we use Google Docs that are accessible to all team members. In traditionally hierarchical organisations, information is shared in order of importance, often diluted as it reaches people at the bottom; within a teal organisation everyone is important. Performance management is another key indicator of a self-managing team. According to Sanderson (2018b), 'conventional performance management relies on defining performance against specifications, objectives and numerical goals then holding people to account for the fictions these create' (n.p.). Within the world of work, we cannot reduce our efforts to numbers and plans; therefore, we use confirmation practices developed by Easier Inc, a partner organisation helping to create better ways of working, that supports us to 'hold ourselves to account – to be responsible – for the value [we] create' (Sanderson, 2018b, n.p.). Confirmation practices drill down into the detail of our roles, providing a set of statements that reflect our purpose. Using reflective practice and coaching we can clarify what success would look like, explore any barriers

or challenges and develop meaningful actions that move us towards success. Bandura (1997) talks of self-efficacy, which refers to a person's capacity to exercise influence over their own life and their ability to make positive changes; social pedagogical practices support this. Confirmation practices are a way of enabling team members to develop self-efficacy and lean into the learning zone. Conflict resolution is the final of the five key indicators of self-management. In self-managing organisations disagreements are resolved through the conflict resolution process. Currently, our team is small and any perceived conflict is raised as a tension through our weekly tactical meetings, supporting us to ask for what we need and remove barriers to moving forwards (Holocracy, n.d.). We also use compassionate communication, 'a way of communicating that leads us to give from the heart' which is 'founded on language and communication skills that strengthen our ability to remain human, even under trying conditions' (Rosenberg, 2015, p. 3). According to Laloux (2020b), 'traditional communication is cold, only from the head, it's short and transactional and is mostly one way' (n.p.). Slack, a messaging app, makes it possible for us to have efficient, transparent communication, and our team plan records how we can best communicate together. The use of compassionate communication, recognising our preferred methods of communication, team agreements based on our values and the systems we use, all support us to express ourselves from the heart with the aim of building authentic relationships.

The diamond model (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012) describes one of the core principles of social pedagogy, 'the unconditional value of human beings' (Jacaranda, 2015, pp. 44–5). The diamond model is so called because it represents the potential to shine within us all: 'diamonds, like humans, are not always shiny and polished but all have the potential to be' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 47). Social pedagogy can support people to shine and the diamond model focuses on four key areas to enable this: well-being and happiness, holistic learning, relationships and empowerment. Meaningful belonging, as mentioned previously, is a key concept in social pedagogy and also a prominent individual and team value within Circles Connected. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our work roles have shifted in that we are currently not supporting face-to-face connections, but instead creating opportunities for virtual connections through our Circles Connected Facebook group, while all of our working relationships are via Zoom and Slack. This liminal space has shifted our sense of belonging and created challenges where we feel less connected to the people we support in our local communities, yet by the same token it has created opportunities for creative ways of working and reaching a wider audience through Facebook. The space created by the pandemic represented a shared challenge within the Circles Connected team. Not only did we explore new ways of working, understanding what could be achieved to support virtual connections, we also learned more deeply about colleagues as individuals and the importance of nurturing our relationships to provide mutual support, not only for work purposes but for our own well-being and sense of belonging. Relationships have always been important; the pandemic has created a deeper recognition of the necessity for nurturing our relationships; having social time with colleagues via Zoom is an example of how we are acting on this intention.

Virtual working and the use of social pedagogical practice

Virtual working can raise challenges about experiencing a sense of belonging; our connections can be limited to Zoom calls where we can only see the head and shoulders of our colleagues. Edmondson (cited in De Smet, 2020) suggests that 'For many people during the pandemic, the explicitness of the *physical* lack of safety has been experienced as a *shared* fear, which has allowed them to be more open and intimate and more able to voice their thoughts and concerns with colleagues' (n.p.). Virtual working during the pandemic has nudged us to be more intentional in our relationships and to be mindful of our own and others' well-being. There was certainly a feeling of common experience, a collective shift to learn new ways of working, an urgency to respond differently. Indeed, the creation of a 'well-being check in' channel on Slack offered an opportunity for us to openly express our feelings and explore our individual and shared experiences.

