The National Council's Framework for Trauma-Informed Leadership

Moving from Management to Leadership

In an ever-changing world, organizations and communities need more than just managers; they need leaders. Understanding the difference between management and leadership is the first step to understanding one's role as a leader. A person can fulfill their job description adequately and still not embody leadership. Through the development of skills rooted in relationship-building, those who manage can learn how to meaningfully lead their colleagues, partners, and community. Creating trauma-informed organizations and communities requires strong and informed leadership to spur the necessary changes in organizational norms, policies, practices, procedures, and structure. There is a need for leaders with the commitment, energy, knowledge, and skills to do the difficult work of facilitating change.

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The National Council's Framework for Trauma-Informed Leadership provides a holistic approach to leadership and incorporates not only the day-to-day tasks of management, but also the relationship-based skills needed to move from manager to leader, particularly when faced with changing environments.

The role of leadership in periods of transformation and transition is to create a context for individuals to learn, adapt, and absorb new ideas, values, and behaviors over time. Leaders, as change agents, must be strategic and focused, differentiating change management from project management. Project management focuses on tracking, reporting, and executing corrective action; change management aligns perspectives and fosters change of hearts, of minds, and, ultimately, of behavior. In order to be successful in change management, leaders must embrace vulnerability and cultivate a culture in which brave work, tough conversations, and whole hearts are expected and rewarded (Brown, 2018). A critical piece of developing this leadership-style is nurturing relationships with staff, clients/patients, family members, and partners. Leaders must care for and be connected to those they lead. Without the foundation of a strong relationship, leaders will struggle to support staff, clients/patients, family members, and partners through complex change. Most importantly, leaders must understand the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion and use these principles to guide every component of their work. To disregard an individual's culture and the value their perspective brings is to disregard the individual entirely.

As seen in the diagram on the following page, this framework includes the core principles of trauma-informed approaches, adaptive leadership skills, fostering supportive environments, and implementation strategies for organizational change. Incorporating the characteristics, functions, and guidelines from all four components will enable managers to become trauma-informed leaders.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

NATIONAL COUNCIL
FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
Healthy Minds. Strong Communities.

Jeff Richardson, MBA, LCSW-C, Board Chair
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Trauma-Informed Principles (SAMHSA, 2014)

- **Safety** - physical, psychological, emotional, and social
- **Trustworthiness and transparency** - among staff, clients/patients, family members, and partners
- **Peer support and mutual self-help**
- **Collaboration and mutuality** - partnering to level power differentials
- **Empowerment, voice, and choice** - for staff, clients/patients, family members, and partners
- Confronts **cultural, historical, and gender issues** to promote meaningful inclusion

Adaptive Leadership Skills for Managing Change

- Advocacy vs. inquiry
- Discussion vs. dialogue
- Getting on the balcony
- Identifying the adaptive change
- Stepping into the void: Risk and courage
- Creating a holding environment
- Maintain focused attention
- Give the work back to the team
- Protect all voices
- Reset

Fostering Supportive Environments

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion as central principles
- Safety includes physical, psychological, and emotional considerations
- Opportunities for collaboration without punishment for failure
- Dare to Lead™ Heart of Daring Leadership principles (Brown, 2018) - courage and vulnerability, self-awareness and self-love, rewarding brave work, touch conversations, and whole hearts

Implementation Strategies for Organizational Change (adapted from Kotter, Inc., 2019)

- Gain commitment from organizational leadership
- Develop a Core Implementation Team (CIT)
- Build consensus
- Create a shared vision
- Communicate for buy-in
- Assess the organization
- Develop a plan
- Create a monitoring system
- Take action

Adaptive Leadership Skills for Managing Change

Adapted from: Blau, G. & Mcgrab, P (2010). *The Leadership Equation: Strategies for Individuals Who are Champions for Children, Youth and Families.* And, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (2012). *Georgetown University Leadership Academy Leading in Challenging Times Curriculum.*

Skill	Description
Advocacy vs. Inquiry	Advocacy is stating a point of view and urging action. Inquiry involves asking questions, clarifying information, and sensing processes. Leadership requires both, but balance is important. High advocacy and low inquiry translate into explaining or telling. When inquiry is stronger, a leader spends more time interviewing and asking. Low inquiry and low advocacy yield observation. Finally, high advocacy and high inquiry generate mutual learning. Each combination has a proper time and place; learn when to prioritize each skill.
Discussion vs. Dialogue	Both discussion and dialogue have their place in leading change. The skill for the leader is to know when to use each approach. When leading a discussion, the facilitator has already identified the challenge and solution and seeks input from others. When engaged in a dialogue, the leader enables the group to define the challenge and brainstorm the best solution. While a dialogue may be more collaborative, consider when discussion may be more productive.
Getting on the Balcony	To manage change, leaders may need to step back from the issue at hand and "get on the balcony" to see the context of the challenge in front of them. From this position, identify differences in values and behavior, recognize patterns of work avoidance, and watch for unproductive reactions to change.
Identifying the Adaptive Challenge	An adaptive challenge is difficult to identify, requires changes in values, beliefs, and approaches to work, and does not have a quick fix. Leaders must be able to spot these challenges to be able to address them. Start by recognizing the need for a collective sense of responsibility and the requirements for developing new competencies. Then, lead staff to work collectively to address these types of challenges.
Stepping into the Void: The Skill of Risk and Courage	Leaders must be willing to take risks and have the courage to put the adaptive challenge on the table. "Stepping into the Void" means seeing the opportunity to say what needs to be said- knowing there will be tension and yet putting it on the table anyway so that the adaptive challenge can be resolved. Have courage and take the risk to address challenges transparently and collaboratively.
Creating a Holding Environment	Leaders are able to regulate distress by creating a holding environment: a place where difficult challenges can be discussed safely, where diversity of opinion is welcome, where experiences, values and assumptions are shared and challenged, and where stress is expected and tolerated. Regulate your own personal emotional response in order to manage organizational distress, tolerate uncertainty and frustration, and to facilitate a learning process.
Maintain Focused Attention	Leaders must use conflict as a source of creativity. Identify distractions immediately and move to regain focus. The strongest leaders do not engage in work avoidance behaviors such as scapegoating, denial, focusing on technical issues, or focusing on individual action.
Give the Work Back to the Team	Leaders share responsibility for the work of change with their team. Allow the team to take the initiative to define and solve problems and support the team, rather than control them. Instill confidence in the team so that they will take risks and support the team to learn from their mistakes.
Protect All Voices	Leaders must rely on others to raise questions about an impending adaptive challenge. Leaders must provide cover for individuals who identify conflicts in the system and must avoid the urge to silence unexpected leadership voices. Be open to those voices even when they are different from their own perspective.
Reset	Resetting requires leaders to identify their top values and what values need to be embedded in the transformation process. Stay focused on what matters and what drives your work.

Trauma-Informed Leadership Sources and References

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