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Compassionate Leadership for Modern Universities

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Professor of Leadership and Business Education in Brunel Business School, Brunel University London

Research interests around academic leadership and compassionate leadership

Consultancy work in leadership development and coaching – often focused on women

I aim to bring humanity into leadership and higher education

Agenda

Defining compassion

Suffering, courage and psychological safety

How we need leadership to be different

What this means for teaching

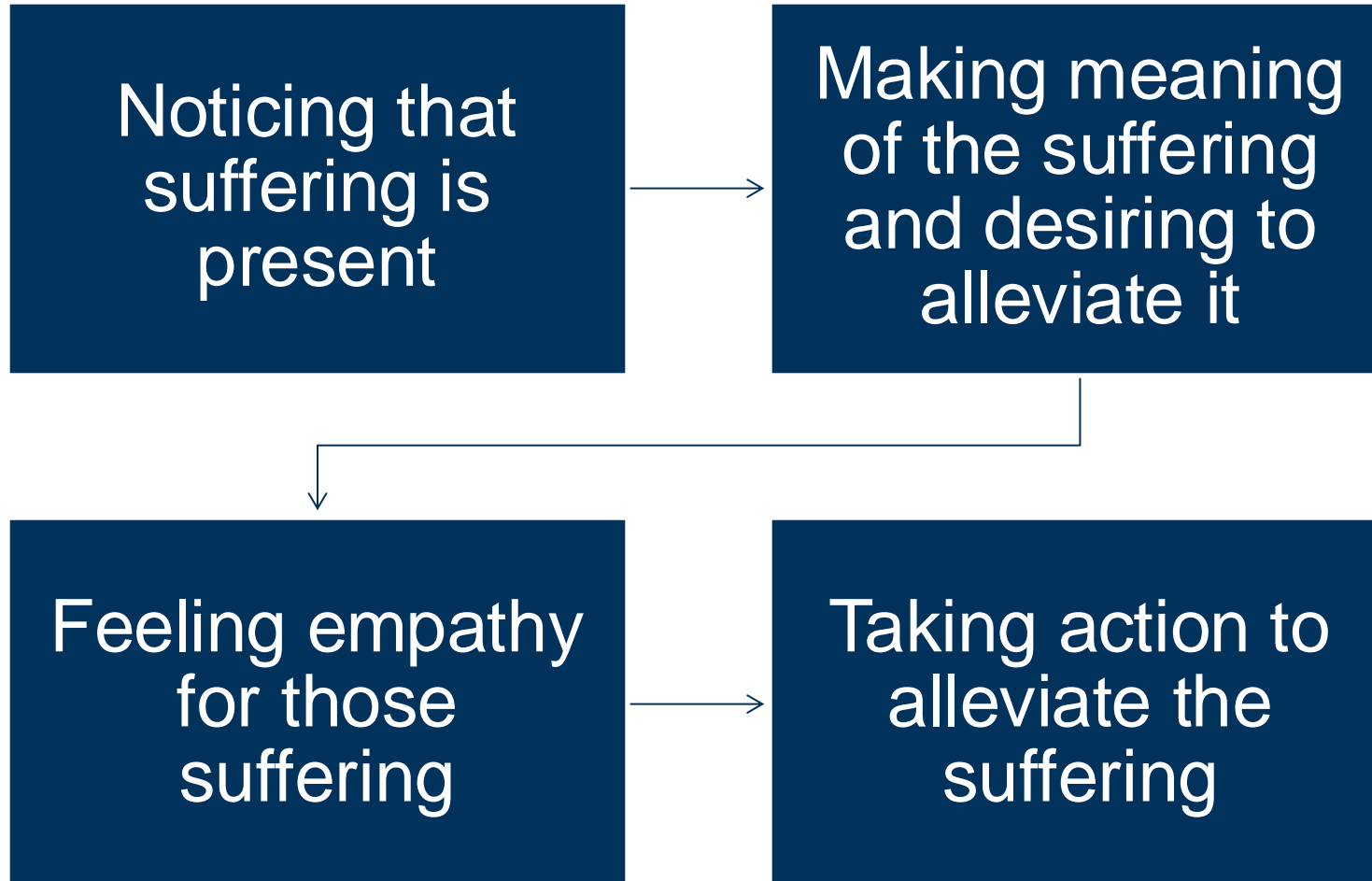
Q&A / Discussion

What is compassion?

