

ORGANIZATIONAL *Resilience*

A Guide for Challenging Times



2020

This year we have seen a continuous, unprecedented and very challenging series of shocks. As a result, organizations across the world are experiencing a sense of **collective trauma**.

How can organizations address the broad and varied challenges of responding to COVID-19?

Imago Global Grassroots came together with 24 Bold Solutions Network organizations to unpack what it means to build resilience in an increasingly complex world. We worked together to assess how the crisis is affecting individuals around the globe working in the non-profit space, their organizations and the communities they serve.- As part of this exercise we identified key actions for responding to these challenging times through resilience lens.

This guide summarizes some of the key concepts for building trauma-informed resilient organizations and

provides actions non-profit leaders can take to guide the process within their organizations. The end goal is for organizations to build resilience by acknowledging the very real and diverse experiences of trauma their staff and beneficiaries are experiencing during these extraordinary times. Throughout the guide you will find:



Questions for your organization to pause and think about

Tips you can apply in your organization

To make the most out of this guide, we recommend watching the video series from the webinar Organizational Resilience in Challenging Times hosted by IMAGO and Lever for Change between July and August 2020. These videos will help you start the resilience conversation with your team.

What is *Resilience*?

Resilience is a concept used in multiple disciplines through which we can learn the importance of building strong support systems that allow us to sustain ourselves and our organizations through tough times. One of our favorite and most relevant definitions of resilience is the one from the Working Resilience Consortium in Australia:

<<**Resilience** is the capacity to manage the everyday stress of life while staying healthy, adapting and learning from setbacks to prepare proactively for future challenges>>.

We will explore resilience more in depth through the key lessons resulting from our sessions with Bold Solutions Network members.



Figure 1. Resilience in different disciplines

Living in a **VUCA** world

The concept of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) was developed at the U.S. Army College in the 1990's as an analysis of the post-Cold War era. The acronym came into more common usage with the 9/11 attacks in the US, and it was extended to other contexts after the 2008 financial crisis.

2020 is without a doubt another VUCA moment. The pandemic along with the social unrest in the US and other parts of the world create the conditions where it is impossible to predict the results of our actions.

There are simply too many unknowns, increasing our inability to grasp the world and deal with the things happening around us. VUCA provides a framework for us to navigate such a world. Understanding the predominant VUCA elements in our organization can help us manage, plan and react more effectively and quickly.

