

Building Block 6: CONNECTIONS



Learning Objectives

- ❑ **Frame** – An approach for how organizations can support creating psychologically safe connections
- ❑ **Clarify** – What psychologically safe connections are and how they affect the employees
- ❑ **Identify** – What consequences may arise from perceived loneliness and isolation



Goal: Provide guidance on facilitating and supporting the creation and maintenance of psychologically safe social connections within the workplace.

Psychological Safety: A ROADMAP

GETTING STARTED

- Foundation
- Support
- Planning

GAINING MOMENTUM

- Leadership
- Culture
- Connections
- Prevention

RAISING THE BAR

- Excellence



©2020 Copyright.
Workplace Safety & Prevention Services.



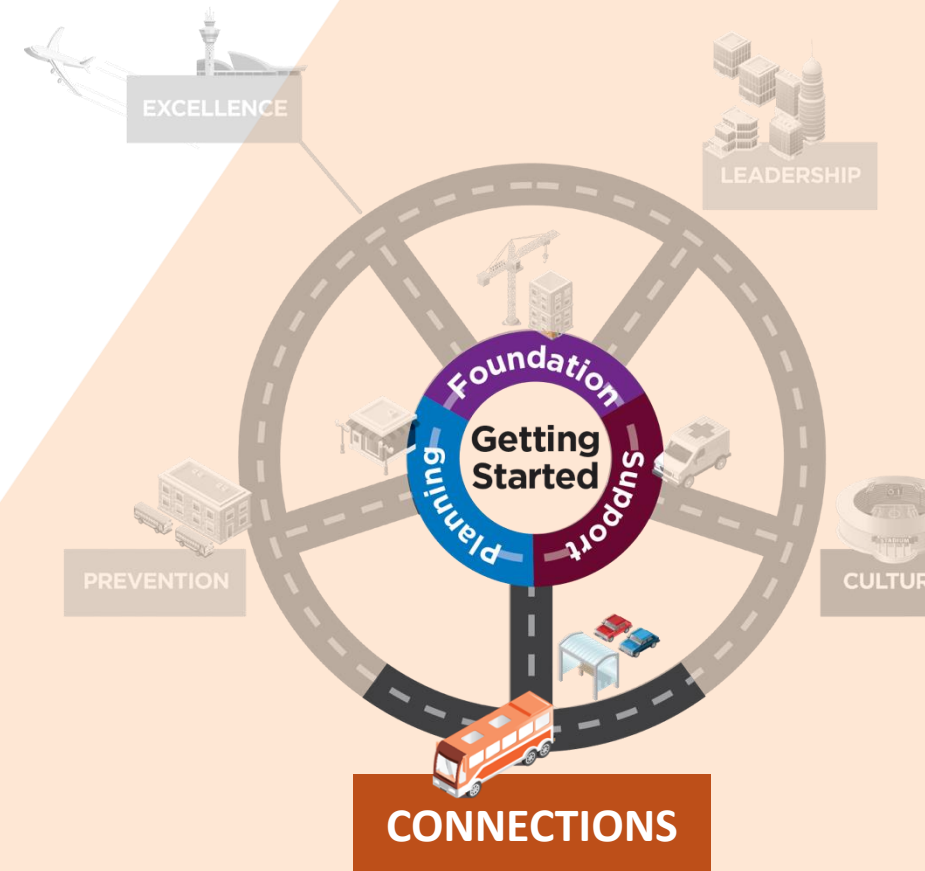
Connections

Purpose of the **Roadmap Connections Building Block 6** is to:

- Showcase the value of facilitating psychologically safe connections in the workplace.
- Ensure organizations understand the consequences of perceived isolation and loneliness.
- Provide tactics for facilitating psychologically safe social connections in the workplace.

Each building block leverages the Plan – Do – Check – Act cycle to gain familiarity with the management system approach.

The following slides will assist in making decisions and plans to encourage authentic connections at work.



Setting the Stage

The purpose of the **Connections Building Block** is to provide psychologically safe facilitators recommendations and guidance on the value of securing psychologically safe connections in the workplace.

Perceived loneliness has been shown to lead to various health issues as well as being a factor in premature deaths. These social connections not only support the individual's physical health, but also their mental health.

With employees spending more time with co-workers than with their families, it is imperative for organizations to help facilitate authentic social connections in the workplace.



What is a Psychologically Safe Connection?

