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Building Group Resilience: A Three-Day Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Social change organizations are often exposed to stress and disruptive, potentially traumatic events. Despite this, few such groups invest time into actively cultivating resilience practices. Likewise, most existing resilience promotion initiatives are designed for use with individuals, not organizations, and lack the experience-based pedagogical approach necessary to interest many social change activists. This curriculum intervention provides a needed bridge between social change activism and resilience promotion theory. Designed as a three-day workshop, it can be used with entire organizations to support both self-awareness of their existing strengths and the development of new protective measures to boost collective resilience.

Introduction: Stress Overwhelms A Tenants' Rights Organization

There were seven of us stuffed into the living room of Kimberly's two-bedroom apartment. The couches were covered in plastic, and the air conditioning window unit was running full blast to offset another broiling July evening in the Anacostia neighborhood of the District of Columbia. I was the only one present not living in the same public housing community, the one the city's government had decided to demolish in the name of redevelopment.

Three weeks prior, this group of women (and a dozen teenagers not present) had upstaged the area's city councilmember and the mayor's representatives at an important community forum by taking the floor to denounce their lack of inclusion in the planning process, taking the public officials by surprise. It had been a real high point for all of them. Several women had emerged from that event with more self-confidence, and others saw clearly the motives of a politician they had once trusted, leading them to become even more committed to building an alternative to the government's proposals to raze the buildings and displace nearly 1,700 residents. Since that day, the property managers had become attentive to the residents' immediate concerns. Kimberly laughed as we came in, noting that if not for their actions, the air conditioner would still be broken.

Kimberly and her neighbors are all African-American women, most in their twenties and thirties. Their success had exacerbated tensions with older women in the complex who struggled to improve conditions in the neighborhood decades previous, and now resented the attention paid these "newcomers." The older women also complained about loud music and public consumption of alcohol, new additions to the life of the

apartment complex that they blamed on the new residents. These conflicts were

distracting, but family dynamics and personal struggles also took their toll.

Two members of the group were often high or disappeared for days at a time.

Several had to take care of ailing, disabled or chronically intoxicated family members.

Fewer than half were employed, and all harbored dreams of studying to be nurses and

paralegals, or of winning a food service job at the nearby Air Force base. Sandra, who

worked part-time at her kids' elementary school, resented Pam and Kimberly for not

taking on more responsibility for the group's progress, given that they were unemployed.

Kim and Debra believed that Sandra was secretly working with older women in the

community's official Residents Council, which seemed to act as a rubberstamp for the

government's plans.

These resentments came exploding to the surface on that July day. Debra and Pam

went on the offensive against Sandra, who lashed out at Rose for showing up late.

Several people said nothing, sitting and smoldering or fed-up with the conflicts. I was an

inept mediator, trying to redirect attention to our agenda and the many external threats the

group had gathered to address while simultaneously trying to address new resentments.

Many of the internal conflicts were mere shadow puppets for unspoken fears.

Most of these women, who had been raised poor, had long internalized the idea that they

could not follow their own leadership. They had been told to aspire to serve others, not to

nurture their own visions for change. Everyone was worried about how to follow-up their

successful show of force at the community forum without alienating the many residents

who had faith in their councilmember. Some felt guilty about having inadvertently

created an antagonistic relationship with a man who many considered a father or

grandfather figure. And looming over all our plans was the imminent but ambiguous threat of displacement for 442 families, which caused no small amount of distress.

On that day and many others, the conflicts seemed stronger than the group's shared sense of collective identity and purpose. The women had not worked together long before being verbally attacked by politicians and neighborhood leaders. In addition, with success also came tough choices. Should we align ourselves with organizations that share our goals but who will be viewed suspiciously as outsiders by other community members? What can a small group really use as leverage against an elected city government? Which of us will speak at the next event?

And just as a plan was hatched, we would receive word of a groundbreaking ceremony or a new round of federal funding for public housing demolition. The new plan quickly became the outdated plan. Someone would spread the disappointing news to the others: "Something's happened, we've got to meet tonight." Family members were asked to shoulder more responsibilities so our cohort could meet ever more frequently. Few had anticipated this, and several were unwilling to put in more time than their initial once-a-week commitment.

Environmental factors also took their toll. Shootings were not uncommon, occurring around once every two months and inevitably leading to calls for either more engaged or less confrontational policing, to finger-pointing between residents, and widely shared grief. Each spasm of violence shook the group, even if it never came up as an "official" agenda item.

We met for several more months, but the group continued to be unable to offer adequate support for the emotional or psychosocial needs of its membership. The added

stress of conflict with popular community members – the rubberstamp elderly residents and the councilmember – was too much. Most group members eventually decided to retreat to focus solely on their private battles, and to try to ignore their likely eventual displacement from their homes.

