

Organisational Anxiety

Leading with gospel clarity

Matt Waldock

Definition and perspective of anxiety

“A real or perceived fear that I do not have something that I need in order to cope or thrive.”

“You can no more hate the presence of anxiety, than a driver can despise the presence of a fuel warning light.”

Features of anxiety

- Anxiety is always present
- Anxiety is contagious
- Anxiety lowers decision making quality
- Anxiety, un-noticed, often has a negative impact spiritually, emotionally, physically
- Groups, committees, congregations, teams can be susceptible to chronic levels of anxiety

KEY APPLICATION: Anxiety's value is only realised when it is observed and its presence acknowledged and its source understood.

Signs that a team has been gripped by chronic anxiety

- Black and white thinking
- Loss of perspective
- Highly reactive or painfully slow
- Overt aggression or ‘peace-keeping’.
- Lack of playfulness

- Proliferation of secrets
- High “togetherness”

“The most anxious person in the room is the most powerful.”

KEY APPLICATION: Identifying the source can only be done by understanding the system.

Typical pain points systems exhibit - John Gall

- Any large system is going to be operating most of the time in failure mode.
- The ghost of the old system will continue to haunt the new.
- Systems tend to malfunction after their greatest triumph.
- The bigger the system the narrower and more specialised the interface will be with individuals.
- A temporary patch will most likely become permanent.
- The system is designed to scale but as it expands it won't behave a smaller system.



‘Togetherness’ focused groups

Groups that are positioned close to the ‘Togetherness’ pole are likely to be highly emotionally fused together. That means that such groups will be extremely sensitive to the feelings and concerns of others in the team, to the extent that an injury to one is an injury to all. Solidarity that galvanises the whole group to act with the same passion and interest as the individual who is directly upset or suffering will be fuelled by the cry for justice. The cost of that level collective sensitivity and centrally mobilised support is that members of the group are expected to raise their own emotional level to that of the injured party and to submit enthusiastically to the decided actions of the majority. Failure to match the emotional level or to participate in-line with the majority opinion will lead to ostracism and even bullying.

‘Individualist’ focused groups

Groups that are positioned close to the ‘individualist’ pole are likely to be extremely emotionally distant from others. You would expect these groups to be incredibly siloed with each person focused on their

own roles and goals with little reference to others in the team unless it directly impacted their own role or attainment. A characteristic of groups in this position is they operate more like consultants or temporary staff rather than long term employees.

KEY APPLICATION: Managing your own anxiety is the single biggest impact to lowering group anxiety.

What leaders can do to remain healthy

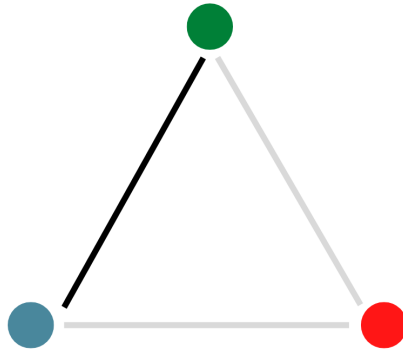
- Be intentional to grow in self-awareness
- Identify with precision your own triggers
- Apply the Gospel with precision

Prior to anxious meetings

- Create space
- Pray
- Remind yourself of one's identity in Christ.
- Pre-articulate what you see, what you want, what you feel.
- What is it I feel that I need, where does the Gospel meet that in full.

Markers of healthy leadership - Murray Bowen

- Ability to remain in contact with aggressive factions.
- Understanding of the dynamics of triangles.
- Awareness of the system or patterns of the organisation.
- Discernment to spot real threats from perceived threats.
- Motivation and timing to initiate counter measures.
- Cultivates an anti-helpless mentality.



Bibliography

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The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory, Roberta Gilbert

The Systems Bible, John Gall

The Emotional Side of Organisations, Patricia Cornella

Managing Leadership Anxiety, Steve Cuss