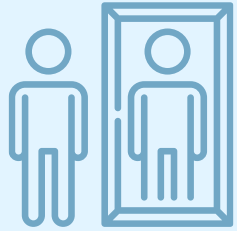
Interdependent relationships where both parties feel secure in sharing their points-of-view, without fear of retaliation, judgment, or anger.

These relationships allow for safe exchange of information between individuals or groups.

The processing of information enhances performance of the individual and the organization.



The Types of Connections Employees May Have



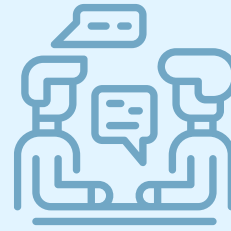
Themselves



Peers



Leaders



Subordinates



Contractors



Customers

The quality of the above connections contributes to the degree that an employee will feel welcomed and included.

Authentic Social Connections and Mental Health

The average employee will spend nearly 90,000 hours of their lifetime at work.

According to Globoforce, 78% of people who work between 30-50 hours per week spend more time with coworkers than with their families. This means they're celebrating birthdays, milestones, and accomplishments with their coworkers.

74% of people surveyed who didn't celebrate these events with their coworkers said they were more likely to leave the job.



Forbes states that strong social connections within the workplace have been shown to make employees happier and physically healthier.

Psychosocial Factor: Perceived Isolation

Perceived isolation is when an employee feels as if they are on an island alone, due to barriers that may include:

- gaps in psychologically safe relationships.
- physical distance.
- obstacles that limit opportunities for formal and informal in-person interactions.



Psychosocial Hazard: Loneliness

Loneliness is the subjective emotion that is a by-product of feeling isolated or from having gaps in authentic relationships.



How Loneliness Can Affect the Employee

Loneliness has been linked to depression, poor sleep quality, impaired executive functions, accelerated cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function and impaired immunity.

Studies have also shown that people who reported being the loneliest had a 40% greater risk of dementia.



Levers Employers Can Use to Build Psychologically Safe Connections

The role of inclusion



Extroversion vs. Introversion



Facilitating social connections



Supportive leaders



The Role of Inclusion

For an employee to feel a sense of inclusion they must feel welcomed, understood, listened to, and fearless to share their ideas or offer feedback.

Inclusion creates the space where employees can develop trust and build authentic social connections.



Take Steps to Remove Stigma



Employees who feel lonely or disconnected may not come forward with this issue due to the stigma they may face. This causes them to self-isolate and continue the cycle of feeling lonely even further.

1

Support the employee-manager relationship:

The employee manager relationship may be the most important relationship to maintain in the workplace.

2

Include mental health in your everyday conversations:

Avoiding talking about mental health or the experiences of someone dealing with a mental health issue only fuels the stigma.

3

Consider doing a pulse check to obtain a baseline on feelings of loneliness:

Gathering data on the perceived levels of loneliness will assist in deciding the next steps for facilitating connectedness.

4

Have daily, or weekly informal check-ins:

Informal check-ins about the employee's well-being are a great way to nurture feelings of belonging, value, and connectedness.

Extroversion and Introversion

Extroversion and Introversion are not either/or traits. They fall on a continuum which means that although you may primarily fall on the Extroversion end of the continuum, you may exhibit Introverted traits from time to time.

Extroversion – Preference for drawing energy from the outside world of people, activities, and things.

Introversion – Preference for drawing energy from one's internal world of ideas, emotions, and impressions.

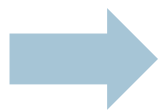
Traditionally we have perceived extroverted people as being better leaders, for example, those who stand up, speak out, give orders and make plans. However, in the presence of proactive teams, these leadership styles can cause stress, abrasion, and decreased productivity.



Tips for Supporting Introverted Employees

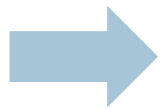
Did you know that introverts make up 30% to 50% of the workforce? Despite this, most workplace structures are biased toward extroverts.

Be aware and build understanding

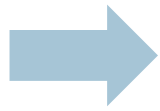


If you're unsure about their working style and preferences, talk to employees. Ask them what they need to feel comfortable contributing their ideas and interacting with the team.