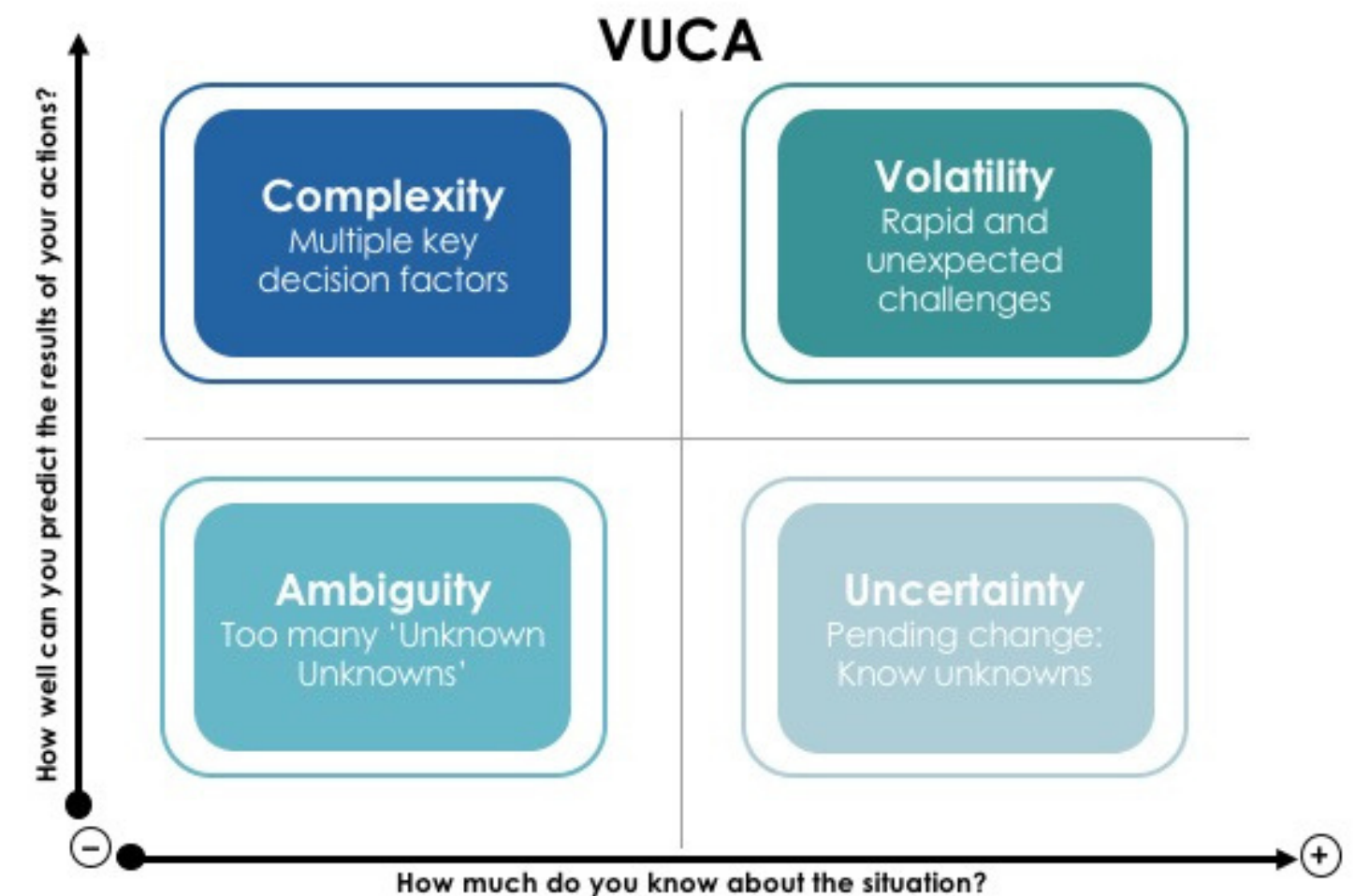


Figure 2. The VUCA Framework

Living in a **VUCA** world



Volatility: Rapid and unexpected challenges. In a volatile situation we are dealing not only with a fast rate and pace at which things happen but also with the potential of things imploding or exploding.

Uncertainty: Pending change (known unknowns). The variables that were in place yesterday are still present but how we work with them and understand them has shifted (i.e. uncertainty in funding sources that shifted as the context around us shifted, about when we return to things as they were, about the political climate).

Complexity: There are multiple key decision factors and multiple elements that are all going on concurrently. In complexity, it is hard to know where to start because there are so many factors that are important to consider in the decisions that we are making.

Ambiguity: Too many “unknown unknowns”, too many things that we just do not know. It goes beyond uncertainty. We not only don’t know when we will go back to work but the nature of the way we work is shifting in ways we are still uncertain about.



As an organization: Which VUCA condition is more present?

Resilience through a trauma lens

The number one lesson for the series of conversations with Bold Solutions Network members was that every single organization is dealing with symptoms of trauma due to COVID-19.

Trauma can exist and affect organizations in the same way that it affects individuals, families or communities. COVID-19 has exposed economic disparities and systemic inequalities and has created a profound and prolonged sense of uncertainty about the future at a global scale. **The depth and length of the pandemic presents an unprecedented experience of collective trauma where, though at different levels, we have all been affected.**

In this context, **resilience** is the capacity of organizations to heal from trauma, and to strengthen their wellbeing and adaptability in ways that can mitigate or prevent future trauma.



Lesson # 1

We are not alone. Symptoms of trauma are common and shared across organizations and its members.

What is **trauma**?

Because an organization's culture is largely shaped by the emotional experience of its members, it is important to build organizational resilience against trauma and respond to the needs of its members as they emerge. Using a trauma lens to understand resilience can provide a language for organizations to address some of its symptoms and support both its members and beneficiaries.

There are things that organizations can do to respond to trauma and to mitigate the risks of long-term effects.

Understanding trauma, how it manifests in our organizations, and its impact, is the very first step to build organizational resilience through this crisis.

While it can be hard to think of the challenges posed by COVID-19 as traumatic, **trauma** can be understood simply as an **inescapably stressful situation** that overwhelms people's existing mechanisms (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995).

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SMHSA) trauma results from an **event**, series of events or set of circumstances **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.

These definitions allow us to locate ourselves and the people that we serve in a scenario where trauma is a very real experience as an inescapable event that we are all going through.

Lesson # 1

We are not alone. Symptoms of trauma are common and shared across organizations and its members.

Sources of trauma

We can think of trauma as a **single catastrophic event**, like natural disasters, or as the direct experience of an **ongoing wounding** (internal or external), like physical abuse or the effects of systemic racism. In addition, in mission-driven organizations addressing the most complex development problems, the **redemptive and empathic nature of the work** requires its members to have a level of empathy to deal and respond to multifaceted challenges, which can be directly tied back to actual experiences of ongoing woundedness and catastrophic events.

If we recognize that trauma can exist as a flow of all of these elements at the same time, the potential of the vicarious experience (our knowledge of how it affects others) is also a source of trauma that we need to address as an organization in order to build resilience (see Figure 2).

