Organizational Parallel Process

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With great thanks to Sandra Bloom, genius.
Trauma

- Changes the way the brain and body work
Recurrent Threat

- Impacts individuals, groups, organization, and society
- Brain attends preferentially to threat, bypassing more important information
- Black/White thinking
- Hypervigilance
- Narrowing of perceptual field
- Distortion of information
- Revictimization
- Difficulty resolving conflict
- Demoralization
- Absence of meaning, purpose, and connection
Traumatized Systems
(Cameron, 1997)

- Centralization
- Threat-rigidity response
- Loss of creativity
- Politicized environment
- Loss of Trust
- Restricted Communication
- Loss of Teamwork
- Loss of Loyalty
- Scapegoating leaders
- Short term perspective and resistance to change
Parallel Process

- “Organizations, like individuals, are living, complex, adaptive systems, and...being alive, they are vulnerable to stress, particularly repetitive stress.” (Bloom, 2006)

- “When two or more systems (whether individuals, groups, or organizations, have significant relationships with one another, they tend to develop similar affects, cognition, and behavior, which are defined as parallel process” (Smith, K, Simmons, V, & Thames, T, 1989)
Environmental Stressors

- Fewer community resources
- Mental health dollars go to corrections or disappear entirely
- Stigmatization
- More severe and disruptive consumers
- High staff turnover
- Massive anticipated changes in delivery model
- Defunding
Parallel Processes (Farragher, 2006, Bloom, 2005)

Clients
Feel unsafe
Angry/Aggressive
Helpless
Hopeless
Overwhelmed
Confused
Depressed

Staff
Feel unsafe
Angry/aggressive
Helpless
Hopeless
Overwhelmed
Confused
Demoralized
## Parallel Process (Bloom, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic stress, hyperarousal</td>
<td>Constant crisis and tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with new info</td>
<td>Difficulty with new info</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addiction to stress</td>
<td>Addiction to stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intolerance for ambiguity</td>
<td>Intolerance for ambiguity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damaged/Damaging relationships</td>
<td>Damaged/Damaging relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation, reenactment</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication

- Context lost
- Loss of feedback loops
- Distortion of information
- “Just tell me what to do”—loss of complexity
- Things start to feel out of control
- Systematic errors
Decision Making

- Perceptions of stress and threat lead to
- Cognitive rigidity, hesitation, vacillation and
- Premature closure (failure to generate all possible alternatives and consequences)
- Judgment and treatment errors result
Which leads to

• Unresolved interpersonal, interdepartmental, interagency, interdiscipline conflicts
• Conflict resolution skills lost due to high turnover
Review of current tangible and intangible losses

- Turnover rates
- Recruitment costs
- Worker’s comp and disability payouts
- Employee liability insurance
- Reputation of self and agency
- Costs of sloppy work
- Presenteeism and absenteeism
- Poorer outcomes
- Litigation cost
Nobody’s Coming

- We are going to have to do this ourselves.
- Systems are interested in maintaining the system.
- Innovation and compassion are our strongest tools.
Change of Mental Model

- Human Services delivery is about **relationship**.

- Agencies are living systems.

- Deep examination of vision and role, both individually and collectively.

- What is a healthy organization?
Start with Safety

- Physical, psychological, social, moral safety
- How to create it individually and collectively
- Bottom line: clients can’t be safe if the staff isn’t safe (Bloom, 2006)
Creating physical safety

- Efforts are made to align policy with the wellbeing of everyone in the environment
- Leaders build trust with employees
- Facilities are designed or changed to be safe for everyone
- Breaches in safety are taken seriously.
Creating psychological safety

- Commitment to emotional intelligence.
- Healthy organizations create multiple levels of containment.
- Emotions are recognized, discussed and managed while ensuring the mission remains in sight at all times.
Social Safety

• We commit to learn from our mistakes.
• We name collective disturbances and stay in dialog until we determine their sources.
• Dissent is encouraged.
• Leaders invite different points of view.
• We commit to communicate openly and nonviolently.
Moral Safety

- We are clear about what we believe and what we do and say.
- We examine our values and act according to them.
- We maintain a value-based work environment.
- We recognize, break, and rescript reenactments.
Organizational Response

- Create multiple levels of containment (safety)
- Get everyone on same page with acronyms (SELF)
- Create and maintain strong teams
- Identify and train leaders
SELF

- Safety
- Emotional Intelligence
- Loss
- Future
Principles of Healthy Systems
(Bloom, 2012)

1. Healthy people adapt.
2. Healthy systems have purpose and can adapt.
3. Healthy organizations value diversity and participation.
4. Democracy—best decisions emerge out of complex, diverse participatory process with creativity and innovation.
Principles of Healthy Systems

6. Commitment to democracy—without giving in to potential of abuse of power.

7. Envisioning safety.

8. Healthy organizations are safe.

9. Commitment to nonviolence—rejecting the primordial desire for retaliation.

10. Healthy organizations expect everyone’s best efforts.
Conflict Management

- Recognize and teach boundaries.
- Hurt people hurt people.
- Create strong teams with strong leaders who can contain disagreement.
- Planned conflict management retreats.
Loss

• Change always involves loss. Not naming the loss prevents the change.
• Once trauma resolves, grief begins.
• Institutional losses need to be named and grieved. These include layoffs, loss of agencies and resources, and loss of beloved colleagues to other jobs.
Future

• “Managing from the future can help people shift how they see the world. They come to believe that they are playing in a larger context that has revolutionary potential.”

• If change is not occurring, ask yourself if you’re getting caught in a reenactment.
Democracy

- “A moral commitment to the common good and community, that transcends both individual self interest and emotionalism and exposes the tendency for more powerful individuals and groups to manipulate and cajole the rest of us.” (Beyer, 1996)
Healthy Organizations

• Share a body of knowledge, values, hold each other accountable for values that then contain, manage, and help transform them.

• They encourage innovation.

• They do not think that self-care is the only solution to burnout and vicarious trauma.
Healthy Organizations

- Recognize excellence.
- Measure and value outcomes.
- Involve every employee in the process of creating a safe, trauma-informed environment.
- Leaders walk their talk.
- Lead from reflection, not crisis.
Last

- My beloved colleagues, you are saving the world. Do not ever believe otherwise.
- Hold yourselves in infinite tenderness.
- Create refuge at work and at home.
- Use your work to heal yourself as you recognize yourself in everyone you work with and meet.