As well as well-being and happiness, included in the diamond model are the concepts of holistic learning, relationships and empowerment. Holistic learning is the 'process of realising our own potential for learning and growth …a lifelong process involving head, heart and hands (Pestalozzi)' (ThemPra, 2020, n.p.). Circles Connected is a new offer to support local communities, inspired by previous work by Hilary Cottam (2018). Our underpinning culture and the processes of self-management have enabled us to share ideas, contribute jointly and share our gifts without hierarchy or need for permission. Feeling

comfortable in the learning zone is part of psychological safety, the space where we can be curious to try new ideas and feel open to learn, where feedback and failures are gifts and opportunities.

Relationships are central to the diamond model and at the heart of what we do within Circles Connected, building positive relationships through every connection. In realising these core aims of the diamond model, social pedagogy promotes positive experiences. Trevithick (2003), in her writings on relational practice, shares her thoughts about energising and de-energising experiences. Negative or de-energising experiences, in her view, can lead to defensive responses from a person with the aim of protecting themselves, while an energising experience can support further self-efficacy, motivation and growth. These experiences are explored within the context of relational practice and how the practitioner can build authentic relationships when supporting people to make positive change. The principles of relational practice, energising and de-energising experiences can also be considered in team dynamics. I am conscious within my leadership role to support energising moments and reflect together with colleagues about what needs to be present within their roles to support this. Using individual values is one way we explore having more energised moments by asking how can we nourish your values, what needs to be present in your role and are these showing up in your one-page profile as important to you? Creativity, fantasy and play are present in one colleague's individual values, so recognising and supporting her to work in this way through sharing graphic information is important.

A golden thread that weaves through social pedagogy is the deep regard and unconditional value of everyone. The concept of head, heart and hands, developed by Pestalozzi (1746–1827), is central to social pedagogy and is recognised in the way we support people, identifying their gifts and the contributions they can make. This is not only for the people we support but our natural way of working, encouraging our colleagues to bring their whole selves to work and recognising the contributions they can make. The head is recognising our knowledge, the heart considers our emotions and values and the hands symbolise our actions. Colleagues complete a document 'Gifts of Head, Heart and Hands' to identify what they are interested in, where their passions lie and the talents they have. Recognising and supporting gifts of head, heart and hands is one way of bringing our whole selves to work and bringing joy into our workplace. Considering the work we do to support people to live well, feel connected and have joy in their lives, we cannot deliver what we do not have, so building joy into our roles is essential. According to Deming (1986, cited in Perlo et al., 2017), 'Management's overall aim should be to create a system in which everybody may take joy in [their] work' (p. 6). Joy in work, he believes, is a fundamental right and it is up to leaders to ensure that colleagues can enjoy that right. Perlo et al. (2017) uses the analogy of 'pebbles in your shoes' (p. 8) to represent the tensions that get in the way of what matters to individuals when considering joy at work. Our self-managing practices and tactical meetings support opportunities where these tensions to be easily raised and addressed. Larger organisational issues or 'boulders' (Perlo et al., 2017, p. 8) may be more complex to address where the organisation is hierarchical, however a self-managing organisation has clear processes and systems to support autonomy and clear communication. Nevertheless, the processes within self-management are only effective when there is a foundation of trust and psychological safety within the team which supports transparent communication and confidence of team members to speak up without fear of blame or recrimination. Joy is not a static state, and it is important to reflect with colleagues that they continue to have joy in their roles, particularly during the pandemic when roles have shifted significantly. We use the person-centred thinking tool, 4 plus 1 (Helen Sanderson Associates, n.d.) to explore what we have tried, have learned, are pleased about and concerned about, which supports us to think about what to do next. Team reviews also support us to identify what is important to us, what good support looks like, what is working and not working, which supports future actions and updating our team plan as necessary.