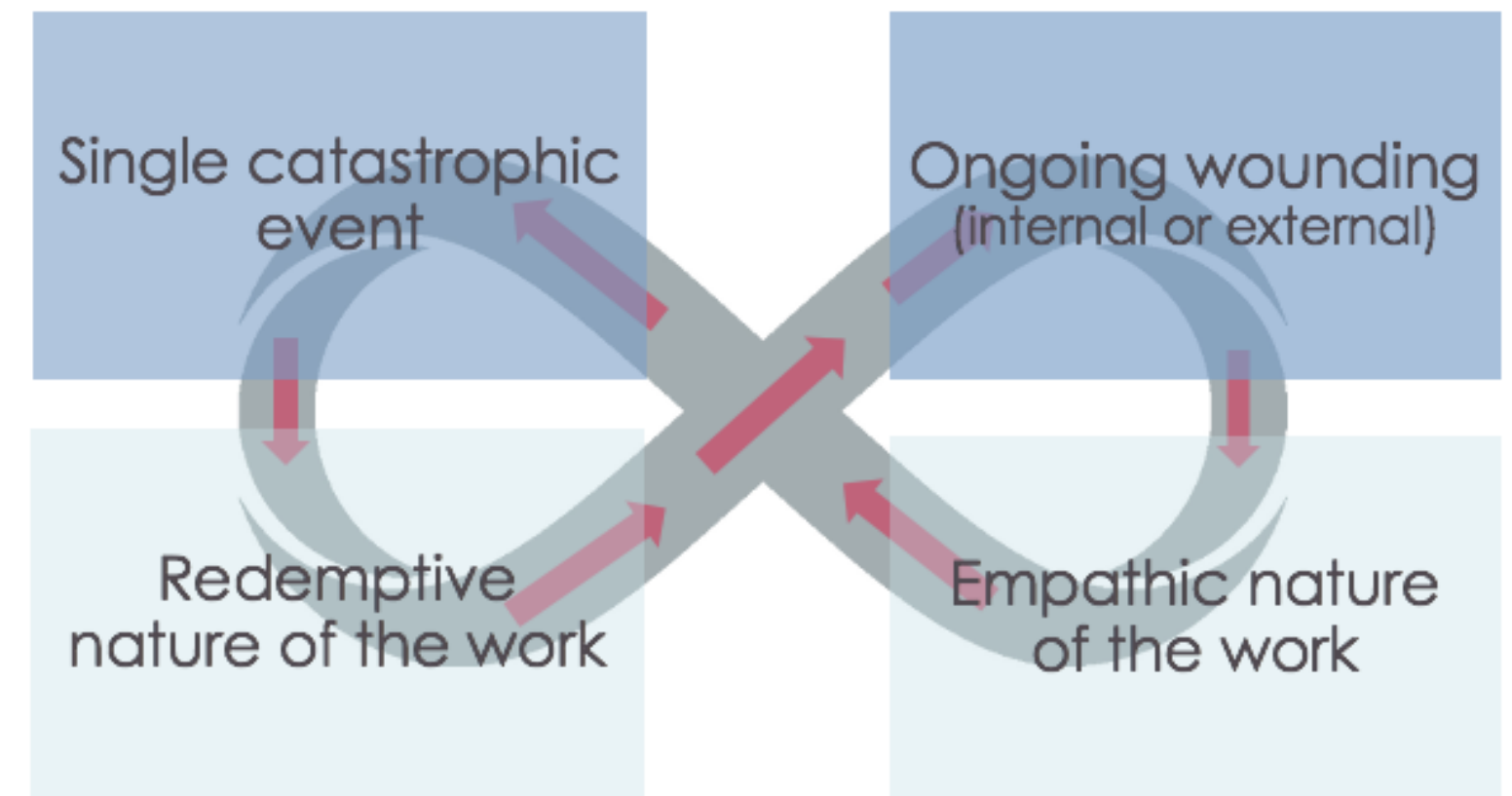


Figure 2. Sources of organizational trauma and its potential flow

As an organization:

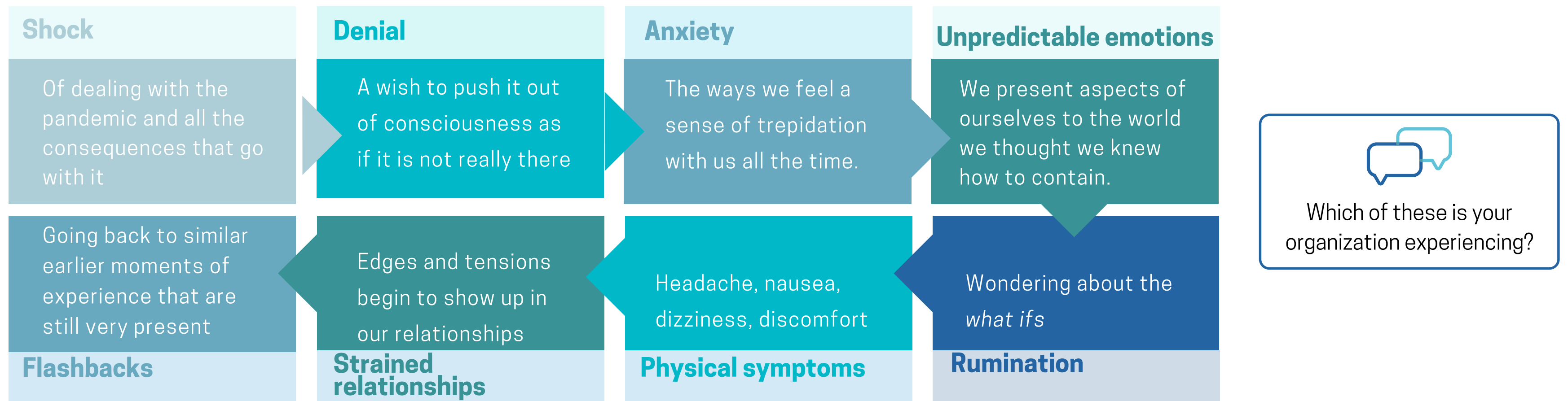


- Where are you in this cycle?
- Can you recognize some sources of trauma for your organization?

