

Leading people through AI adoption.

How to facilitate psychological safety and effective conversations to guide your team through technological change.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

The difference is rarely technical. It is human.

AI has become an integral part of how most organizations operate. Teams use it daily. Leaders keep rolling out new tools. For the most part, they work. But something is often missing.

Two teams can be equally capable, trained, emotionally intelligent, and equipped with the same AI tools yet achieve very different outcomes. The difference is rarely technical. It is human.

This guide is for the leaders who want to see that layer and know how to meet it. It offers practical steps to build psychological safety and create the conditions where your people feel supported and ready. Because readiness is not a given. It is something you create.



Readiness is a state we can see, name, and develop together. The work begins with people.

WHAT WE WILL COVER

FOUR SECTIONS · ONE PRACTICE

A working set of practices for the leader rolling out AI.

-
- 01** **The impact of AI on fundamental human needs.** P. 04
Why people react the way they do, survival, context, autonomy. The three needs every leader has to meet.
-
- 02** **How leaders create psychological safety at work.** P. 07
Self-awareness, shared tenets, modeling behavior, and integrating values into policy.
-
- 03** **Listen before you lead.** P. 11
Facilitating effective conversations about AI. Before, during, and after.
-
- 04** **Put your people first.** P. 14
Common reactions, empathy, facts, and a written commitment to your team.
-

The paper closes with a three-step get-started guide and details on how to find us.

Closing · p. 18 About · p. 19

The impact of AI on fundamental human needs for psychological safety.

Here is what is happening beneath the surface when people respond to AI initiatives.

AI's presence in all aspects of life can evoke strong emotions, fears, and resistance, especially when there are mandatory changes in the workplace. Diverse views and feelings about AI can also touch on deep issues like cognition, creativity, psychology, communication, ethics, environment, life view, and even survival.

So as a leader, you're going to encounter different levels of willingness to use AI in the workplace. This is a human response to a technological shift.

The use of AI, and especially workplace-imposed AI initiatives, threatens three fundamental human needs for psychological safety.

SURVIVAL

CONTEXT

AUTONOMY

Each is examined on the following page.

Survival, context, autonomy.

The use of AI, and especially workplace-imposed AI initiatives, threatens three fundamental human needs for psychological safety. Each shows up in a different shape. Each can be met.

01

Survival

Even if your organization plans to prioritize the ethical use of AI, the fact is that it has already threatened the livelihoods of many, and your employees have watched that unfold. Some companies have used it to replace roles and people. Those people then face a job market where AI has made it increasingly difficult for resumes to reach employers.

Do this. Make sure your team knows their jobs are secure and that they are deeply valued. Show understanding when people feel uncertain.

02

Context

A key element of psychological safety for many people is having enough context and preparation for something new. Because of the rate at which new AI tools are emerging, they are often introduced suddenly. The brain can max out its bandwidth to cope with change and adaptation.

Do this. Give your team as much context, notice, and preparation as you can when asking them to integrate AI into their work.

03

Autonomy

We all feel safest when we have a core level of control regarding how we think, act, create, communicate, and work. A requirement to use AI at work can create resistance due to a lack of autonomy regarding when and how people use it. It could pose a challenge to their beliefs or personal ethics.

Do this. Offer choice and freedom in the use of new tools as much as possible.

Address all three and people return to a workable baseline.

HOW THE THREE NEEDS OVERLAP



Fears about basic survival for people and their families often inform their response to AI-based change. Meet that fear with steadiness.

When AI threatens any one of these three needs, the other two compensate. Address all three and your team finds a steadier baseline from which to engage the change.

How leaders create psychological safety at work.

Psychological safety is critical to ensure your people can function at their highest capacity, especially during times of change, when the brain is faced with the challenge of adaptation.

Since fears about AI are at an all-time high for some people and teams, it's even more essential to create an atmosphere where people are able to slow down, communicate, and receive the support they need from leaders who demonstrate empathy and consistency.

A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE WORKPLACE ALLOWS YOUR TEAM TO

- Reflect on how they feel and build self-awareness.
- Communicate openly with leadership about concerns.
- Try new solutions without repercussion.
- Navigate transitions with the right support.

● THE BRAIN ON SAFETY

Research shows there is a significant difference in how the human brain functions depending on whether or not an environment feels safe. Even subtle nuances in workplace culture make a big difference in employees' capacity to reach their full potential.

In a psychologically safe workplace, employees engage more effectively in high-level analysis, project management, attention to detail, creative innovation, and interpersonal communication.

Focus on self-awareness and self-development.

Your organization's culture starts with you. Your ability to understand and regulate yourself deeply impacts everyone on your team. Cultivating self-awareness is often invisible work, but it's essential to creating the foundation where others feel psychological safety.

Reflect on your own readiness by thinking about your strengths and areas for improvement in these four domains. Write down how you show up in each, and any thoughts about how you'd like to improve.