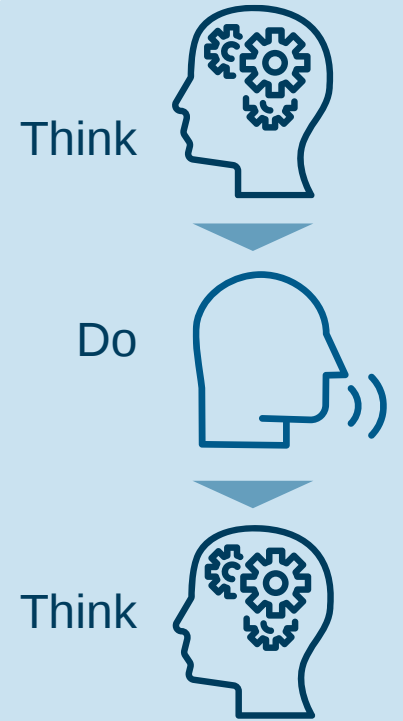
Honour employee differences and preferences



Consider whether the frequency, format, and length of meetings is suited to everyone. And, when possible, hold individual meetings for those who feel more comfortable connecting one-on-one or in small groups.



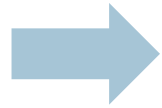
Introverts often prefer to work alone, rather than in groups. Try to make room for quiet and private space for concentration when appropriate and reasonable.



Tips for Supporting Extroverted Employees

Extroverts may have experienced more social challenges than introverts with increased time alone and feelings of isolation during the pandemic.

Be aware and build understanding

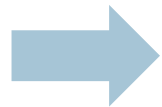


If you're unsure about their working style and preferences, talk to employees. Ask them what they need to feel comfortable contributing their ideas and interacting with the team.

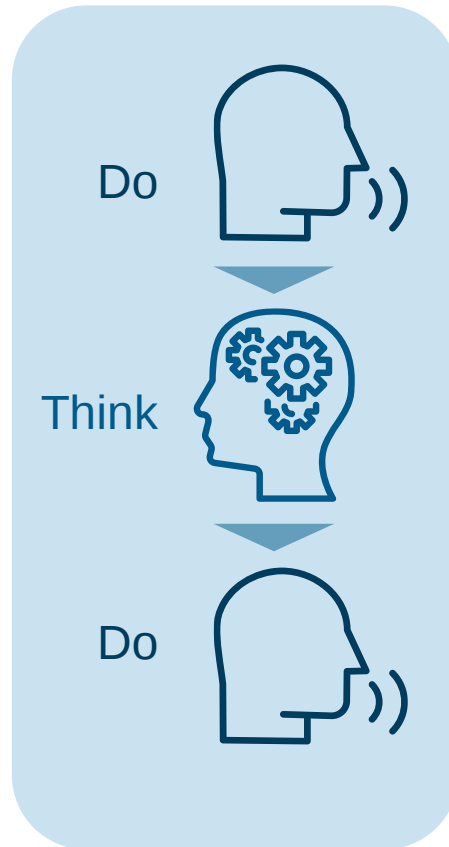
Honour employee differences and preferences



Extroverts like to vocalize thoughts and ideas and engage in social stimuli with words and actions. Create opportunities for them to do so.



Extroverts are energized by group interaction. Provide forums for sharing ideas and collaboration.



Tactics for Facilitating Psychologically Safe Connections

1

Create a safe space where employees feel that they can socialize, decompress, and avoid distracting other employees.



2

Find new things to celebrate with your employees, and hold annual ceremonies to recognize them for their hard work.



3

Introduce teammates from different departments that may not often have contact with one another.



4

Encourage team building, while ensuring team building exercises don't feel forced or uncomfortable.



5

Share a meal, employers can provide opportunities for social engagement by hosting healthy potlucks or team lunches.



Strategies for Facilitating Psychologically Safe Connections

Be aware – Realize that any employee experiencing isolation and loneliness in the workplace perceives an absence of meaningful social connections.

Break down barriers – Leaders who actively and openly talk about the importance of social connections can reduce the risk of employees suffering in silence or experiencing stigma.

Develop a social connections strategy – Leaders should consider their strategy to help employees maintain and develop meaningful social connections in the workplace.

- **Check in** - The goal is to build a healthy social connection with the employee so they don't feel alone in the workplace and have at least one safe relationship they can count on.
- **Employee support** - Educate employees about psychological support services, including peer, buddy, and training programs that can help those who are struggling, get the support they need.
- **Leverage technology** - Use technology that promotes social connections.