Symptoms of trauma

Looking at the definitions above, trauma will feel much closer than many people often believe. COVID-19 as well as the social unrest resulting from the challenges of systemic racism in the US has likely increased the experience of trauma in the general population which was already 70%. It is important to note that around 20% of people who experience trauma go on to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Helping teams recognize sources and symptoms of trauma is an important first step towards building resilience and avoiding long term consequences. These are some of the most common symptoms:



Lesson # 1

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Intersectional trauma

COVID-19 turned the world upside down. With work-at-home as the new normal, the boundaries between work and personal life were further blurred. For many people, this has resulted in unmanageable workloads combined with additional responsibilities at home (parenting, homeschooling, caregiving, etc.).

In mission-driven organizations, leaders tend to focus primarily on taking care of others and on sustaining the organization. While staying afloat is the first needed action, when this is sustained for an unknown amount of time without finding time for personal care, symptoms of trauma including burnout, are likely to manifest.

At a personal level, trauma is experienced not only directly resulting from a specific event but as a result of the intersections of personal, vicarious, collective and historical experiences. It is thus hard to determine how much of the feelings that we experience comes from our own history, from what we witnessed, or from an overwhelming majority being affected. This is known as intersectional trauma.



Figure 3. Intersectional trauma

Lesson # 2

To start our resilience journey, we need to **create space for reflection** for ourselves and for our teams.

Intersectional trauma

People who experience intersectional trauma are the most vulnerable right now because it is coming from a variety of circumstances all at the same time. For this reason, they are more likely to have personal expressions and carry the symptoms of intersectional trauma in the following way:

- Inability to manage uncertainty
- Increasingly unfiltered thoughts/ behaviors
- Unwanted intrusive substance of shadow
- Unhealthier psychological defenses



Which one of these are you experiencing?

Intersectional trauma shows as a nested pathway in the following way:

- ➔ **Rejection:** denial, the desire not to see it.
- ➔ **Repression:** trying to hold this out of consciousness because it is overwhelming
- ➔ **Regression:** moving into unhealthy behaviors
- ➔ **Reflection:** the belief that this moment provides us a way of being able to step back and into ourselves and give meaning and purpose to this.

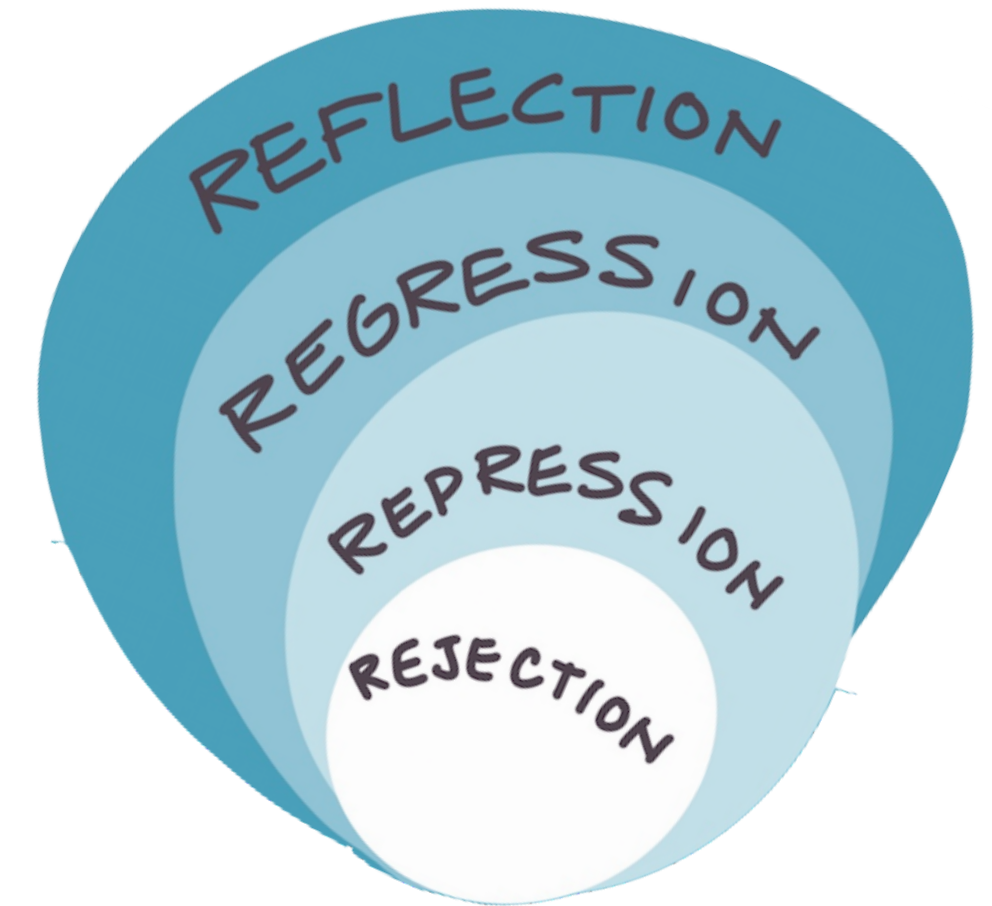


Figure 4. Manifestations of intersectional trauma

Resilience factors

There are things we can do and practice as leaders get us to develop personal resilience and avoid burnout. The equilibrium between responding to our organizational and team needs and finding time for self-care is one of the hardest balances we need to achieve. It is important to understand that while **our missions hold us up** and allow us to respond quickly, this does not change the fact that in addition to responding to the communities we serve, **all of us are experiencing this crisis as well**.