- 01 **Self-awareness.** Recognizing when your emotions are influencing your decisions and behavior, so you don't allow your internal states to drive your actions on autopilot.
- 02 **Communication and connection.** Sharing information, processing emotions, and staying open under pressure so you can transform awareness into collective action.
- 03 **Interpersonal effectiveness.** Making collaboration work, especially when perspectives differ or the stakes are high.
- 04 **Growth mindset.** Believing you have the ability to develop readiness and improve on your strengths, which keeps you growing instead of stagnating.

- **TIP, START WITH SELF-AWARENESS**

Three small practices.

- Pause several times each day to ask: what am I feeling right now and what do I need to feel more grounded?
- Take a moment before conversations to assess your state and make sure you feel ready to engage.
- Reflect after interactions: how did you feel before, during, and after? What informed how you showed up?



Self-development is a long-term endeavor. Build a set of personal practices, and seek out professional development specific to fostering psychological safety for your team.

Build a foundation of shared tenets, and live by them.

A, ESTABLISH SHARED TENETS

To create psychological safety, establish a shared language for what it means across the organization. Start with leadership. Come together for this specific purpose and decide what core values you want to implement.

- Empathy, even in the face of differences.
- Active listening in all interactions.
- Focus on solutions, not blame.
- Inclusion across identity and working styles.

Expand each into a group agreement, *"we show empathy when someone is struggling and respond with supportive words"*, then invite the whole team to contribute. Anonymous survey, full-team meeting, shared document.

B, COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

Once you've established the environment, remind your team that leadership will continue to make this a priority. Invite people to communicate with you about it at any time.

Use every touchpoint, opening and closing of team meetings, 1:1s, all-hands, to refer back to what you've agreed upon as a team.

● THE FOUR-STEP ROLLOUT

- 01 Draft three to five values with the leadership team.
- 02 Send an email ahead of the all-hands explaining the purpose.
- 03 Invite contributions through an anonymous survey.
- 04 Publish the shared group-agreements document.

Talking about it is one thing. Modeling it is another.

C, LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Demonstrating the qualities of a psychologically safe workplace is different from describing them. Ensure that all your communications, private and team-facing, exemplify the agreements you've made.

- Show compassion.
- Communicate clearly.
- Listen to all voices.
- Focus on solutions instead of blame.
- Share openly about your own challenges.
- Keep commitments. Demonstrate loyalty.
- Highlight moments of exemplary team unity.

D, INTEGRATE INTO POLICY

Group agreements only hold when they're embedded in concrete policies and procedures. The most important move: create regularly occurring opportunities for your team to communicate with leadership, so they know support is always there.

● WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

- Quarterly 1:1s anchored to the values document.
- An always-open written channel for concerns.
- Open agendas at team meetings, anyone adds.
- A named person responsible for the document.

Creating psychological safety in your organization is a long-term endeavor, but you can begin now.

Listen before you lead: facilitating effective conversations about AI.

Intentional conversations set the stage for true connection and communication. They are what will help your team navigate change, every single time.

One of the most important actions you can take is to make a clear, consistent practice of inviting open, honest dialogue between you and your team. Especially with AI-related transitions, where the pace is fast and the emotions diverse, sitting down with each person and creating space to be heard is critical.

The brain responds to safety in ways we can measure, and culture is the variable that flips the switch.

FROM THE FIELD · TPRC PRACTICE NOTES

WHAT CONVERSATIONS CAN DO

- Foster your team's trust in you as a leader and a person.
- Give employees space to express themselves and feel valued.
- Clarify nuanced situations.
- Bridge gaps in communication.

Before and during: small practices that change the room.

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

Laying the foundation is as important as the conversation itself.

- 01 Create a clear invitation.**
A specific timeframe, place, and goal, so employees know this is an intentional opportunity to share openly.
- 02 Prepare yourself internally.**
Tune in with your own emotional and physical state. Make sure you feel grounded so you can navigate with calmness and clarity.
- 03 Create a welcoming environment.**
Reduce distractions, white noise, harsh lights, screens, so the other person can focus and you can give your full attention.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

Five things to do once you're in the room together.

- 01 Foster connection.** Invite them to share how they're feeling. Be honest about how you're feeling. Showing you're human bridges hierarchical gaps.
- 02 Ask open-ended questions.** "How do you feel about this change?" "What's easy or hard about it?" "Anything you're concerned about?"
- 03 Show you're listening.** Body language and eye contact demonstrate presence. Reflect back what you hear.
- 04 Acknowledge and validate other perspectives.** Recognize people as individuals whose identity, experiences, and beliefs inform how they feel.
- 05 Close intentionally.** Thank them, ask if they have further thoughts, let them know you're there for continued support.

Send the invitation that opens the conversation.