Type into the chat what you think compassion is, or some brief examples of when you've seen compassion



Four Stages of Compassion (Worline and Dutton 2017)



The NEAR model of compassion



Simpson, Farr-Wharton & Reddy (2019)

Key Points

- Compassion is necessarily enacted in response to suffering
- Suffering must exist in order for there to be compassion
- Compassion is therefore different from kindness, gratitude, happiness etc which are linked with positive aspects of life
- Empathy is part of compassion, but not the whole story
- Compassion requires action



We need to talk about... suffering

•Types of Suffering (Kanov 2021):

- **Inevitable:** Part of the human experience.
- **Avoidable:** Caused by the work environment.

•Why is there suffering in higher education?

•Impact of Neoliberal Ideologies including:

- Shift towards capitalist practices.
- Focus on bureaucratic procedures over education (Bush, 2018).
- Emphasis on targets, KPIs, and market economics.
- THE University Workplace Survey (2016) indicates feelings of exploitation and neglect by management.

•Causes of Workplace Suffering (Worline & Dutton, 2017):

- Feeling underappreciated and undervalued.
- Lack of control over workload.
- Work perceived as lacking meaning.
- These factors contribute to workplace stress and reduced productivity



We also need to talk about...courage

The Need for Psychological Safety

- **Definition:** Professor Amy Edmondson describes psychological safety as a belief that the workplace is safe for expressing ideas, questions, concerns, and mistakes.
- **Key Points:**
 - It's about candour and openness, not just being 'nice.'
 - Conflicts and differing viewpoints are part of a psychologically safe workplace, leading to better solutions.
 - Psychological safety is a means to achieve excellence and high-quality care.
 - The “learning zone” is the ideal state with both psychological safety and a commitment to excellence, resulting in high performance and continuous improvement.

Compassion and Psychological Safety are Inextricably Linked (IMO!)



More compassion will lead to more psychological safety – it's okay to make mistakes; empathy with people who suffer when they make mistakes etc



More psychological safety will encourage and support more compassion through openness

If we have psychologically safe environments, we can be more compassionate



Compassion in the workplace often requires courage from leaders



Courage to do things differently and to challenge the status quo



Address the blockages in the systems and administrative loads



Move away from presenteeism and productivity focus to 'Slow Productivity' (Cal Newport) which would involve more trust



Neoliberal universities are environments which minimise trust and therefore reduce opportunities to try things out and to risk failure, thereby reducing innovation and creativity

What do we need leadership to be / do?



- What do you need leadership to do differently in order for you to be a more creative teacher / researcher?
- Why?
- Type some thoughts into the chat

Being different – what leaders need to do

- Notice suffering – be present with people, find out what's going on
- Noticing suffering is not enough on its own – but is crucial
- Empathise with the suffering – take time to put yourself in other people's shoes and understand why they are feeling the way they are
- Assess what options are available – generate solutions together to solve the problems
- Respond – put things into place, change things that aren't working
- Acting to change things is important:
 - Eg improving admin / bureaucratic burdens so there is more time for teaching preparation, seeing students, writing journal articles etc
- Be clear about what matters – and reward it
- Facilitate compassion for oneself and for others
- Understand systems and structures – and where suffering is caused
- Demonstrate self-compassion, model positive work behaviours,

What this means for teaching



Lots of work on compassionate pedagogies – not covered here



Lack of compassionate leadership creates fear and burnout which limit compassion for others and the ability to be creative in the classroom



Working with systems and structures allows us to understand the impact of these on our students



Trust, psychological safety, compassion from leaders allow us to develop our self-compassion and compassion for others

Places to go from here:

Paul Gilbert, <https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk>

Kristin Neff, <https://self-compassion.org>

Amy Edmondson, <https://amycedmondson.com/psychological-safety/>

Gibbs, P. ed., 2017. *The pedagogy of compassion at the heart of higher education*. Springer.

Waddington, K., 2021. *Towards the Compassionate University*. Routledge.

Worline, M. and Dutton, J.E., 2017. *Awakening compassion at work: The quiet power that elevates people and organizations*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Q&A / Discussion

