

# Moccasin Approach®



## Background:

In 2005, Mac Macdonald created the concept of the “Moccasin Manager®”; in 2006, the phrase “Moccasin Approach®” followed. Both were trademarked in the UK in 2017 and then in the USA in 2020.

## Origins:

As you may have guessed, our term, Moccasin Approach®, is linked to an old saying that is often attributed to various Native American tribes, which goes along the lines of:

“Don't judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins”.

Our research at the time revealed that a similar saying, “walk a mile in his moccasins,” was used in the poem “Judge Softly.” We believe that Mary Lathrap wrote the poem in or around 1895. You can read the full poem by [clicking here](#).

Regardless of who originally wrote about walking in someone else’s shoes or moccasins, our thinking is born from a similar perspective: We should not judge people until we understand what the world feels like for them from **their** perspective. Then, we should **Approach** them with **Care** and **Empathy (ACE)**.

## Evolution:

Since we created these two terms, the ingredients of our Moccasin Approach have evolved based on what we learned from years of leadership and management programmes and thousands of discussions and thoughts from our amazing delegates about why it needed to evolve. Thank you all.



We are very comfortable with our Moccasin Approach, but we look forward to watching it evolve further as we continue to have more wonderful conversations with people worldwide.

Leadership and management have evolved over the years and will continue to do so. However, the best forward-thinking organisations will invest in their future leaders and managers **before** they become leaders and managers. Don't let people learn how to lead and manage from their line managers or leaders unless those they learn from have undergone professional training.

## How can the moccasin approach help organisations?

Our Moccasin Approach asks everyone to make a conscious effort to see things from the perspective of others before we communicate with them. That is not just for our work colleagues but also for everyone we meet in life. This world badly needs us all to use the Moccasin Approach.

The approach won't immediately change all the toxic behaviours people demonstrate, but we believe it's precisely what's needed to do that over time.

People need to understand the detrimental effects their negative behaviour has on others, the impact on their organisation's success, and how positive actions infect others with positivity; people are motivated to improve performance, which, in turn, improves their behaviour towards others.

This clip from the Netflix series After Life with Ricky Gervais ([click here](#)) gives us a simple but powerful message. (All credit belongs to Netflix.)

As an organisation spreads the thinking of our Moccasin Approach and more colleagues employ it, people's behaviours will develop and align closer with the organisational values. To drive this forward, colleagues must be motivated and inspired by those driving the culture and fostering psychological safety.

The OCET ([click to read](#)) will be the driving force that helps all colleagues evidence their values and behaviours by living them daily and monitoring them to ensure they do. Behaviour breeds behaviour.



A top tip is to check your values and ask yourself if they need to be more people-focused. The main focus of values should be on your people and how they behave. It's not **all** about your customers or clients. Yes, they matter and deserve to be looked after really well, but get your people right and happy and loyal customers and clients will follow.

When we, consciously or unconsciously, block people from saying what they honestly think because of how we behave towards them or the fear we instil in them, we let the immeasurable value of "clean communication" and "clean information" slip through our fingers. Can your organisation afford that? (See Blockers and Barriers below).

If you are unfamiliar with "Psychological Safety", investigate it immediately. In simple terms, the concept is that **all** your people throughout the organisation don't just **feel** safe; they **are** safe to say whatever they wish to whomever they want to, as long as what they say is politely, professionally and respectfully communicated.

We must all feel safe when we tell our manager/leader we've made a mistake. Many organisations say their values show they have such safety, but often, they do not. It is merely what I call a flag-waving exercise. Here are our values—don't they look great? And that's it—another tick in the box.

Organisations that treat their values and underpinning behaviours as flag-waving exercises will never achieve psychological safety. They must employ a mechanism that actively ensures psychological safety by monitoring behaviours. If they do not, this will result in the best people leaving or, worse yet, being pushed out by the toxic behaviours that some managers and leaders continually enable—yes, even the most senior of them.

## Change and doing the right thing:

**Everyone** can choose to do the right thing or not. If you want to see the change, your organisation needs to improve its culture, stand up and start a movement. Later in the document, I'll explain how that can be achieved through our OCET thinking.

## Gandhi:

Some years ago, I read these words: "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." They were, and still are, said to be Gandhi's words. I later read that, in fact, they are a summary of his fuller words: "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a person changes their own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards them. We need not wait to see what others do."