Send a note ahead of the 1:1 that names the purpose, the time, and the safety of the space. Here is a sample you can adapt to your voice.

SAMPLE INVITATION

FROM You

TO A member of your team

SUBJECT A 1:1 about our new AI initiatives

I'd like to invite you to have a 1:1 conversation about our new AI initiatives. My goal is to provide a space where you can share your thoughts, feelings, and concerns openly, with no repercussions, and to better understand how I can support you through this change.

We can meet on Monday or Wednesday from 1pm to 2pm. Please let me know which works for you. I look forward to connecting.

Adapt the tone, the timing, and the framing to your own relationship with the team. What matters is the explicit invitation to share openly.

Put your people first. How to lead conversations in a constantly changing AI landscape.

The rapid introduction of AI to the corporate world has been confronting and challenging for many. Supporting your team through transition begins with the right kind of conversation.

We've explored how to facilitate effective conversations in general. Now we'll look at how to navigate conversations specifically about AI-based change at work, what to listen for, how to respond, and where to be most clear.

The next page begins with how to understand common reactions and meet them with empathy.

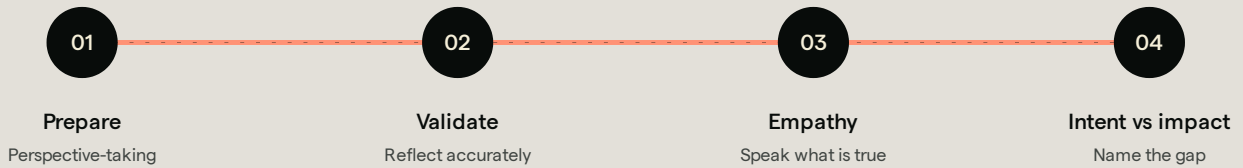


How to respond with empathy to what your team is actually feeling.

Here are some things you might hear from employees about new AI requirements, why they're important to take seriously, and how to respond. Remember: always put your people first.

WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR	WHY IT MATTERS	HOW TO RESPOND
"I'm really worried that my job might eventually be at risk as AI progresses."	Threat to survival and sense of worth. Fear about job loss inhibits effective work, and is valid given systemic realities.	<i>"I completely understand why you feel that way. We are committed to using these tools to support your work, never as a replacement. We really value you, for everything you bring."</i>
"Learning new tools just adds more to my plate."	Threat to context and autonomy. Some people need more time and context to learn new things. Valid given lessened control.	<i>"I can relate, I had challenges adapting too. It's ok if it takes time. What specifically feels challenging? I'm here to help you throughout this transition."</i>
"We're expected to produce output at a much faster rate, and it's really stressful."	Threat to autonomy and survival. There's a real limit on human capacity for output; expectations don't always reflect that.	<i>"I can imagine how challenging this is. We understand there are still humans behind these tools, and we're taking care to avoid unreasonable expectations. If pressure builds, please tell me."</i>
"I don't trust AI to do this well."	Threat to context and autonomy. People may fear AI will lessen the quality of their work and misrepresent their abilities.	<i>"That's a very valid concern. AI requires strong human oversight. You'll always retain control over every stage of output. If anything is making your job harder, let me know."</i>
"I don't really have much to say about this."	May reflect a threat to autonomy, context, or survival. Some people only speak about feelings in certain situations.	<i>"That's ok, there's a lot to process. If at any point you have questions or concerns, I'm here to listen. I'll follow up in a couple weeks just to see how you're doing."</i>

Prioritize human emotions. Then provide facts.



A, PRIORITIZE HUMAN EMOTIONS

Your number one priority in every interaction is your people. Their humanity, their feelings, their experiences. That is what builds trust.

- 01 Prepare with perspective-taking.**
Step into your employee's perspective. How is AI connected to their livelihood, family, identity?
- 02 Validate how they feel.**
"Thank you for sharing. I understand you feel ___ about this because ___."
Reflect accurately.
- 03 Show genuine empathy.**
"I really understand why you feel the way you do." Speak only what is true.
- 04 Address intent vs. impact.**
Your company's intent may be ethical. The impact felt may be different. Name that gap.

B, PROVIDE FACTS

Start with a shared knowledge base, the context of AI, its strengths and weaknesses, and what your company plans to use.

- **SHARE THE DISTINCTION**

"AI" is often used to mean only one kind: *generative AI*. But forms of AI have existed since the 1950s. Offering context helps people place your use in the larger picture.

- **SPECIFY HOW AI WILL BE USED**

- **Information synthesis**, summarize long documents; organize schedules.
- **Coding**, coding assistance and bug detection.
- **Sales and marketing**, improve lead quality; create initial drafts.

Augmentation, not replacement, and back it up in writing.

Be clear about your company's plans, policies, and perspectives. Make it unquestionable that you deeply value employees as human beings, that their individual skill sets are indispensable, and that the new tools are intended solely to support, never replace.

