

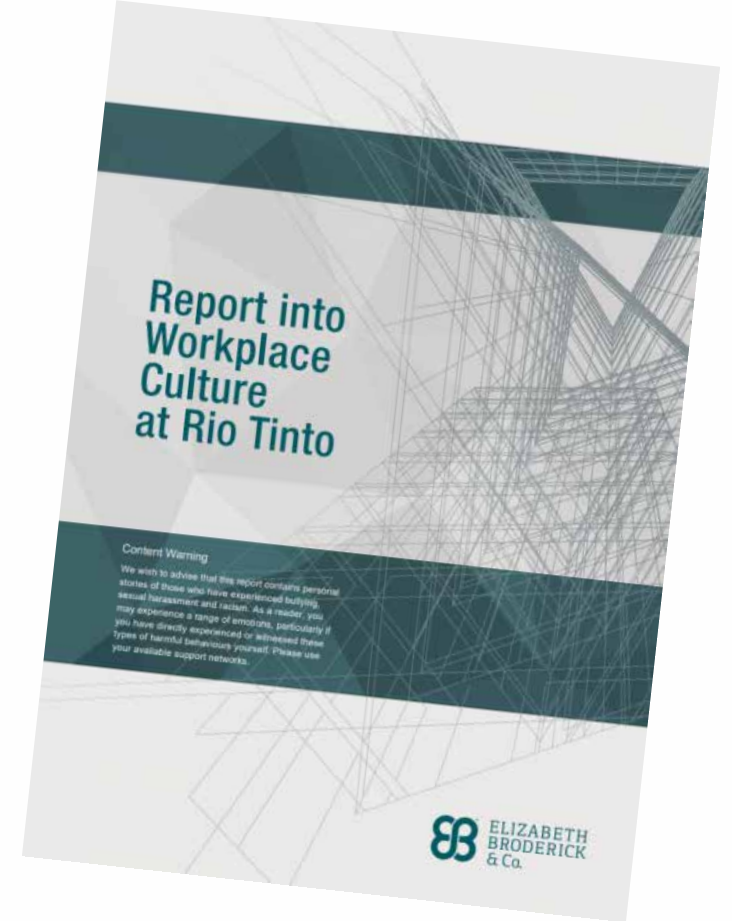
Silence is the Real Hazard

How leaders create cultures where speaking up prevents incidents.

21 October 2025, Rob Wentzel

Introduction

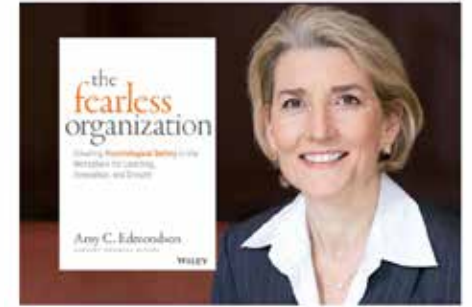
“the WHO estimates that 15% of working-age adults have a mental disorder at any point in time and that this costs the global economy US\$ 1 trillion each year due to lost productivity”



What is psychological safety?

"A shared understanding by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking"

Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School, 1999



"When people feel comfortable asking for help, sharing suggestions informally, or challenging the status quo without fear of negative social consequences."

McKinsey & Company, 2021

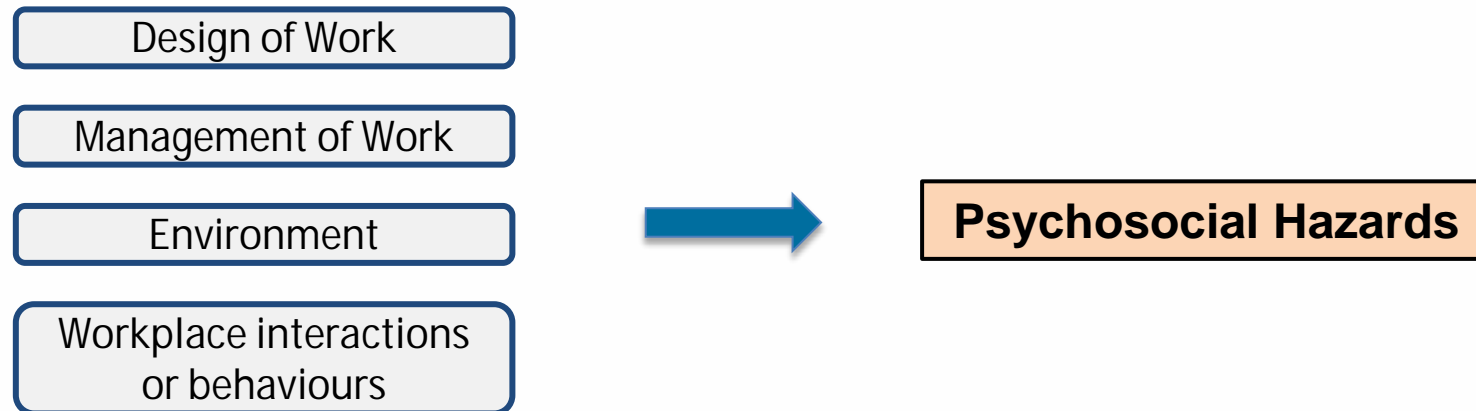
"The belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes"