Developing resilience practices can help us meet the current leadership challenge to guide our teams through these complex and uncertain times. These are seven resilience factors developed by the Working with Resilience Consortium (2020):

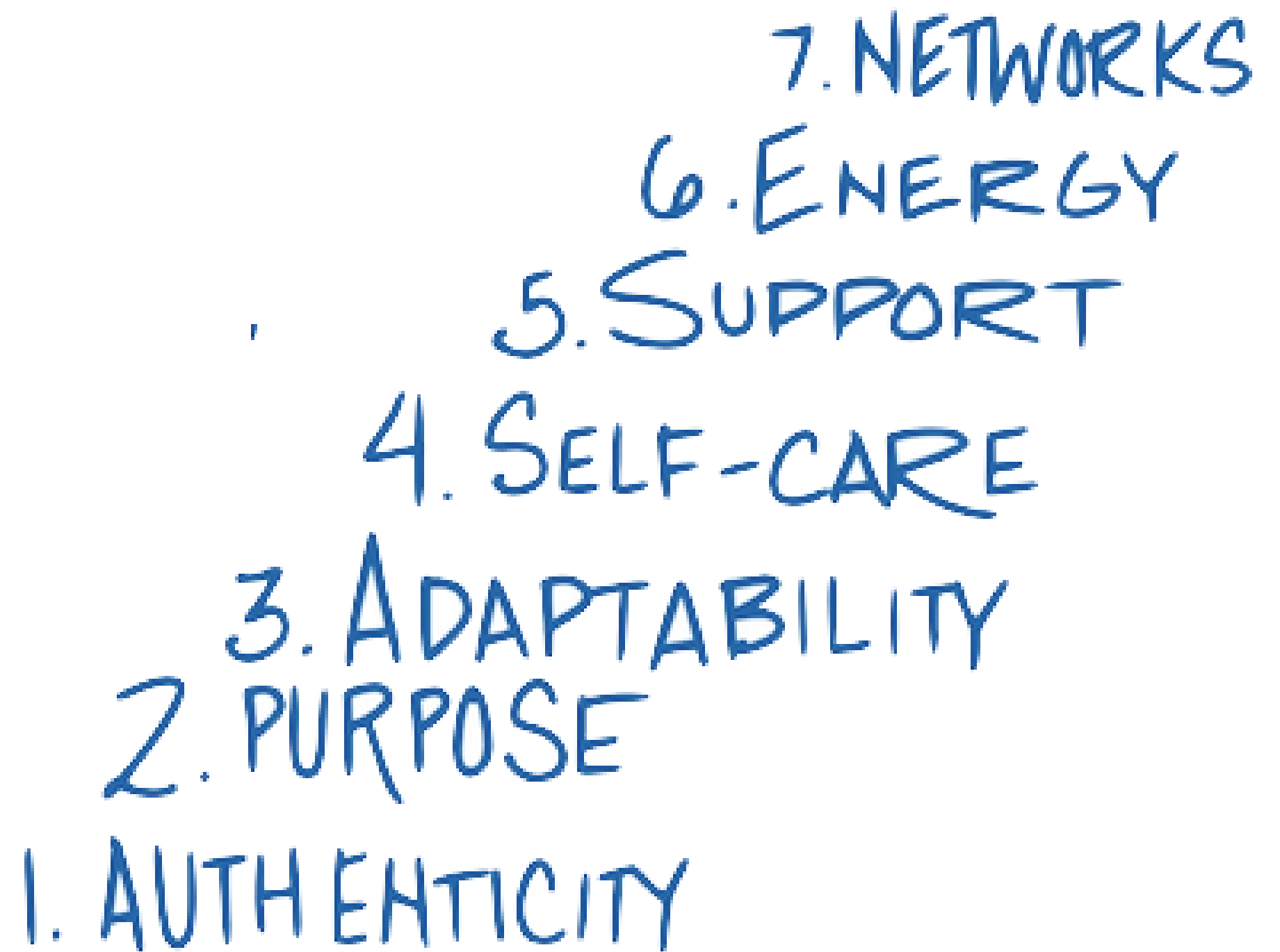
- 
7. NETWORKS
 6. ENERGY
 5. SUPPORT
 4. SELF-CARE
 3. ADAPTABILITY
 2. PURPOSE
 1. AUTHENTICITY

Figure 5. Seven resilience factors. Working with Resilience Consortium (2020)

Lesson # 3

We need to be kind to ourselves . Focusing on resilience factors can allow us to better meet the leadership challenge of this moment.

Seven **resilience** factors

1. AUTHENTICITY

Knowing and holding onto your personal values, deploying strengths, and having a good level of emotional awareness and regulation.

2. PURPOSE

Having work that offers purpose and a sense of belonging. Aligning work with your core values and beliefs.

3. ADAPTABILITY

Staying optimistic and keeping a solution-focus when things go wrong. Reframing setbacks and minimizing the impact of any negativity around you.

4. SELF-CARE

Having work and life routines to help you manage everyday stressors. Creating work-life balance and ensuring time for relaxation and recovery.

5. SUPPORT

Seeking feedback, offering advice and providing support readily to others.

6. ENERGY

Maintaining a good level of physical fitness, having a healthy diet and getting adequate sleep.