A further social pedagogical concept which is congruent with the way we work is the 3Ps, a Danish model developed by 10Rs1 Group 6 (2010, cited in Charfe and Gardner, 2019) which recognises the three areas of self when working alongside people – professional, personal and private. Professional refers to our working roles, drawing on knowledge, theory and experience, and informing how we work together and support people. The professional recognises 'the value of inserting the personal strand in our practice' and as relationships are at the heart of social pedagogy practice, there is a recognition of 'sharing a sense of who we are as individuals working alongside others' (Charfe and Gardner, 2019, p. 39). Personal is the part of ourselves that we share to support the building of authentic relationships, reducing imbalances of power and connecting with others. This information can be seen through the use of our one-page profiles, where we share what people appreciate about us, what is important to us and what good support looks like. The 3Ps, as with the one-page profile, recognises the private

self, the part of us that is only shared with those closest to us. What we share depends on the context, the relationship and the experience. The professional, personal and private is unique for each person and situation and constant reflection is needed to consider appropriate boundaries while being open to developing authentic relationships. Through the pandemic and the shift in ways of working to use virtual means, rather than face to face, to build connections, it has been interesting to reflect on the three spheres of professional, personal and private. While face-to-face groups have been on hold, Circles Connected has moved to supporting connections and keeping people entertained through a Facebook group. A conversation about childhood hobbies uncovered a common theme between our members for tap dancing. This led to me sharing a weekly video of my tap dancing. Virtually bringing people into my home to watch my dancing was made possible by the shift in boundaries between the professional, personal and private created by the pandemic. When workers are office based there is a clearer distinction between the professional and the personal. Now, through the use of technology, we are connecting with colleagues in their own homes via video calls, an invitation (maybe reluctantly) into people's personal space and a need to recognise the shift of boundaries between the professional and personal sphere and its impact.

Bringing our whole selves to work is part of how we live our values and build authentic relationships, supported through the use of one-page profiles, the gifts of head, heart and hands and the personal element within the 3Ps. 'Bringing our whole selves to work' may have different meanings; for some it is about being authentic with your identity, for others it might be the freedom to say what is on your mind or talking about your personal life. As previously described, self-management is a core element of a teal organisation alongside evolutionary purpose and wholeness. Laloux (2020b) defines the concept of wholeness as 'how people can show up …a space where it's safe enough for people to show up as themselves' (n.p.). Creating this space leads to 'extraordinary vibrancy' with 'creativity, energy and passion' (Laloux, 2020c, n.p.). For this to occur, a space of psychological safety is needed where people feel comfortable and confident in bringing their whole selves to work. Gubbala (2018) suggests that wholeness can be misinterpreted to mean 'unleashing our conditioned emotional responses and patterns on others' which can lead to an 'emotional wild west' (n.p.). Compassionate communication helps to avoid this and supports effective communication, which is essential for developing positive relationships that are congruent with social pedagogical values. The 3Ps show us that we have the professional, the personal and the private areas of our lives, where the boundaries can flex depending on what feels right for the person and the context. Likewise, one-page profiles share rich information, which may change dependent on the audience; for instance, what is needed to be shared at home is not necessarily needed to be shared at work. In order for wholeness to occur, Laloux (2020b) recommends clarifying what the invitation to wholeness really means and how individuals want this to show up. For us, bringing our whole selves to work is using the gifts of head, heart and hands, sharing our professional and personal selves to build authentic relationships with the people we support and our colleagues and living our values by how we show up and walk the walk. The risk of not bringing our whole selves to work is continuing to support the hierarchy and power imbalance between the professional and the person supported, not fulfilling our potential to lean into our creativity and not being authentically pedagogical. According to Stroj-Rullo, 2020) the pandemic has nudged us towards wholeness, 'we simply don't have a choice to not bring our whole selves to work anymore [*sic*], because work-life and life outside work have started to blend' (n.p.). The challenge is to create a space of psychological safety where wholeness can flourish.