If I may, I'll add: "Let's change our nature **right now!**"

Regardless of our role, hierarchical position, or seniority in an organisation, we can all light the fire of change. We need to start the conversation and create a movement for improvement. Just put it out there, believe in it and help it evolve. Be the spark that lights the fire 🔥. Great leaders and managers will support you and bring you with them to share that vision.

## How does the Moccasin Approach work?

If you have met me, you'll know my passion for Emotional Intelligence (EI) and how impactful I believe it **can** be (if you make the effort).

I have read and studied EI for years and completed my master's degree on the impact of EI on Leadership and Management in July 2019. But I also know just how challenging it can be for many people to put into practice. We all have some EI, so even if you think your EI falls short in some areas, fear not, as we can develop it quickly, given time and effort.

As far as we are concerned, the four ingredients of EI include:

### 1. Self-awareness

- How aware are we of the triggers which change our behaviour towards others?
- What changes occur in our behaviour towards others due to these triggers?
- How do our follow-on behaviours affect others?
- How do our follow-on behaviours change the behaviours of others?



Just as a point to note here... we cannot become truly self-aware without the help of others. We need people to help us understand the impact we have on others. When we are stressed, frustrated, or annoyed, our behaviour towards others can change significantly, so learn how you impact the behaviour of others and adapt your emotional follow-on behaviours.

## 2. Self-management

- How do we discover hidden triggers and how they affect our behaviours?
- Once we identify them, how can we reduce their impact and develop coping strategies?
- What checking mechanism do we have to check progress?
- What continuous self-awareness practices are we undertaking to become more self-aware?



## 3. Social awareness

- What are the triggers of those we communicate with (work, socially and at home)?
- How do they manage their triggers (or are they completely unaware)?
- What impact do their follow-on behaviours have on others and me?



If necessary, how should I address these?

- What are their dreams, goals, fears, loves, hates, and frustration points...?
- How can I help manage their triggers through my approach and adapting my communication with them?
- How well have I let them get to know me and my triggers?

## 4. Relationship management

- How can I use what I know from social awareness to develop my relationships?
- How do I best approach individuals to help us build great relationships with others?
- Am I authentic with everyone (and true to myself)?
- Do I encourage and empower authenticity in others?
- What, if anything, is holding me back (fear of being “me”, fear of repercussions from being open and honest with peers, managers and leaders)?



These are just **some** of the ingredients required to be a great communicator, manager, leader, and, of course, a great human being. The real twister for us all is that each of us employs our Moccasin Approach and EI differently.

The Moccasin Approach mindset creates and develops stronger relationships throughout our organisations, families and social connections. Still, we all have preferences for what we share and discuss, so we'll all handle this differently.

## Food for thought:

I believe the word "Sawubona" is a Zulu greeting that means "I see you, you are important to me, and I value you." We must learn to see others in this mindset, so regardless of who you are in the organisation, irrespective of importance, race, gender, religion, or anything else that divides us, welcome the opinions of others, see them for who they truly are, accept them, and make an effort to understand them. They, too, will adapt to understand you.

Our experience over many years tells us that people and their behaviours cause most workplace conflicts and, more worryingly, workplace saboteurs who can throw a spanner in the works.

Examples include consciously or unconsciously:

- avoiding total honesty born from a fear of speaking out
- guarding against transparency as it could expose us
- worrying that empathy may be seen as a weakness
- being inconsiderate and disrespectful towards others
- demonstrating inequality and indifference
- protecting what we are accountable for by not addressing known issues.



The Moccasin Approach is an excellent solution for all such things.

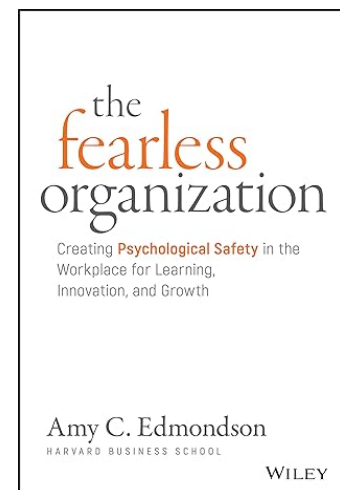
## Psychological safety:

According to Amy Edmondson, the author of "The Fearless Organisation", it is "a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes."

This is one of the four key ingredients of our Moccasin Approach. Organisations must ensure that the promise of psychological safety is not just left as a promise but actively promoted and implemented in every way possible across the whole organisation.