In addition.....

Major WHS national reform recognises broader organisational factors contribute to individual stress and mental health

These organisational factors are referred to as '**psychosocial hazards**'

Psychosocial hazards are anything that can cause psychological harm



Managing psychosocial
hazards at work

Model Code of Practice

July 2022

Psychosocial hazards (Qld)

High and /or Low Job demands

Low Job Control

Poor Support

Low Role Clarity

Poor organisational
Change Management

Low reward and
recognition

Poor organisational
Justice

Poor workplace
Relationships

Remote or Isolated
Work

Poor environmental
conditions

Traumatic Events

Violence and
Aggression

Bullying

Fatigue

Harassment

Sexual Harassment
(incl. gender based)

Psychosocial hazards

WHS laws now require businesses to address psychosocial hazards the same as physical hazards.

1. Leadership and organisational commitment
2. Worker consultation and involvement
3. Identification of hazards
4. Risk assessment
5. Control of risks
6. Monitoring, review and continuous improvement
7. Integration with broader systems

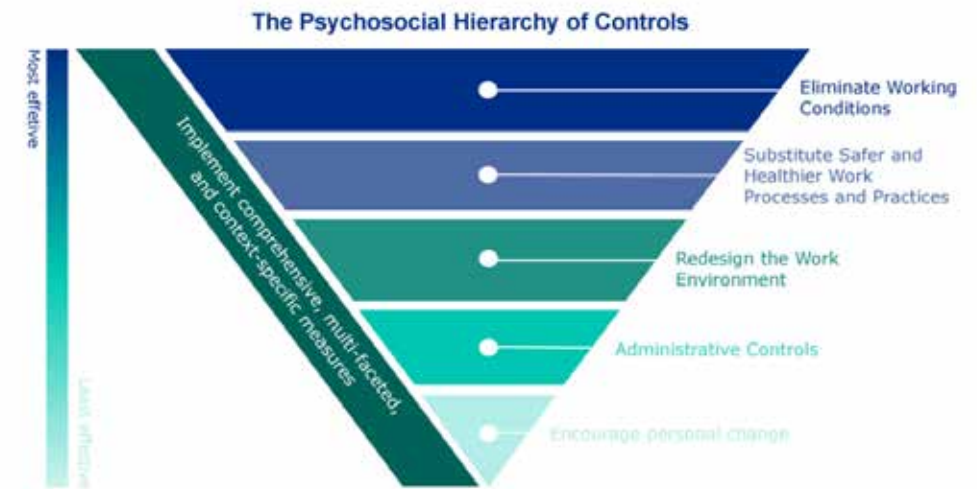


FIGURE 1 | The psychosocial hierarchy of controls.

Senior leadership visibly engaged in psychosocial health, resourcing the management of risks, ensuring systems are monitored and improving over time

Why Psychological Safety and Psychosocial Risk Management?



WHS Legal Reform

"We have to"



Because we care

"We want to"