Exploring psychological safety

Edmondson (2019) describes psychological safety as a 'climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves. They are confident that they can speak up and won't be humiliated, ignored or blamed' (p. xvi). Psychological safety is creating a space where mutual trust can thrive and people can be honest and caring at the same time.

The work by Kahn (1990) considered employee engagement, recognising the importance of meaningful belonging and psychological safety. The work of Edmondson (2019) further tested the concept of psychological safety identifying that it enables 'team learning behaviours and team performance' (p. 13). Edmondson's work influenced Google's Project Aristotle, research to explore what makes some teams thrive and others fail, led by Rozovsky, 2015), who together with her colleagues

studied 180 teams from across the organisation. Early feedback failed to identify particular factors that produced thriving teams, until they started to explore the concept of psychological safety; this led to the discovery that 'even the extremely smart, high-powered employees at Google needed a psychologically safe work environment to contribute the talents they had to offer' (Edmondson, 2019, p. 41). Other factors alongside psychological safety also supported team performance including clear goals, dependable colleagues, personally meaningful work and work that has impact. Nevertheless, according to Rozovsky, 2015), 'psychological safety was by far the most important … it was the underpinning of the other four' (n.p.). Considering Project Aristotle's findings alongside my own work, developing psychological safety is underpinned by our practices; delivering our accountabilities to each other by doing what we say we will, doing work that nourishes our values and using gifts of head, heart and hands to make a difference through building relationships and developing contributions to our local communities. It is, however, the presence of psychological safety that underpins everything, and without it the other four factors alone will not be as effective in creating a flourishing team.

A space of psychological safety exists when people feel they can speak up, share ideas and ask questions without being punished or embarrassed; a place where they are equally confident to share mistakes, failures and learning moments without fear of blame as they are to celebrate successes in a supportive team without fear of envy. 'Psychological safety is present when colleagues trust and respect each other and feel able – even obligated – to be candid' (Edmondson, 2019, p. 8). A ground rule within our meetings is that there is no such thing as a silly question, which is hoped will promote asking questions for clarity if needed. While permission for that question to be asked is given, it will only be asked if the person feels confident and comfortable to do so; the writing of a ground rule can *support* an environment of psychological safety but it doesn't *produce* such an environment – psychological safety is created by developing shared expectations, how we invite participation and how leaders respond to what is heard.

In order to fully understand psychological safety, let's consider what it is not. Psychological safety is not about being nice; it does not equate to an environment of ease or comfort or an avoidance of difficult conversations because it is easier. Brown (2018) recognises the avoidance of tough conversations as one issue that gets in the way of brave leadership. There is a 'norm of "nice and polite" which leads to diminishing trust and engagement, passive aggressive behaviour and back channelling communication' (Brown, 2018, p. 8). The use of compassionate communication supports us to have conversations that are clear and kind, using language and a process for speaking truthfully while caring deeply. Scott (2019) suggests a process for feedback, 'Radical Candour', caring personally while challenging directly, recognising that trust is built on relationships, where you 'bring your whole self [to work] and care about each of the people who work [with] you as a human being' (p. 9), while also recognising leadership qualities to enable people to be the best versions of themselves.

Psychological safety is not based on personality characteristics – extroverts don't naturally have it because they are confident to express themselves. It is a space where everyone feels comfortable to speak up and where a leader recognises when and how to draw people in to participate.

Psychological safety is not about reducing standards. Psychological safety 'enables candour and openness …and is conducive to setting ambitious goals' (Edmondson, 2019, p. 18), creating an environment where mistakes are learning opportunities. When psychological safety and standards are both high, this creates a learning zone where collaboration, learning and innovation can take place.

Operating as a teal organisation, using the processes of self-management and bringing our whole selves to work supports a good basis for developing a space of psychological safety. Our use of one-page profiles and team plans supports the development of meaningful belonging.

The next step is inviting participation, where the leader creates an open space for reflection, living into our value of curiosity and framing questions of genuine interest to invite dialogue, where we feel energised by discovering new insights and learning together. The space for participation needs to be mirrored by good listening. The leader's role is then to act on what is being heard. Productive responses are characterised by three elements; sharing appreciation, framing failure as a learning opportunity and clear responses for when values of the organisation are not upheld (Edmondson, 2019).