      I was a bit player in this dramatic sequence, invited to advise the group on campaign strategy, connect them to outside resources and help with logistical tasks. And I had more time to offer than anyone, being paid to knock on doors and make phone calls with them. However, what they needed more than anything was not another social change resource ally – attorneys and strategists had also offered pro-bono services – but an opportunity to reflect on the many assaults on their wellbeing as individuals and members of a social change group. They were overwhelmed not by any single crisis, but by a confluence of factors.

Background: Social Change Necessitates Resilience

      This is a relatively dramatic example of a social change group succumbing to stress-related factors; few organizations encounter such adverse conditions simultaneously. But the individual challenges encountered by this group are not unique to their experience, or even to low-income housing activists. Many groups that set out to change their environment through political engagement encounter identical types of stressors. Most social change activists are unpaid and must balance demands on their time. Many issues that polarize communities, from reproductive rights to mountaintop removal, often generate interpersonal tension among community members. Political activism requires engagement on issues that can be deeply personal, and waging conflict for social change inevitably requires choices fraught with tension. All groups experience

gains and declines in membership, both because of their actions and due to individual

members' developmental and other life changes. None are immune from the impacts of

environmental stressors.

Although all experience stress and trauma, few social change organizations take

the time to reflect on their common or potential stressors, or to anticipate future

challenges to the psychosocial wellness of their members. Although practiced at

evaluating power relationships and related dynamics, these organizations are often

unaware of their own strengths – the habits, characteristics, routines and rituals that allow

them to thrive despite adversity. This curriculum is therefore written for those groups that

are ready to explore and further develop their own resilience. It is designed to support

whole organizations to intentionally develop their adaptation to unexpected, potentially

traumatic events and improve their management of common stressors.

Literature Review

The concept of resilience was originally developed to explain why some children

with adverse early life experiences failed to develop predicted psychopathologies

(Garmezy, 1991; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). In more recent years researchers have used

resilience processes to explain how individual adults maintain relatively stable

trajectories of healthy functioning following exposure to potentially traumatic events

(Bonanno, 2004), and have examined how adaptive processes and protective traits

function in families (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1996; Patterson, 2002). As applied to

organizations, resilience can be understood as a multidimensional, organizational

attribute enabling an organization to absorb, respond to and potentially capitalize on both

disruptive surprises and daily stresses (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2010; Lengnick-Hall &

Beck, 2009).

        Bonanno, describing the distinction between the resilience approach and

traditional views of posttraumatic psychopathology, notes four possible trajectories

following a potentially traumatic event: resilience, recovery, chronic psychopathology

and delayed reactions (2004). Although there is an active debate in the literature

regarding whether organizational resilience should best be characterized by active

processes or post-stressor outcomes (Masten, 2001), most agree that there are three broad

levels of resilience, as first enumerated by Masten (1994). The first is the capacity to

"bounce back" from stressful events, characterized by an organization's ability to retain

an identical level of functioning before, during and after the event (Denhardt & Denhardt,

2010; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Horne, 1997; Wildavsky, 1988). Other researchers

borrow from ecological perspectives on resilience in describing organizational adaptation

to unexpected events (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005). This perspective emphasizes

allostasis, or the maintenance of homeostasis through a dynamic process of adaptation to

daily stressors or unexpected events (Sterling & Ever, 1988). Researchers using this

criterion evaluate organizations for resilience based on their capacity for adaptive

flexibility and ability to learn new coping styles (Argyris 1993; Horne & Orr, 1998;

Folke et al, 2002). The third capacity identified by researchers, the capacity for growth,

shares with adaptation the ability to quickly identify emerging problems and implement

innovative solutions (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). This capacity enables organizations to

capitalize on unexpected and potentially adverse events (Lengnick Hall & Beck, 2009;

Meredith et al, 2011).

Applying Resilience Theory to Organizations

Although research on adult, child and family resilience continues to draw the

interest of psychologists, very little scholarship exists on the resilience of systems larger

than the family (van Breda, 2011). The literature that does exist is largely focused on the

ability of for-profit firms in Western cultural contexts to "bounce back" from stressful

events (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2010; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Horne, 1997;

Wildavsky, 1988). This research emphasizes corporate survival and adaptive

management under dire conditions that might include, for instance, a crisis in the global

marketplace for goods and services. Organizational resilience has also been discussed in

the literature on organizational management (Coutu, 2002; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003;

Mallak, 1998), organizational development (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstefeld, 1999), disaster

preparation and response (Freeman, Maltz & Hirschhorn, 2004; Weick, 1993) and

military combat readiness (Meredith et al, 2011; Nash et al, 2011). However, these

studies mostly emphasize the resilience of individuals within a workplace or a combat

unit, not the system itself (van Breda, 2011). As approaches to understanding

organizational resilience, they share a narrow focus on performance measures, and,

unlike family systems resilience research, little emphasis on the overall psychosocial

wellbeing of the people involved in organizational life.