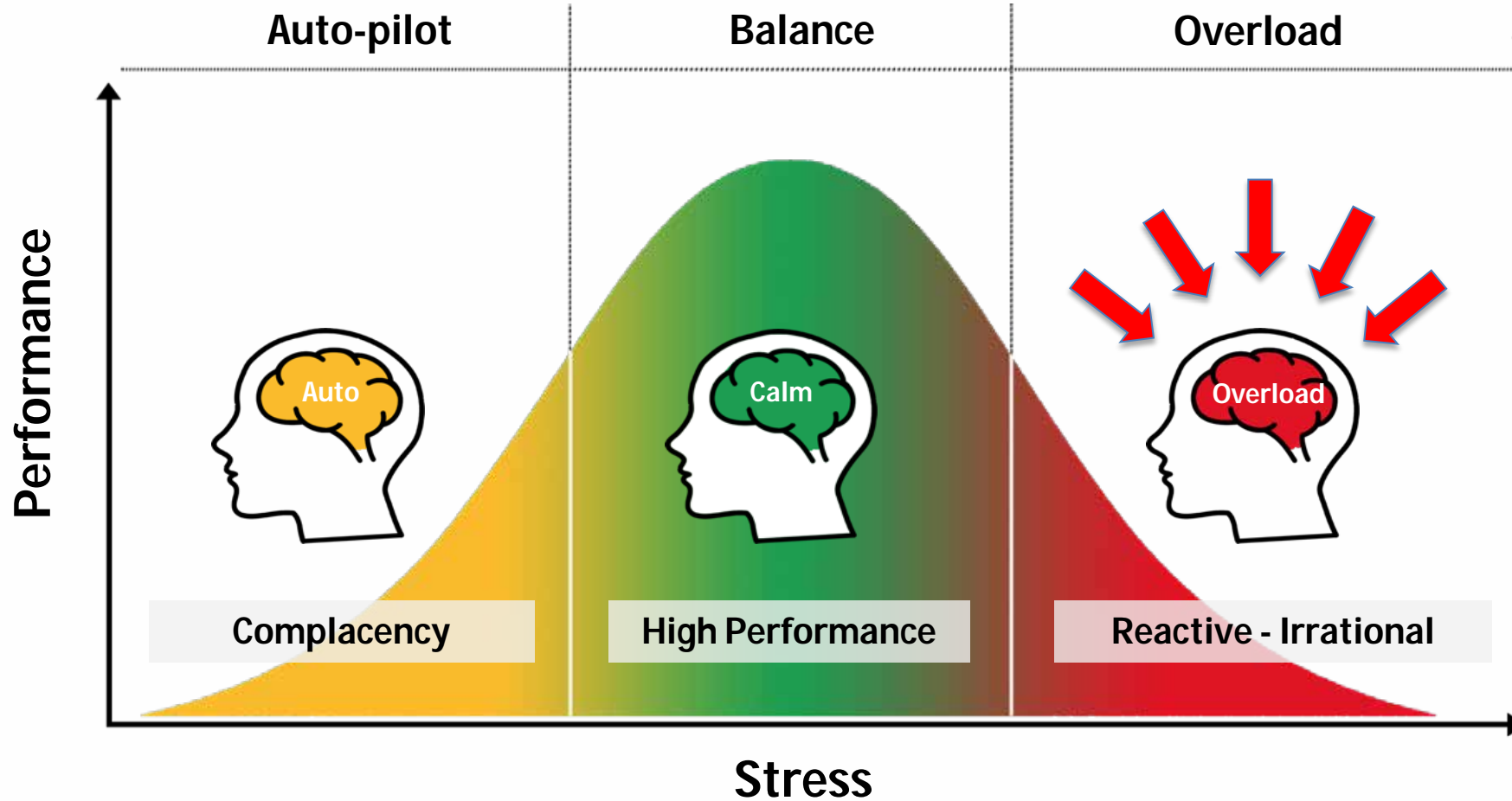
Business Case

"It is good for your business"

What is the business case?

