

## Learning, 3.3: Not knowing

### Summary:

- Lots of people find saying 'I don't know' difficult. We want to appear competent, and fear being perceived as lacking professional knowledge.
- Furthermore, we often don't know what we don't know - we can exist in blissful ignorance until it bashes us on the head. So when we're asked: 'do you understand?' we're likely to say 'yes.'
- This makes mistakes and oversights more likely. Being honest about what we don't know is a marker of safe, competent teams.
- Given how difficult we find it, we have to be invited to not-know. This means leading questions can be useful, for example: 'Which bits of what I just explained were the least clear?'
- We should also model not-knowing: the more we say 'I don't know' the more we normalise it for the people around us. This is doubly true if you are in a position of power.

### Exercises

- 1) What are the characteristics of the *perfect* professional in your role?
  - ) Think about your most recent time at work. When did you meet that standard? When did you fall short? What's your emotional response when you, or others, don't meet that standard?
- 2) When have you felt comfortable to ask questions at work, even if they feel 'stupid'? When have you not felt comfortable doing that? What are the differences in those contexts?
- 3) How might you invite not-knowing on your next shift? Where are the opportunities to model not-knowing?

### Resources and links:

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.5172/hesr.2013.22.3.291> Paper on how threats to professional identities in healthcare cause conflict
- <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2020/05/05/threats-to-professional-identities-can-lead-to-resistance-to-organisational-change/> Blog summarising a study on how threats to professional identity threaten innovations
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953619300334> Ethnography of one of the safest British maternity wards. The openness of the

culture - including high status individuals being open about what they did and did not know - was highlighted as integral.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWjif8XIoENQ&pp=ygUOI3lvdXRoaW5rYWdhZW4%3D> Talk by psychologist Adam Grant on the power of knowing what you don't know

## Evaluation:

We would really appreciate your feedback through these short questionnaires on the videos and their usefulness. Your feedback will help us improve future content.

### Prior to watching the videos



### After watching the videos