Tips for Fostering Social Connections in a Virtual World

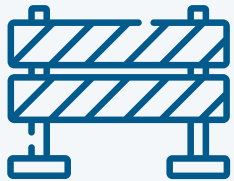
- ▶ **Help employees understand their value to the organization** - Take time to acknowledge what they're doing - not in broad strokes, but in an individual and meaningful way.
- ▶ **Determine employees' preference for check-ins** - Don't assume all employees want to check in the same way or as often.
- ▶ **Promote civil communication** - Remind employees to be mindful of tone and delivery in writing and monitor perceptions around digital communication.
- ▶ **Establish protocols for virtual meetings** - Work with teams to clarify expectations about meeting behaviour.
- ▶ **Define a remote work policy** - Set expectations around safety, impairment, ergonomics, use of technology, productivity, and work start and stop times.
- ▶ **Audit your employees' experience** - Employees who feel disconnected risk experiencing isolation and loneliness, as well as feeling disengaged from their work.

Consider the Challenge of Not Having Enough Alone Time

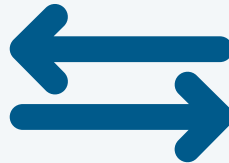
Aloneness vs. Loneliness: While some have struggled with feelings of isolation and loneliness, many have faced the challenges of suddenly spending a lot of time at home with family members.

Having time for yourself gives you the chance to break free from social pressures, tap into your own thoughts, feelings, and experiences, as well as providing you space to recharge.

Creating space



Set boundaries



Return the favour



Be flexible

Help Leaders Get the Skills to be More Supportive

The term “manager isolation effect” refers to how a manager’s functions can affect both their direct reports’ feeling of isolation and themselves.

Being a manager can be lonely. One factor that can contribute to loneliness is being tasked with the responsibility for making decisions, some of which won’t be favorable to some or all employees.



Provide leaders with:

Intrapersonal skills (mental fitness, emotional intelligence, emotional literacy)

Interpersonal skills (communications, teambuilding, conflict resolution)



HR Considerations for Preparing Leaders



The HR strategy has potential to pick and train leaders to be able to build supportive connections with reports as well as support employees to build healthy connections in the workplace.

Develop a selection process that measures interpersonal skills.

Onboard leaders with the organization's core values with respect to connections and culture.

Train leaders in interpersonal skills like communication, team building, and conflict resolution.

Have performance management evaluate how effective leaders are at facilitating and building healthy connections with peers and teams.

Hiring

Onboarding

Training

Performance

Encourage Leaders to Value Social Connections



Support leaders in facilitating psychologically safe social connections.

Managers who aren't skilled at building healthy, two-way relationships with their employees may find themselves feeling disconnected from their team and peers.

One of the best ways for a manager to prevent feelings of social isolation or loneliness is to be committed to helping their employees.



Call to Action → Ensure Each Employee Has One Safe Relationship

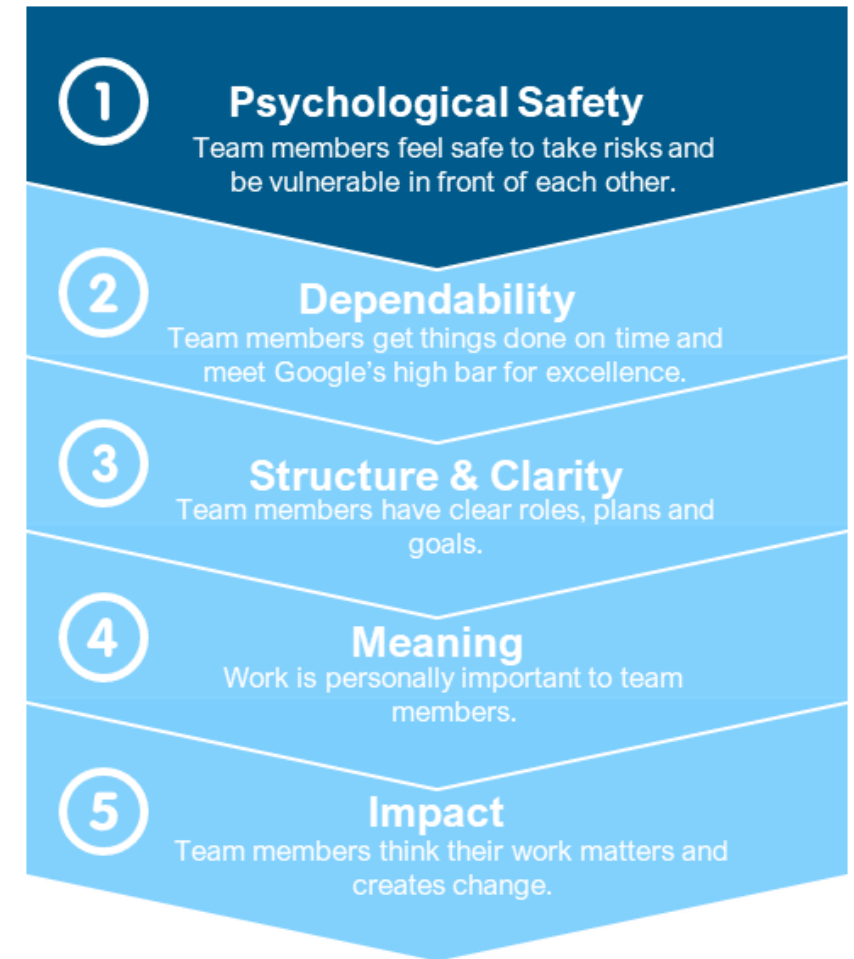
Rule of One – Be committed and take intentional action to encourage all employees to have at least one social connection in the workplace.