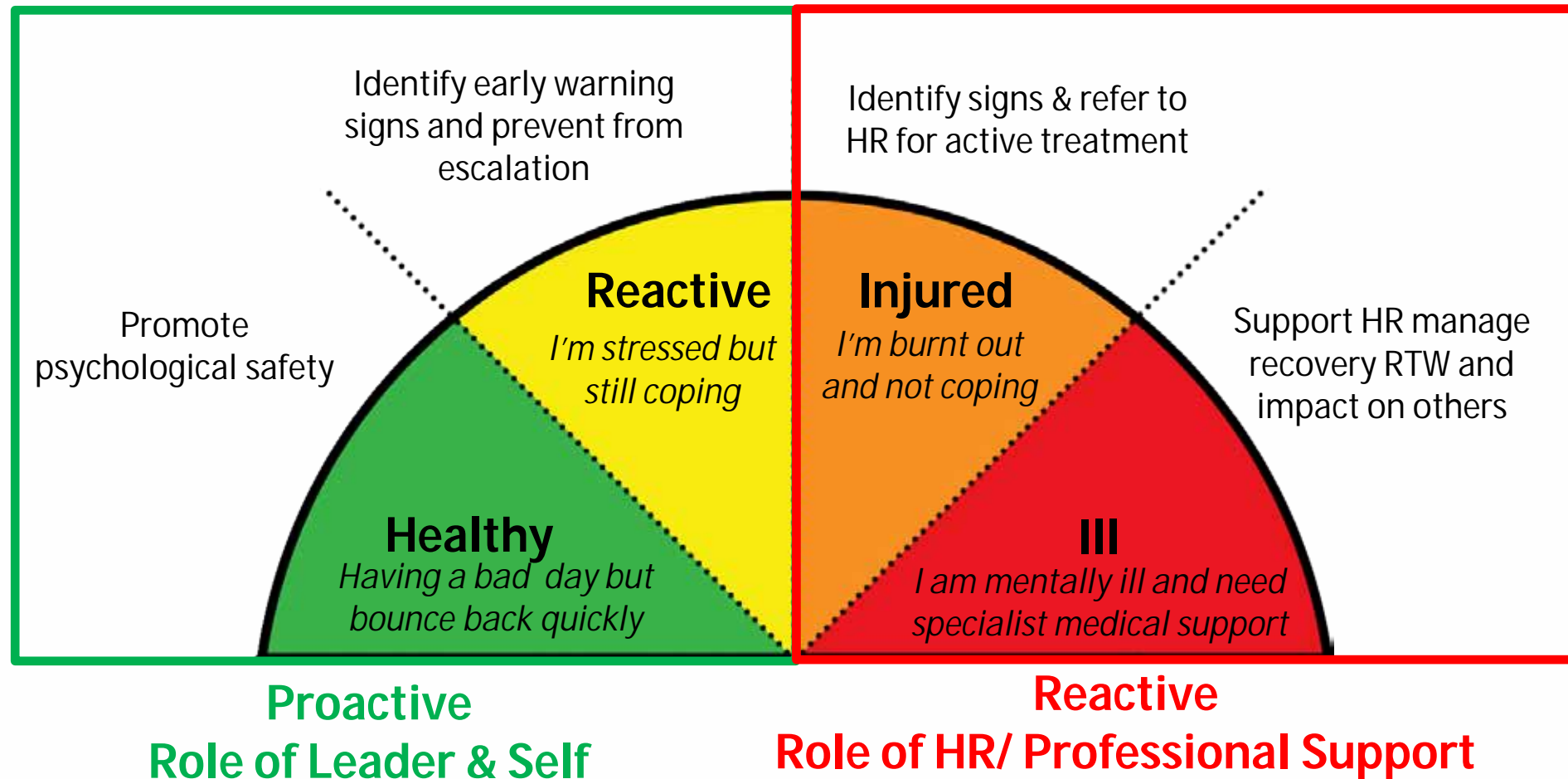
- reduced productivity and efficiency
- decline in job satisfaction, morale and team unity
- increased absenteeism and presenteeism
- increased staff turnover
- avoidable/unexplained errors
- decline in the quality of relationships, increased conflict
- increased incidents and injuries (both psychological and physical)
- increased health care expenditure and employee compensation claims

Should leaders avoid stress at all cost?



