HEALTHY SYSTEMS = TRAUMA-INFORMED AND TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

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a philosophical or theoretical framework
Assumptions that determine what we think, feel and do, shared by group, and outside of our individual conscious awareness.

Help our brains automatically organize information.

It’s not “What’s wrong with you?”

It’s “What happened to you?”

Foderaro, 1991
The older paradigm that has dominated group life – and therefore individual existence – for at least the last two hundred years is a model that sees organizations as machines.


The newer model is that of organizations as alive, possessing the basic requirements of a living system


The underpinning for this new worldview:

- Biology and evolutionary biology
- Systems theory
- Cybernetics
- Quantum theory and nonlocality
- Complexity theory and Emergence
LIVING SYSTEMS THEORY

A general theory about the existence of all living systems, their structure, interaction, behavior and development.

A system is a whole which consists of a set of two or more parts.

Each part affects the behavior of the whole, depending on how it interacts with the other parts of the system.

Life keeps emerging out of the previous system and is different from its predecessors and yet has parallels.

(Living Systems Theory) (Miller, 1978)
LIVING SYSTEMS ADAPT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE

HEALING WAS LIKE STRAIGHTENING A TREE TO GROW TOWARD THE SUN: A LITTLE AT A TIME
Organizations, like individuals, are living, complex, adaptive systems and that being alive, they are vulnerable to stress, particularly chronic and repetitive stress.

Organizations, like individuals, can be traumatized and the result of traumatic experience can be as devastating for organizations as it is for individuals.
When two or more systems – whether these consist of individuals, groups, or organizations – have significant relationships with one another, they tend to develop similar thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

K. K. Smith et al, 1989

PARALLEL PROCESS MAY BE THE KEY TO NONVIOLENT, REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

- INDIVIDUALS
- FAMILIES
- ORGANIZATIONS
- COMMUNITIES
- SOCIETY
pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group has learned as it solved its problems...and that has worked well enough to be considered valid and taught to new members

How we do things around here

Organizational Culture

Accumulated Wisdom
Largely unconscious

Failure to understand the nature of living systems
Flawed understanding of the nature of change
Failure to recognize that all change involves RISK

FUNDAMENTAL DILEMMAS FOR CHANGING CULTURE IN LIVING SYSTEMS
KEY STARTING POINT

Less violence, more safety
Less injuries
Less staff turnover
More success
Better results
Better teamwork
More pleasure, more satisfaction

CHANGE REQUIREMENTS ATTRACTIONS
ATTRACTED TO GREATER HEALTH

A state of optimum regulation and adaptive functioning of body, mind and relationships that depends on the integration of function.

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Has a clear and obtainable mission that is driven by a shared, well-articulated vision.
MISSION DRIVEN, TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

An organization that counteracts the short-term and long-term effects of stress, adversity and trauma on its managers, staff, and the people it serves while staying true to its mission, expanding social justice and improving the health and well-being of all organizational stakeholders.

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

• Is driven by a coherent, practiced, shared value system.
• The values are modeled by leadership.
• The values can be seen in routine daily behavior.
• The values are embedded in the public presentation of the organization.
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE VALUES

Sanctuary Commitments

Apply to everyone and all decisions

At the heart of creating trauma-responsive systems

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Has authoritative leaders

Do their best to model system values

Count on others’ input for decisions

Know who and when to include in decisions

Try to lead consensus whenever possible

Set high expectations and reward good performance

Do not play favorites
A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Leaders assume responsibility, acknowledge others' accomplishments.

Leadership values the power of organizational culture.

Leaders who want to work with decentralized authority and distributed power and can also make decisions.

Leaders who promote the self-organizing properties of organizations.

Recognize their own system as a living system.

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Leadership makes long-term commitment to trauma-informed change.

Leadership commits human and nonhuman practical resource.

Leadership solicits and organizes a representative implementation team that includes service recipients, people-with-lived-experience.
A HEALTHY SYSTEM
HAS PERIODIC CHECKUPS

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Team begin an internal self-assessment – would you want to receive services here?; would you want to work here if you knew what it was really like?

- Visual: informative, orderly, clean, comfortable, beauty, inviting
- Interviews: phone and in-person
- Surveys (i.e. ARTIC and others)
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

- Decides what metrics make sense consistent with trauma-informed knowledge
- Uses that knowledge to inform objectives and change process
- Regularly reviews metrics to assess sustained change.

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

- Is a safe and trustworthy organization for all stakeholders
- Works on restoring safety and trust when there has been a breach
- Has resources available to build, maintain and restore trust
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

A safety culture encompasses all four domains of safety

Team assessment of where the “social immune system” needs repair

Team begins to define what changes may need to occur to create and maintain a safety culture.