Google's Aristotle Project

- This research project examined what makes effective teams
- Team effectiveness was measured by:
 - Executive evaluation
 - Team leader evaluation
 - Team member evaluation
 - Sales performance against quarterly quota
- The key finding was that team effectiveness is less about who is on the team and more about how the team works together

5 Factors that most influenced team effectiveness



PDCA Cycle

P

Plan – Determine what you will do and how you will go about doing it.

D

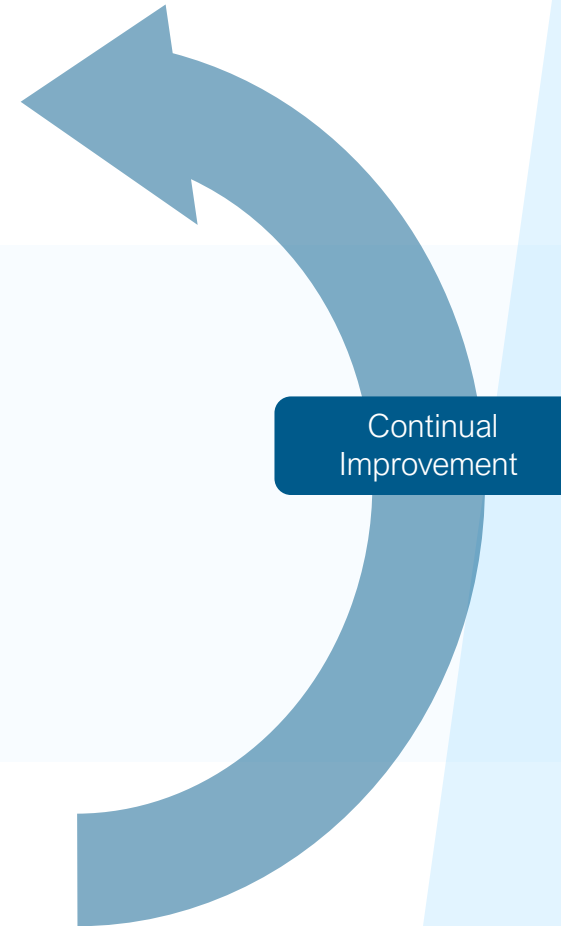
Do – Implement what was planned.

C

Check – Assess performance relative to the plan.

A

Act – Take appropriate action to correct and improve.