1. Intensity
2. Duration
3. Frequency

Health spectrum and the role of leaders

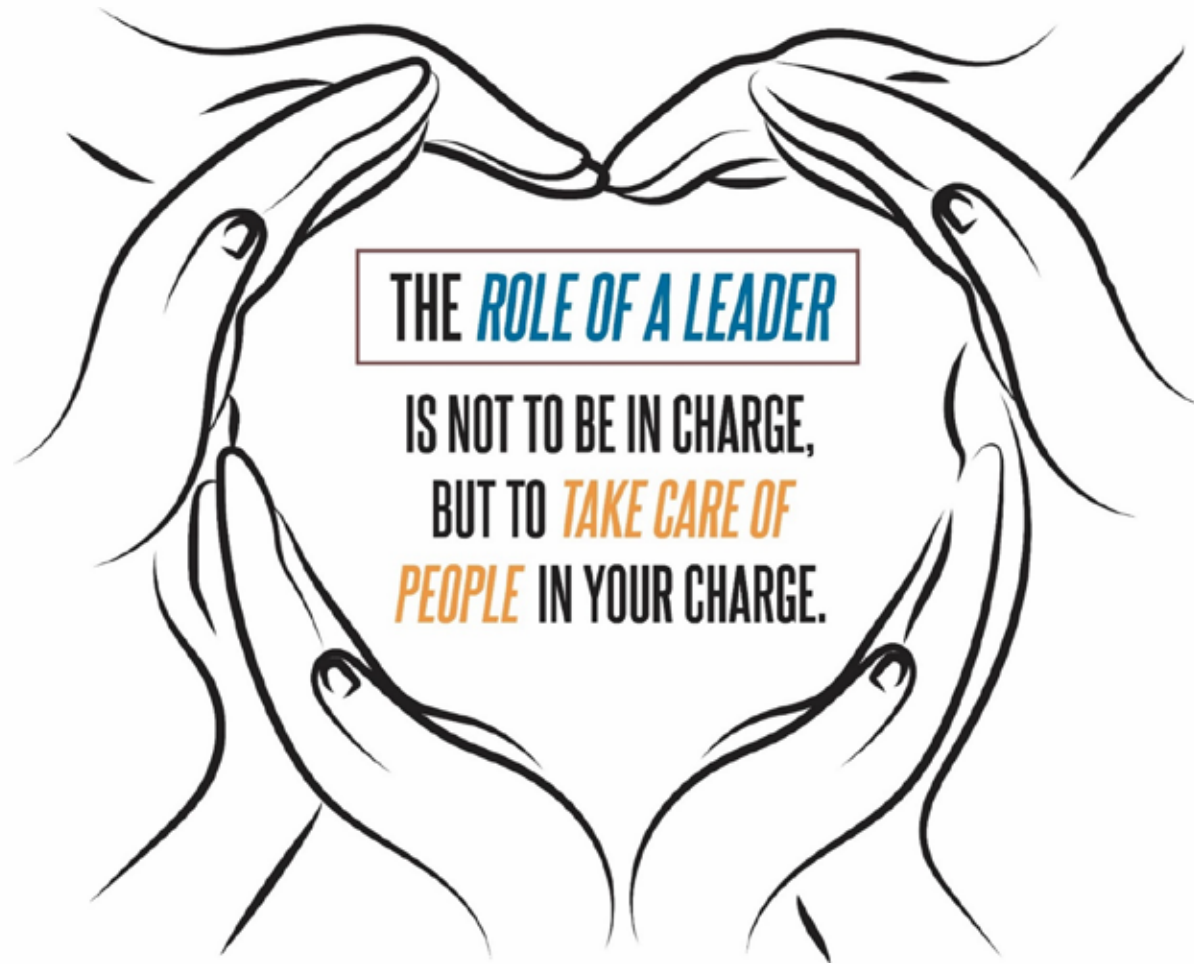


How do we know and avoid silence?

Create a psychologically safe environment:

1. Consciously connect – do you know your people?
2. Build trust and respect – allow for mutual feedback
3. Be curious, what is going on for people now?
4. Lead by example – admit to mistakes
5. Acknowledge people for taking interpersonal risks





Does psychological safety mean “being soft”

1. Assume a positive intent
2. Be clear and respectful
3. Hold people to account, firm but fair
4. Don't avoid straight feedback, but use empathy
5. Normalise feedback



Giving Feedback - Intent and Tone?

Intent: Express frustration

*"Your performance was terrible;
I am disappointed in you. You
caused me a lot of trouble"*

Intent: Support and Growth

*"This didn't meet the standard, let's
figure out what was missing, how to
fix it together and explore what you
need to avoid this in the future"*



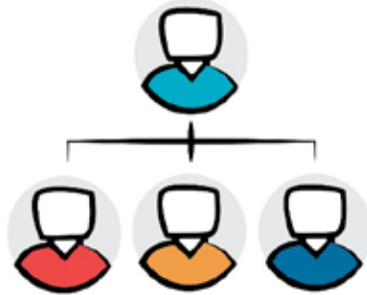
What does good look like?

Organisation Design



Clear vision, simple processes, tools, adequate resources, job clarity and demands

Leadership



Provides clear goals, builds rapport, models behaviours, fosters team relationships, demonstrates care

Individual Experience



Feels accepted & safe to speak up. Asks questions, raises issues, makes & owns mistakes, shares ideas, challenges

Business Outcomes



Reduced turnover, increased diversity, high morale, early reporting, improved performance, catalyst for innovation