7. NETWORKS

Developing and maintaining support networks at home and at work in order to perform well in your job.



As an organization: How much are you practicing any of these during this time?

Facilitating resilience factors

One of the most important tasks as leaders is to **create the conditions** for resilience in our organizations. Leaders can focus on identifying and promoting two elements of resilience: facilitating factors and sustaining factors. Focusing on ensuring there are systems and structures in place to promote this will allow your teams to maintain confidence in their work, feel supported, and adapt with resilience.

Facilitating factors include high levels of confidence in your and your team's abilities, establishing disciplined routines for your teams' work with systems and structures that support the work in new settings, and making sure members have support within the team as well as the presence of social and family support. When all these three facilitating factors are present, a team's capacity for resilience is dramatically increased.

THREE KEY FACILITATING FACTORS

Level of Confidence in Our Abilities

Disciplined Routines for Our Work

Presence of Social and Family Support

Figure 6. Facilitating factors

Establishing facilitation factors allow us to respond with resilience is fundamental, but **in order to sustain this, leaders have the responsibility to model sustaining factors in the way they lead their teams.**



Which facilitating factor needs to be developed further in your team?

Sustaining resilience factors

As leaders, we need to display compassion by recognizing that there is a degree of suffering that people are experiencing relative to their previous level of functioning in the phase of a pandemic, protest and unrest, transition to the virtual space. In all of these transitions we need to demonstrate how we care for the communities we work for and for each member of our team. A second sustaining factor is making accommodations

COVID-19 brought life to a halt and that means many of the people we work with have to reconcile being a full-time worker with a teacher or full-time caregiver at home, beyond the technical aspects of ensuring team members have the elements to work from home. Finally, to create resilience leaders have the courage to guide the conversation and to demonstrate genuine concern for others.

THREE KEY SUSTAINING FACTORS

Display Compassion (Care first)

Make Accommodations (#TurbulentTimes!)

Guide Conversations (Genuine concern)

Figure 7. Facilitating factors



As a leader, which sustaining factor do you need to enhance?

Failing to provide the space with silence can be very damaging for our teams as we know that every single member is affected by the situation one way or another. This guide presents a number of ways in which you can show these resilience factors by starting conversations with your teams. This is the biggest leadership challenge right now.

You may find that as an organization you identify other facilitating and sustaining factors that work for your team. This is not an exhaustive list. It aims to guide you to reflect on what are the aspects you as a leader need to facilitate and sustain to build a resilient organization.



Choosing an accountability partner to focus on one of the sustaining or facilitating factors can help keep our focus on growing in a selected area.

Lesson # 4

We need transformational leadership, one that displays compassion, makes accommodations, and guides difficult conversations.

Post-traumatic **growth**

There are ways in which we can grow in this moment. The Japanese practice **Kintsugi** offers a beautiful metaphor for us to think about post-traumatic growth. Kintsugi is a centuries-old Japanese art of fixing cracked pottery. Rather than hide the cracks, the technique involves rejoining the broken pieces with powdered gold, silver, or platinum.

When put back together, the whole piece of pottery looks beautiful as ever, even while owning its broken history. We can consider that all organizations have in one way or another experienced this brokenness, and there are ways through which they can make meaning and find creativity in the face of adversity. This is known as post-traumatic growth, finding opportunities for growth in the face of trauma. This approach can lead us to:

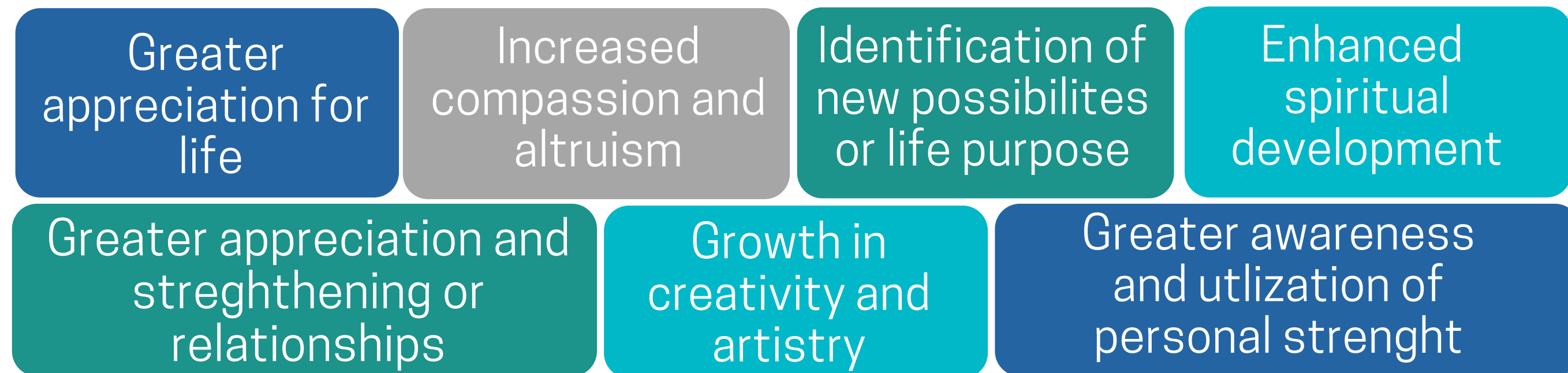


Figure 8. Growth after trauma

Thinking about **Kintsugi** can give us a notion of healing and wholeness. However, as much as we recognize and address trauma in our organizations, it is important to consider that research indicates that:

- ➡ Most people would **prefer to have not had** the trauma
- ➡ Growth from **positive events** is sustained longer
- ➡ **Resilience and adaptation** are needed to transform adversity
- ➡ Trauma once triggered is often subject to **morph and return**

What can we do?