Organisations that say their organisation promotes psychological safety but doesn't are showing their word cannot be trusted, and **that** kills cultures.

Trust is about the consistency of your honesty, reliability, dependability, etc. As the Team Principal of the Mercedes F1 team, Toto Wolff, said, "Leadership is about actions, not words." So, again, if you don't follow up your words with the right actions, trust is destroyed, and quickly, too.





Ask yourself this: If you were in charge of your organisation and accountable for everything, and despite your best efforts, an important project nosedived, you'd be most frustrated. But if you later discovered it was because you were not given the honest opinions of your close advisers, something is wrong, and it needs fixing now!



Those you asked for their input need to know that they can and **must** speak honestly and that **their** people **must** speak honestly to them with the same psychological safety. If you discover people have been hiding the truth, then before you chastise anyone, ask yourself: why did this happen?

Why are people worried about speaking the truth? What has the behaviour of some people taught others about how badly they accept the truth? Are those who report to your direct reports too scared to tell them the truth? If so, what has made them behave like this? If people are blocking the passage of clean information, it must be fixed quickly. The example of how things will work in the future must come from the top down. Lead and manage by example.

If you believe in this thinking, ask your senior leadership to write a short motivational paper explaining how the organisation is going to push this new road map forward and how it will become a new way of open, honest, and transparent "clean communication" and "clean information." (See below).

Demand the truth, and lead by example to spread that approach. The ROI can be staggering, with improved organisational culture and retention levels going through the roof.

Alternatively, you can continue ignoring the poor leadership and management you know exists and allow it to persist! But if you continue enabling this poor behaviour, you must also accept the consequences!

Consequences can include losing great people, performance issues, a lack of rapport between colleagues, dysfunctional teams, a lack of inter-team cooperation, and unspoken resentment between people, managers, and leaders due to the fear of repercussions. Is this ringing any bells yet?

Any successful relationship relies on many ingredients, but one of the key ones for me is this: it's all about investing "you" in "them".

### Clean communication and clean information:

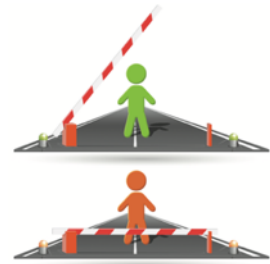
The term "Informed decision" refers to a decision that a person makes after considering all the information they have gathered, the expected outcomes of their decision, and any risks that may come into play.

It is critically important that the information they have gathered is 100% accurate and not filtered or skewed to suit the person or people providing the information. For it to be clean, it must be free of bias and offered without fear of repercussions or harsh criticism, and this can only happen when psychological safety truly exists and is proven to exist. Again, lead and manage by example.



## Blockers and Barriers:

A **blocker** can consciously or unconsciously block a colleague's honest communications. An example would be when a colleague has the courage to tell their manager about something they believe is wrong. The manager blocks that information and covers it up, as they don't want to risk getting into trouble with their seniors for telling the truth. They may even block in other ways, such as by altering reports or withholding praise and promotions.



A **barrier** prevents a person from gaining a qualification, certification, or promotion they rightly deserve. It stops them from moving forward and may result in them leaving to find an organisation that will let them develop.

To be honest, they are interchangeable. The barrier to getting the well-deserved promotion may be a person or people who do not like you or even fear you because you are very good at what you do and are too outspoken.

Again, if you were the person in charge of the organisation, would you not want people to be free to tell you what is going on and why there is a serious breach of regulations or unfair treatment of a colleague?

Take our Moccasin Approach thinking and build on it to light the fires in the hearts and minds of all leaders, managers and colleagues. Help it spread through meaningful conversations and help reap all its subsequent benefits.

The behavioural improvement it can have has produced some heart-warming outcomes, which are fantastic for relationships, output, success and employee engagement and retention. Not to mention greatly improved mental health.

Raise the barriers and educate your blockers so that they raise barriers and clear blockages, and they, too, become proficient at clean communication, which is in the best interest of all colleagues.

If you can make a difference as a leader or a manager, you must lead the way, capitalise on this, and drive this thinking forward. If you are not a leader or manager and think you can't bring about such change, then you're wrong. I have seen it done by courageous people committed to making significant changes in their organisational culture. Become the change you want to see!

We should not have to push people to come with us, nor should we have to pull them with us, but ideally, because of how we inspire and make them feel, we will bring them with us.

~ Mac Macdonald ~