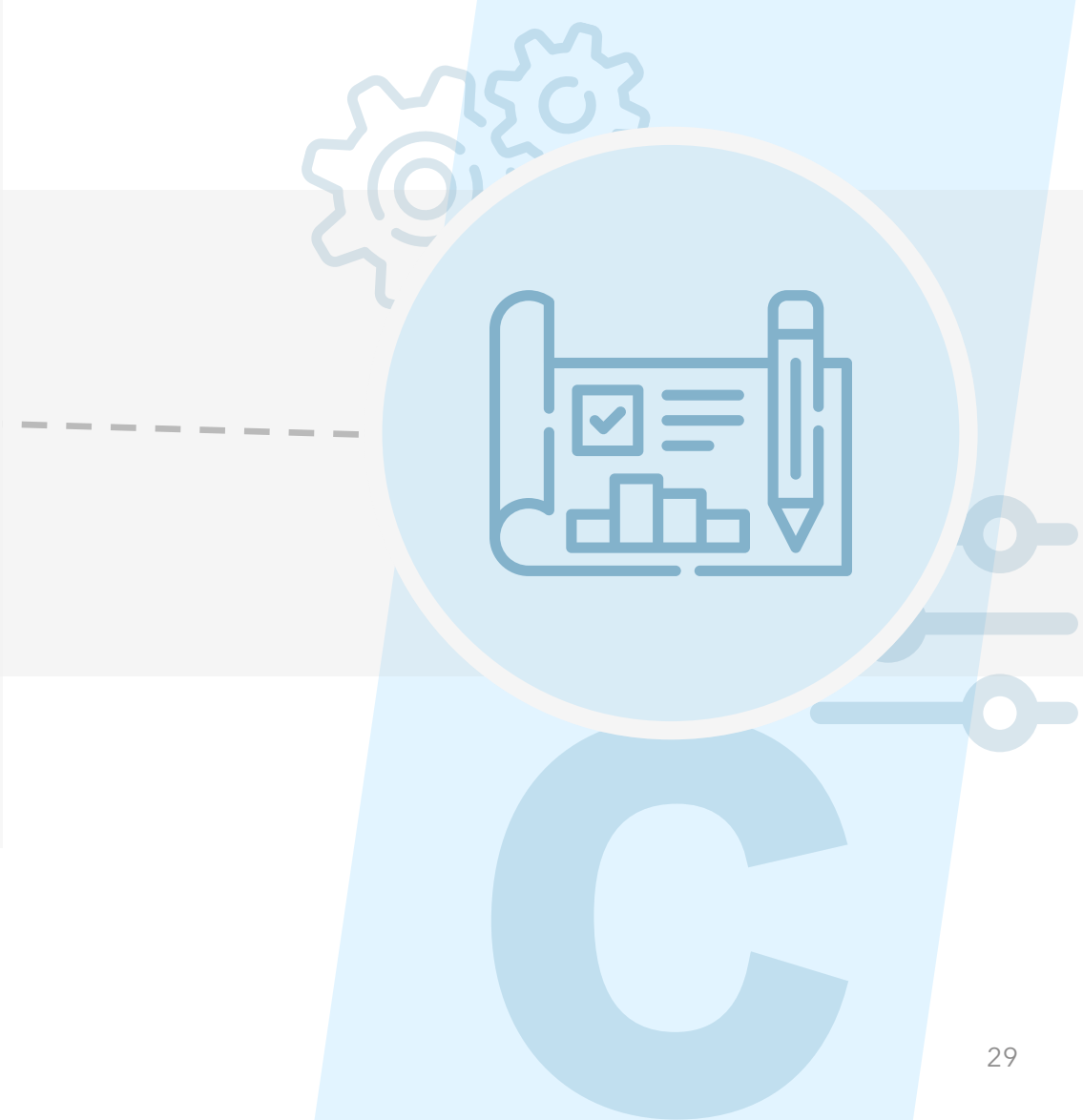
Implement

Action steps to consider	How will each element be implemented?
Project management	
Communication plan	
Scheduling	
Facilitation strategy	
Employee feedback strategy	
Change management	
Training plan	



Monitor

Define success metrics, for example:	Be specific
Desired key performance behaviours (KPBs)	
Target key performance indicator (KPI) results	
Desired outcomes/results	
What data will be collected/available (e.g. qualitative or quantitative data)?	
What reporting will be completed?	



Correct and Improve

- Have we met our targets or goals?
- Do we need to make any adjustments?
- Where are our opportunities for continual improvement?

Complimentary Resources Available to You

Perceived Isolation – Loneliness Effect

This survey is designed to increase your awareness of the relationship between *isolation* and *loneliness*.

Introvert vs. Extrovert Quick Survey

The purpose of this quick survey is to help you evaluate where you fall on a continuum from highly introverted to highly extroverted.

Report on Loneliness, Isolation and Resilience

This article and associated research speaks to issues surrounding isolation and loneliness, as well it provides some tips for helping employees in staying socially connected.

The Inclusion Imperative

This paper and associated research provides insights on diversity and inclusion within the modern workplace, as well as providing tips to ensure you are facilitating a respectful workplace.



Other Resources

Timothy R. Clark [The Four Stages of Psychological Safety](#)

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

[Home - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

WSPS Resource

Hugr Authentic Connections



Maximize Your Roadmap Experience



For consulting support services, please contact:



roadmap@wsps.ca

Building Block 7: **PREVENTION**



For all your health and safety solutions, contact:

Workplace Safety & Prevention Services

1 877 494 WSPS (9777)

[WSPS.CA](https://www.wsp.ca)

CONNECT
WITH US



In partnership:

**The Conference
Board of Canada**