Deliberate Rumination/Setting Intentions

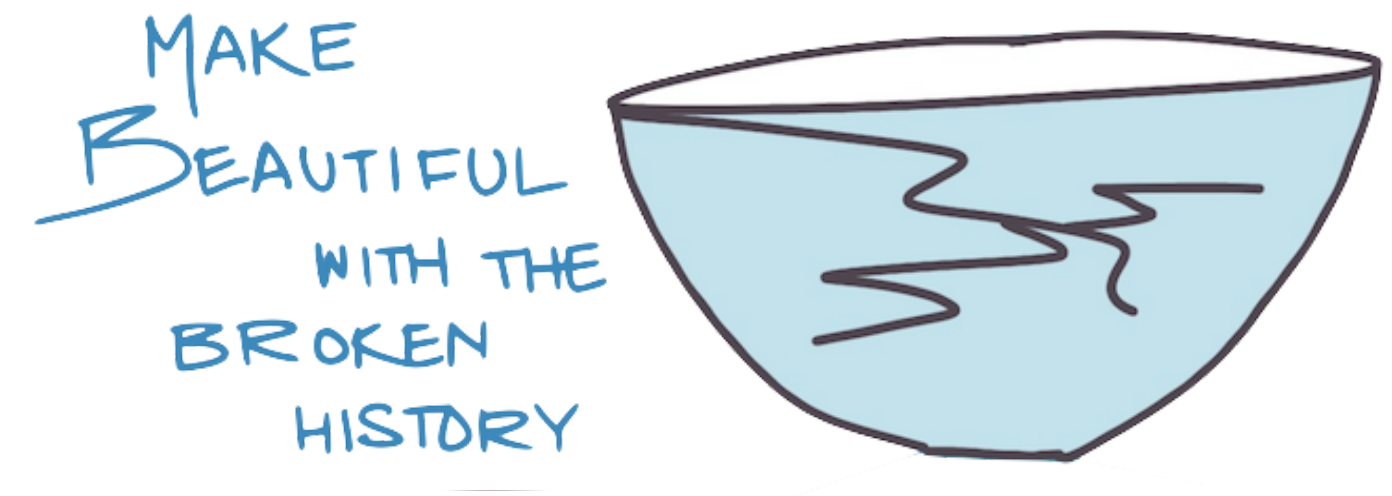
Positive changes in relationships
Perception of new possibilities

Expressive Writing

Meaning to stressful/traumatic situations
Expression of range of emotions

10-word intention

Write down a short mantra to guide your growth



Lesson # 5

There is an immense growth opportunity. Owning our broken history by engaging, assessing and renewing can lead us to organizational growth.

So becoming a trauma-informed organization means not only taking action now that we are living through a crisis but to sustain the elements of resilience and be alert of the elements that can trigger trauma within an organization and its members. One way to do this is to apply three easy practices to develop resilience: engage, assess and renew (EAR).

EAR provides an applied model to help people in your organization think about resilience:

Applying this model, organizations can identify immediate resources/stressors, develop an inventory strength of current coping modes/”positive attitude”, select potential routes to resolution, and engage healthier practices that promote wholeness and healing.

AN “EAR” FOR RESILIENCE: ***THREE STEPS***



Figure 9. An EAR for resilience

A time for **transformation**

“Life after the coronavirus” continues to be unknown, however, there is a growing recognition that things will not be the same, a call to challenge the status quo, to revise our priorities and to transform.

A survey from CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies shows that most leaders believe economic activity won't return to the pre-pandemic levels until 2022, and that business travel will never return to before COVID19 levels. Furthermore, 48% of business leaders believe that the pandemic will accelerate the move to stakeholder capitalism. In other words, the nature and duration of the global pandemic shows that the resilience task at hand is one of transformation.

To look at this call for transformation, we think that Chelleri's work offers an interesting perspective to understand resilience response as part of a continuum.