The more emphatically and authentically you emphasize this, the less likely your people are to feel fear about technological change.

ACKNOWLEDGE AI'S LIMITATIONS

- It is not omniscient or sentient. AI tools are designed and trained by humans. They predict, they don't think.
- It risks significant inaccuracy. Generative AI gives you what you ask for and can be highly flawed or factually wrong.
- It does not challenge input. AI won't push back. It cannot replace the kind of human interaction that leads to the most productive insight.

EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT STATEMENT · SAMPLE

A document you can share.

As an organization, we value each of you as a human being with an invaluable skill set and expertise that cannot be matched by generative technologies. We are committed to:

- The ethical and responsible use of AI as a tool for augmentation, never replacement.
- Taking actions that uphold loyalty to you, our employees, and job longevity.
- Sustaining strong human oversight of all AI output, for accuracy, nuance, and depth.
- Honoring your comfort levels with using AI, and offering accommodation when needed.

Share this during conversations as tangible evidence to back up your words. Adapt the language to your organization.

One conversation can change a lot. Sustained communication changes the system.

As you wrap up any conversation, close on a note of appreciation and support. Let your employees know there will be continued opportunities to share what they think, feel, and need.

CLOSING LANGUAGE YOU CAN USE

- "Is there anything else you'd like to share or ask?"
- "How do you feel I can best support you going forward?"
- "I really value everything you do. Your feelings about this matter."
- "Thank you for communicating openly with me."



GET STARTED GUIDE

Three steps for next week

01

Start a self-reflection practice.

Pause once or twice a day to name what you feel and what you need. Reflect after important interactions. The work begins inside.

02

Invite input on trust-building tenets.

Draft three to five group agreements with leadership. Invite the whole team to contribute through an anonymous survey, then publish a shared document.

03

Hold 1:1s about AI.

Send the invitation. Hold the space. Validate emotions, share facts, and commit in writing to augmentation, not replacement.

ABOUT



The People Readiness Company.

Most firms that touch this space do adjacent work. Strategy. Leadership development. Learning platforms. Change management. All of it useful, none of it aimed at the variable that determines whether any of those investments deliver.

We were built to name that variable, measure it, and change it. The readiness framework is the result of fifteen years of direct observation watching technology rollouts, ownership transitions, and strategic pivots succeed or fall short. It has been tested across two continents and two decades of client work, from technology companies to higher education, from ten-person teams to organizations of five hundred and more.

WHAT WE MEASURE

Whether a team is in a position to meet the demands of significant change, and how that position is shifting over time.

HOW WE STAY CLOSE TO THE WORK

Every engagement is led by the people who built the framework. Measurement, development, and reassessment run in 90-day cycles that continue for as long as the organization is navigating significant change.

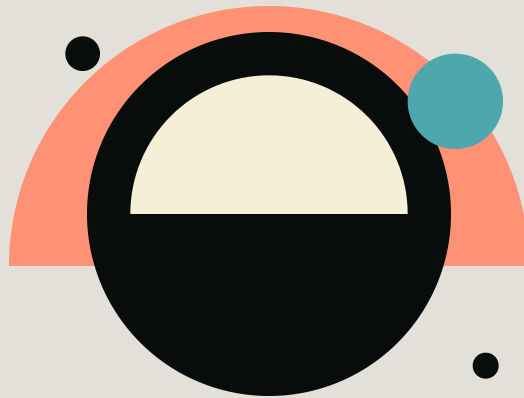
WHAT WE BUILD

The specific capacities the readiness data identifies as missing, through structured group facilitation and daily individual practice, visible in the data within 60 to 90 days.

WHO WE WORK WITH

Private equity and M&A leadership assessing people risk before a deal closes. Transformation leaders whose initiatives depend on people they cannot fully read. Founders scaling through the window where gut feel stops being enough.

Want to talk about a specific situation in your organization? Turn the page for ways to reach us, and the authors of this paper.



Everything is people.

The work begins with the human. Always.

GET IN TOUCH

Contact and the authors of this paper.

CONTACT

WEB	thepeoplereadiness.com
EMAIL	hey@thepeoplereadiness.com
PRESS	julius@thepeoplereadiness.com
LINKEDIN	linkedin.com/company/thepeoplereadiness

AUTHORS

Faryn Sand,
MA Clinical
Psychology

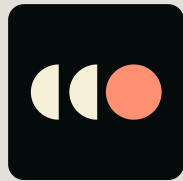
TPRC FACILITATOR
& COACH

Alexandra
Croitor

TPRC PROJECT
AND SUCCESS
MANAGER

Julius Geis

TPRC FOUNDER &
CEO



Thank you for reading.

Continue the work. We're here when you want to talk.

THEPEOPLEREADINESS.COM

VOL. 01 · 2026