

SPSP National Learning Event – October 2025

Responses to unanswered questions

This document summarises questions raised during and after the plenary session delivered by Dr Suzette Woodward at the SPSP National Learning Event. The questions have been organised into four key themes to allow for easier response.

Theme 1: Reducing bias and judgement in event reviews

- How do we mitigate against judgement in significant adverse event reviews?
- Human factors are essential, but they can introduce preconceptions. How do we manage this?
- What role might artificial intelligence play in reducing or replacing human bias in these processes?

Question summary

How can we ensure fairness and objectivity in learning from events, especially when human judgement is involved?

Answer

- A clear **standardised tool or approach** help guide people towards system factors, rather than focusing purely on what the individuals did or did not do such as an adverse event review etc.
- Think about the **language** you use. Using appreciative inquiry language. Aim for factual documentation and evidence rather than unsubstantiated opinions.
- Multidisciplinary groups help to gather opinions and evidence from people with **diverse** backgrounds who can bring ideas, ask questions, contribute and challenge (the key steps for psychological safety) - this can enhance objectivity. However, you also need expertise within the group who really understand the particular task, process or area that the adverse event happened in to be able to describe what “normally happens.”
- Use the process of **mapping work** as intended (what did the policy say), work as normal (what happens most of the time) and work as done (what happened this time) - looking to see the differences and similarities.
- Using prompts which **shift people away from biases** such as hindsight, outcome and confirmation bias. Using questions that ask the opposite of what people might think the causal factors are to challenge these preconceptions eg if we think the cause of a fall was the patient’s medication can we put that to one side and ask what all the other causes could be.

Theme 2: Psychological safety and speaking up

- What can staff do to raise concerns when discouraged by senior managers?
- How can we support a culture where curiosity and challenge are welcomed, not suppressed?

Question summary

How can staff be empowered to speak up safely, even in hierarchical or resistant environments?

Answer

- Leaders and managers at all levels of the organisation have to **role model** psychological safety, admitting their own mistakes, responding positively when questioned or concerns are raised. Think about the tone of your conversation and the words that you use.
- In all meetings get into the habit of **asking everyone for a contribution** using open-ended questions - not ones that can simply be answered by yes or no. Do so in a gentle style - tone is very important here and wait for the response. Don't rush people to speak up, the lead of any meeting have to provide people the opportunity to speak and to ensure that they are in listening mode not thinking about what their next question or meeting is.
- Build **assertiveness** over time especially for diverse cultures who struggle to speak up to those in power.
- Recognise and **celebrate staff** who raise concerns or questions with stories that demonstrate the benefits of doing so.
- Create **buddy systems** for people to have a colleague that they could raise issues - either for them or with them – strength in numbers.
- Try using a **cultural mapping tool** for teams such as the one used by [Erin Meyer](#).

Theme 3: Leadership and accountability

- Advice for supporting senior staff who take responsibility for errors made by juniors.
- How do we reconcile a just culture with public demands for accountability (often perceived as blame)?

Question summary

How can leaders be supported in navigating responsibility while maintaining a learning-focused, non-punitive culture?

Answer

- Implementing and embedding a **just culture** will really help in this case. A just culture is not about being blame free, it is the way of balancing accountability and learning. It requires consistency right across the organisation to develop trust. Clarity around what a just culture is and the way in which staff will be supported is vital.
- Clarity about **acceptable and unacceptable behaviour** is also vital. Demonstrating what that is for staff and addressing it.
- Creating a **culture campaign** for the organisation will help to bring a just culture together with psychological safety and supportive team behaviours will raise awareness and understanding of what this means.
- **Role model** the desired culture.

Theme 4: Proactive safety and learning culture

- How can we shift from reactive incident reporting to proactive harm prevention?

Question summary

How do we move towards a forward-looking, learning-driven safety culture?

Answer

- Safety culture - purposefully ask in **daily conversations everyday work insights**:
 - How are you feeling?
 - What is helping you get things right around here?
 - What could we do to make your life and work better?
- **Safety management systems** - helps focus people on the processes, helps create a business case for working on safety.
- Use a tool like **Video Reflexivity Ethnography (VRE)** - to consider what we can learn about what we do normally and stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration and communication for example:
 - Video record real handovers and huddles or interactions around critical events - to help improve communication and looking at task allocation.
 - Filming medication processes to pick out good practice and ways to strengthen the process.
 - Filming when people get distracted or interrupted from the perspective of the person being interrupted and the person interrupting – it's not always a bad thing and it needs exploring.
- **De-clutter / de-implementation** – find out what you could stop in an evidenced base way – see Yorks and the Humber research work. https://psrc-yh.nihr.ac.uk/psrc_themes/de-cluttering-safely-for-safety/