Lowe, Basterfield and Marsh (2017) consider team coherence when developing psychological safety, recognising how relationships or values fit, being conscious of tensions. There may be signs that the team is not in agreement but this is left unaddressed, 'trust and safety slowly degrade as a result' (Lowe et al., 2017, p. 53). As stated previously, it is the role of the social pedagogue to consider what cannot be seen, yet needs to be understood, reading between the lines of behaviour and recognising emotional clues.

People who know me well can see that it is written on my face what I'm thinking and if my words don't match my body language, they know to check in with me to explore deeper. Although this is shared on my one-page profile, knowing this comes with time to develop a relationship. Likewise, recognising such behavioural cues can be more difficult when relationships are virtual and conversations are via Zoom. Using the stress and support tool can share additional information, the detail is dependent on the richness of conversation and the space for listening.

Lowe et al. (2017) suggest that there are no hard and fast rules; experimenting with ways to encourage and support interpersonal risk taking is the way to develop psychological safety, the key is being open to trying and learning without fear of embarrassment or punishment.

Challenges and benefits

Considering virtual working, what are the benefits and challenges and how can we build flourishing digital relationships and spaces of psychological safety?

'Teal organisations are built on trust' (Laloux, 2014, p. 80), and building trust requires vulnerability of the leader and having a people-positive attitude where we believe that everyone is doing their best work, exploring where people's gifts and passions can flourish, coaching not micromanaging and developing conditions and support for people to become the best versions of themselves. Micromanaging not only does not fit with our values and ways of working but also suggests a lack of trust, resulting in a withdrawal of psychological safety. Marlow, Lacerenza and Salas (2017) suggest that within virtual teams an unusually high volume of communication may have a detrimental effect on performance and it is the quality not quantity of information that is important. Marlow et al. (2017) also suggest that trust is higher in virtual teams when initial face-to-face meetings have taken place. Hack and Paint support this view stating that the success of their virtual team is making space for face-to-face opportunities where relationships can deepen (Gill, 2018).

Achieving good communication within a virtual team requires video calls, the next best thing to face-to-face meetings, getting to know people well enough to recognise subtleties of body language and making sure that everyone has a voice and is included. Written communication is also essential and Fried and Heinemeier, co-founders of Basecamp, suggest that 'being a good writer is an essential part of being a good remote worker …and a remote leader' (cited in Lew, 2020, n.p.). Cate Huston, a developer experience leader for multinational firm Automattic, believes that virtual working can actually be good for communication: 'remote work makes the problems of work more explicit and then we can set out deliberately to address them …we think much more deliberately about how to build ourselves as a team, how to make sure we are communicating well [and] documenting things clearly' (cited in Hannah, 2019, n.p.).

Considering collaboration as one of the top challenges for virtual teams (and also one of our values) how do we make sure that we do this effectively, living our values, supporting our principles of self-management and not leaning into the role of manager? Using the reflective tool 4 plus 1 questions, we agreed as a team to record our thoughts asynchronously by the end of the week. The learning was that doing it individually meant that the reflection didn't feel collaborative. I had leapt in to record my thoughts first, leaving others not recording their reflections as it had already been done. The learning from this is that in future we need to do this while connected on a Zoom call so that there is equal collaboration. Lew (2020) suggests that it is not only about picking the right tools to support online collaboration but also using the right processes – how meetings are structured to include everyone's voice, how we live our values, particularly collaboration, curiosity and flourishing. Creating a space of psychological safety where everyone feels comfortable and confident to speak up and share ideas can support effective collaboration.

Considering loneliness, the mental health charity Mind (2020) has highlighted that remote workers may be at a higher risk of feeling lonely and isolated through lack of social connection that a traditional office environment can provide. However, although you are not socially isolated in a busy office, you can still feel lonely. Working in a shared space with people around you doesn't necessarily create a feeling of meaningful belonging.

