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Integrate DEI with psychological safety: small innovation, big impact

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Embedding psychological health and safety as a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) enabler ensures individuals with different values and backgrounds can contribute equitably. As engineers, we sometimes chase the “perfect” solution in excitement – without realising the quiet storm of pressure building up at work or/and in life. Although WorkSafe Victoria has formally recognised psychological hazards in Occupational Health and Safety Regulation in 2025, few of us feel comfortable to speak about it openly. This paper shares practical lived approaches to cultivating inclusion and wellbeing within our engineering teams.

METHODOLOGY

I have been championing social and mental health at work via simple and repeatable behaviours – small innovations that integrate wellbeing into daily routines and make meaningful cultural impact:

- **Integrate Courage to Care culture.** At KBR we encourage safety conversations on both physical and psychological safety within and outside of work to foster zero harm and duty of care culture.
- **Innovate small caring acts.** Where it feels natural, we can use playful habits to bring people together through shared passion, such as joining food club, afterwork gathering or expressing appreciations with our colleagues, families and friends.
- **Impact with genuine communication.** Being emotionally authentic to everyone including ourselves. Answering, "How's your day?" with something genuine and inviting the same, helps normalise openness across diverse personalities and backgrounds.
- **Drive peers check-ins.** Normalising conversations about stress and feedback. Considering giving and receiving mentoring – as a safe space for reflection and learning.
- **Integrate self-care and compassion.** Redirecting the urge to rush and perform by taking breaks, stepping outside for air or using grounding tools recognises that careers are marathons, not sprints, and learning curves are not always linear.

These practices are intentionally small so anyone—regardless of role or background—can adopt them.

RESULTS

These small actions improve how we feel about work and our teams, allowing us to feel safe and inclusive at work. We trust our teams and allow ourselves to experiment with and learn from challenges. Our inclusive habits turn workplace into a community we enjoy showing up for. As we embrace honest conversations and psychosocial safety, we grow faster, with greater pride and joy in our work.

CONCLUSION

My journey from eager graduate to wellbeing advocate shows that inclusive culture grows through everyday acts of care. Treating psychological health as a DEI enabler supports an equitable and inclusive workforce to innovate through micro-behaviours, integrate care into daily routines, and impact team culture positively.

KEY WORDS

Occupational health and safety, psychological wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, everyday acts, culture building

BIOGRAPHY

I am a Mental Health First Aider and Chartered Process Engineer with experience in water and wastewater treatment planning, design, operations and control. I am passionate about bringing people together across the chemical engineering community—from students and early-career engineers to professionals and academia. With practical industrial experience and a strong people-first focus, I enjoy learning, connecting and creating welcoming professional spaces. I am committed to fostering psychologically safe, inclusive engineering environments where individuals of all backgrounds can thrive.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Please indicate which conference program your abstract relates to:

Hazards Australasia

Chemeca

Sub theme: Diversity, equity and inclusion