Respectful boundaries support safety.

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Has well-regulated emotions

Is emotionally intelligent

Recognizes patterns

Understands individual and group dynamics
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Recognition of emotional dysregulation as primary sign of exposure to trauma/adversity.
Has tools in place that help promote emotional regulation for everyone.
Emotions are honored but do not rule
There is recognition that emotions are contagious and become collective.

COMMITMENT TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Encourages participatory democratic structures
Minimizes the abusive use of power
Values diversity of race, age, gender, education, experience, etc.
Finds complex solutions to complex problems through creativity, innovation, and teamwork.
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Recognizes that all trauma is about the abusive use of power.

To avoid retraumatization, the constructive use of power – individual and collective – must be understood throughout the organization.

Democratic, participatory structures are the best protection against abuse of power.

COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Is committed to open, honest and frequent communication
Team develops a communication plan to inform everyone in the organization.

Team develops materials to inform internal and external stakeholders.

COMMITMENT TO OPEN COMMUNICATION

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

- Retains ....
- Draws upon ...
- Learns from ....
- Uses......
- ITS CORPORATE MEMORY
TRAVMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

RECOVERING MEMORY

Organizational history is reviewed including:
- Founding vision
- History of trauma
- History of loss
- Failures
- Adaptations
- Successes

COMMITMENT TO OPEN COMMUNICATION

In a learning organization, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models — that is, they are responsible for learning.

— Peter Senge —

A HEALTHY SYSTEM IS A LEARNING ORGANIZATION
EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WE CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD
- NELSON MANDELA

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL LEARNING

Everyone in organization is educated in:

- Trauma theory
- Developmental neuroscience
- Group dynamics
- Social determinants
- Spiritual neuroscience

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

- Has routine conflict management strategies.
- Uses all kinds of conflict as opportunities for new learning.
- Seeks creative, integrative solutions to challenging problems.

"YOU MUST UNLEARN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED"

A HEALTHY SYSTEM
Knows how to unlearn
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

KEY QUESTIONS

- What should we keep?
- What should we eliminate?
- What should we do that is new?

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Standard operating procedures, policies and procedures are reviewed for consistency with organizational mission and values.

Trauma-informed values incorporated into interviewing, hiring orientation, and all human resource practices.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL LEARNING
A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Cares about social justice and does its best to “walk the talk”

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Is about the human rights of everyone, including children.

The personal IS political

Recognizes that trauma exposure can cause the loss of meaning and purpose.

Finds a way to strike a balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of a group.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Develops a shared language for working together, organizing change, solving problems.

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

Simple enough language for all to understand.
Conveys indispensable ideas about healing from trauma and adversity.
Becomes an effective problem-organizing and problem-solving tool.
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

- Trauma = Loss
- Recognizes resistance to change as resistance to loss.
- Honors loss
- Expects adaptive change

COMMITMENT TO GROWTH AND CHANGE

A HEALTHY SYSTEM

Knows how to party!
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATION

- Team organizes a system-wide celebratory kick-off
- Routinely looks for, finds, and celebrates even small successes
- Orients itself toward a better future

COMMITMENT TO GROWTH AND CHANGE
TRAUMA-INFORMED VALUES ....

**NONVIOLENCE:**
- we need to feel safe in all life dimensions to think complexly

**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:**
- we need to understand individual/group consciousness and unconsciousness

**SOCIAL LEARNING:**
- we learn through trial-and-error in context of mutual trust

**OPEN COMMUNICATION:**
- we need to keep information honest, open, and flowing – secrets make us sick

**DEMOCRACY:**
- we need to avoid abuse of power and have wide participation to deal with complex problems

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:**
- we need to balance our individual needs and desires with those of the collective good

**GROWTH & CHANGE:**
- we need to change and all change requires loss and will not happen without vision
PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO LIVING SYSTEMS

PRIMARY: Trauma-informed
- Universal knowledge about trauma, adversity and its effects on all living systems

SECONDARY: Trauma-responsive
- Policies and practices in place to minimize damage and maximize opportunities for healthy growth and development in all populations at risk.
- Context for healing and recovery

TERTIARY: Trauma-specific
- Free up energy, integrate full biographical narrative, safe exploration of new modes of being

BECOMING TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE AND HEALING ONE’S ORGANIZATION IS NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART
In the field of mental health, most attention has been given to psychotherapy, some to mental hygiene, but very little as yet, to the design of a whole culture which will foster healthy personalities.

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The Therapeutic Community, 1953
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