Professor Ilke Inceoglu of the University of Exeter Business School says that the risk of loneliness may be reduced when the whole team work in a virtual way, 'feeling isolated is certainly a risk of remote working but if everyone is in the same boat then you already feel a sense of connectedness' (cited in

Hannah, 2019, n.p.). This would suggest that meaningful belonging is not necessarily achieved through the physical proximity of relationships but *how* the relationship is developed. The tools we use, such as one-page profiles and team plans, support this but it is *how* they are used that develops the relationship and supports psychological safety.

When thinking about our existing space of psychological safety, our self-management processes – for example, raising tensions in a tactical meeting – supported us to feel safe discussing work-related issues, yet a gap was still perceived, the wearing of a 'work mask' that didn't quite support being immersed in a psychological space. 'To scale daring leadership and build courage in teams and organisations, we have to cultivate a culture in which brave work, tough conversations, and whole hearts are the expectation, and armour is not necessary or rewarded' (Brown, 2019, p. 36). While also being conscious of the 3Ps and recognising our professional, personal and private selves, I accepted that we needed to delve deeper, considering what we already have in place that supports embedding social pedagogy and psychological safety into the way we work and also what we need to do differently and plan our next steps. This reflection has led to the development of resources considering joy at work, measuring psychological safety and further embedding social pedagogical practices. While the 'stress and support' tool has been used previously, my content now includes how armoured leadership shows up for me and what colleagues can do to support me. I am mindful that when relationships are based on digital means, conversation is limited to head and shoulders, however, as with all pedagogical practice it is *how* we invite participation, *how* we invite challenge, *how* we build courage and *how* we respond that builds psychological safety. The resources developed are the foundations of psychological safety, *how* we use them builds the space.

Connection, trust and psychological safety can be developed with virtual teams; *how* it is embedded is crucial, the environment to support these conditions is not necessarily a building, rather a space where open communication about challenges, concerns, learning and caring deeply for each other is able to thrive.

Conclusion

It is the role of the social pedagogue to consider what cannot be seen yet needs to be understood, to read between the lines, to hear what is not said. Working virtually can present an added complexity when we see only see a person's head and shoulders through Zoom rather than meeting face to face. Building trusting and authentic relationships takes time, willingness and commitment, and it is values, ways of working and leadership which support this to happen, not an office space.

Psychological safety is something we feel, which can be supported by the structures, guides and resources that steer our way of working, however psychological safety is not a static position; it flexes and shifts depending on the current context and situation. For me the key ingredient is *haltung* and how I feel when my values are nourished; I have a deeper feeling of psychological safety when I have a greater sense of belonging, and meaningful belonging can be equally present with digital relationships when we focus on how to build and nurture them. The way we work, focusing on relationships, using compassionate communication and daring leadership, supported by the principles of self-management, provides a great foundation for psychological safety but it is our behaviour and actions, showing that we care deeply and strive to build authentic relationships that creates the space where candour and growth can flourish. Psychological safety is not fixed, nor guaranteed to be maintained without reflection and while we are exploring ways of measuring this, the validity and accuracy of responses about psychological safety is dependent on psychological safety itself, a Catch-22. Psychological safety takes effort, a way of working underpinned by a transparent culture with regular reflection to consider who is participating, who is withdrawing, what are the tensions that are being raised and what is being heard and felt.

Implementing psychological safety and social pedagogy 'is an ongoing process of developing at a professional, personal and practical level. Because the world around us changes, the people we support change, our teams change, and we ourselves change, so must social pedagogic practice' (ThemPra, 2020, n.p.).

So how do we know we have psychological safety? What can we see, feel and hear? The knowledge that conversations are clear and kind, that communication is open and honest without evidence of hierarchy, that questions are being asked that stretch and challenge, a space to be vulnerable and safe. Developing psychological safety is an ongoing process; so when a colleague checks in because she's

noticed that I've not been myself and offers support, without possible barriers of hierarchy or permission, it feels like we are on the right path.

Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work.

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