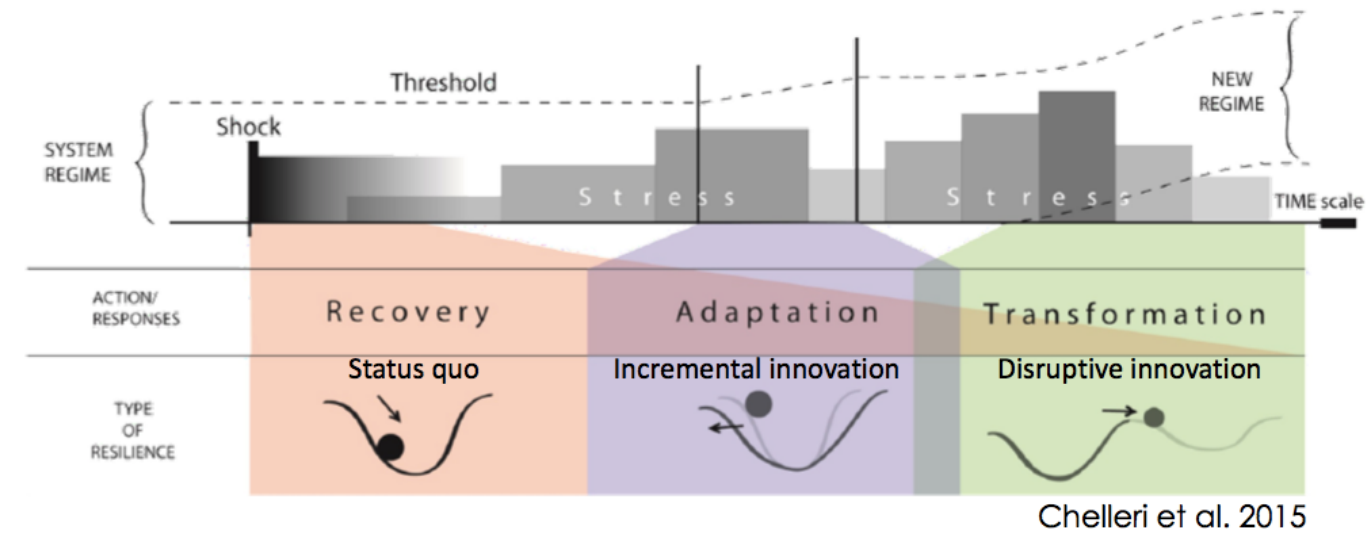


Figure 10. The resilience continuum

The depth of the shock and the length of its level of resulting stress determine how we respond. Under emergencies (such as floods, fires, etc.), the most immediate response is to recover and return to the status quo. When the stress is sustained, incremental innovation that gradually takes us towards a new system. Finally, when the cumulative stress is so great and prolonged, as in the case of COVID, organizations can no longer adapt, transformation towards a new system that emerges becomes necessary to survive and thrive.

What does this mean for organizations?

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and in many ways deepened the multifaceted economic, social and cultural inequalities that many non-profit organizations aim to reduce. It is important to reflect on how this bare reality can serve to reflect on the things that need to be different.

This may mean revising how the experience of sustained trauma in an organization and the communities they serve can influence an organization's capacity to fulfill its mission. **Moving towards transformation and resilience may mean:**

Adaptive leadership rather than hierarchical and top-down leadership

Equal access to opportunities, **social safety nets** and **contingency** plans

Transition towards a more **local economy** and way of operation

Promoting **inclusivity** and **adaptability**

Resources that are **readily available**

Strong, broad and distributed **networks of support**

Shared power and sense of future



How have current events influenced your organization's capacity to fulfill its mission?
What changes are necessary to transform your organization and sustain your mission?

ORGANIZATIONAL Resilience IN CHALLENGING TIMES



LEVER FOR CHANGE

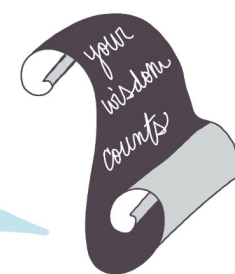
ZACHARY GREEN
UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

ENGAGE
ASSESS
RENEW

DESIGNED AND LED BY
IMAGO for
BOLD SOLUTIONS
NETWORK



SUPPORT
STRENGTHENING DISCIPLINE
MAKING ACCOMODATIONS
CONFIDENCE
GUIDING CONVERSATION
BREAKDOWN IN OUR CONVERSATION
GETTING MORE IN DEPTH



GUIDE THE CONVERSATION
COMPASSION
ACCOMMODATIONS
SILENCE IS A FORM OF VIOLENCE

CONFIDENCE ROUTINE
SUPPORT
LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE

CREATIVE GROWTH
MAKE BEAUTIFUL WITH THE BROKEN HISTORY



REFLECTION
REGRESSION
REPRESSION
REJECTION

how do we become resilient?

1. AUTHENTICITY
2. PURPOSE
3. ADAPTABILITY
4. SELF-CARE
5. SUPPORT
6. ENERGY
7. NETWORKS



TRAUMA SHAKES OUR WORLD VIEW

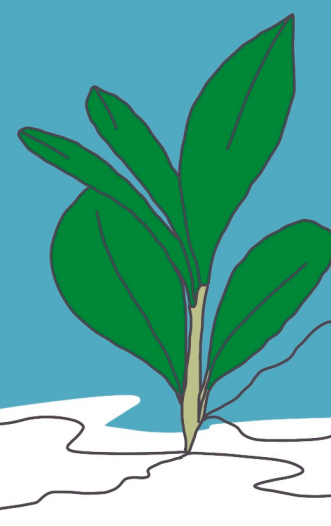


A TIME OF TURBULENCE

prepare proactively
HOW DO WE BREAK THROUGH?



WHEN WE ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO CHANGE THE SITUATION...
CHANGE OURSELVES



FACE THE MOMENT TO BE READY FOR
10 WORD INTENTION
transformation

digitally scribed by
LAUREN GREEN
dancing with markers

We hope that this guide and the accompanying videos will be a helpful tool to use with teams within your organization as we charter these extraordinary challenges. Building resilience at both the personal and organizational level is something that will benefit organizations in this Bold Solutions Network during COVID and beyond.



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