Still, organizational resilience research remains relevant. Many organizational

stressors identified in the literature are experienced by volunteer-based organizations, like

ethical dilemmas, reorganization, threats to belief systems, personnel turnover, power

struggles, looming deadlines and intergroup conflicts (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2010). They

are likewise likely to demonstrate similar protective factors and characteristics of

resilience. And organizational resilience research offers a useful conceptual framework for understanding the process of stimulating resilience across human systems.

Organizational Resilience Factors

Studies show support for several protective factors that underlie organizational resilience to stress. These include a cohesive group identity, collective meaning-making, flexible approaches to adversity, social support, expression of positive emotions and an optimistic attitude towards dealing with unexpected challenges.

Shared Identity & Meaning-Making

A broadly shared core group identity (Freeman, Maltz, et al., 2004; Horne & Orr, 1998; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009) helps organizations to frame unexpected, potentially adverse events in ways that enable problem-solving rather than dysfunction and threat rigidity (Coutu, 2002; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Organizations that can leverage their cohesive identity towards collective meaning-making also show elevated resilience (Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993). This process, which Lengnick-Hall et al call "constructive sensemaking" (2011, 246), can support creation of a shared story of competence and capability that shapes organizational approaches to confronting challenges (Haglund, et al., 2007).

Organizations help create shared meaning of their resilience to adversity by sharing memories of their accomplishments and celebrating their accomplishments, which is also described as a process of "savoring" (Bryant & Veroff, 2006). Rituals such as these also promote intergroup social support, measured as meaningful interpersonal connections, shared commitment, respectful interactions, trust and goodwill (Horne and

Orr, 1998). Higher levels of social support have been noted among more resilient

organizations as well (Haglund, et al., 2007; Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003).

Cultivation Of Optimism And Positive Emotional Expression

Numerous studies have found that supporting the expression of positive emotions

and cultivating optimism have a positive impact on resilience. Positive emotions,

including the use of humor, are believed to facilitate social support within groups and

facilitate the creation of trust among teammates (Haglund, et al., 2007; Ong, Bergeman,

Bisconti & Wallace, 2006). Teams that are optimistic about their ability to take on new

challenges are also less likely to suffer traumatic effects from adverse events (Ong,

Bergeman, Bisconti & Wallace, 2006). These qualities have also been documented as

factors of resilience in adults generally (Bonanno, 2004; Keltner & Bonanno, 1997).

Routines & Rituals

Behavioral preparedness also leads to resilient outcomes. Organizations that have

established over-learned routines and practical habits particularly to respond to stress, and

that have invested energy in simulating and practicing stress responses, are less likely to

suffer debilitating effects from stressful events (Lengnick-Hall, et al., 2011).

Implementing these strategies also supports organizations to develop more flexible

approaches for dealing with stress (Haglund, et al., 2007).

Studies of family resilience have also demonstrated the importance of routines,

rituals and celebrations to family cohesion and adaptation during crisis to the

maintenance of homeostasis in the family system (Fiese et al., 2002; Walsh, 1998). The

use of activities like rituals that support connection to cultural elements has been well-

documented as a stress intervention tool in training settings, used to support both the

prevention of trauma and the process of recovery (Kalyjian, Moore, Kuriansky &

Aberson, 2010; Nicolas, Schwartz, & Pierre, 2010). In post-conflict Sierra Leone, for

example, emphasizing traditional rituals like storytelling, singing, dancing, pouring of

libations and cleansing ceremonies has been shown to stimulate resilience to violence

(Toussaint, Peddle, Cheadle, Sellu & Luskin, 2010). These rituals, ceremonies and

traditions have also been implemented in diverse contexts to support multigenerational

trauma recovery and for resilience to future traumatic stress (DeGray, 2010). Although

the use of rituals in promoting resilience can take disparate forms, many psychosocial

interventions make use of cultural and spiritual representations like prayers, music and

icons to support the nurturing of individual and collective endurance (Raphael, Wilson,

Meldrum & McFarlane, 1996).

<div align="center">Promoting Organizational Resilience</div>

Much is known about protective factors that promote resilience, but less research

exists on techniques for intentionally boosting organizational resilience, or embellishing

characteristics that lead to flexible and adaptive responses in adverse conditions through

psychosocial interventions. Most resilience training is oriented towards disaster first

responders, to support flexible approaches to crisis and prevent post-traumatic stress

disorder. Despite their widespread use with firefighters and professionals in other high-

risk occupations, there is disagreement among researchers as to the effectiveness of

preparatory interventions designed to expose personnel in high-stress occupations to

stressful situations (Whealin et al., 2008). A few studies have found optimal disaster

behavior correlated to a high level of prior disaster training and experience (Van der

Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Although this may indicate some utility in

preparing for high-stress scenarios, it is unlikely that preparation for the physical danger

typical of most such interventions would be of much use to most North American social

change organizations. A few resilience and psychosocial wellness promotion programs have been designed for low-stress workplaces, but these are largely targeted towards reduction of one particular risk factor, rather than promotion of overall wellness (Quillian-Wolever & Wolever, 2003).

Other existing resilience promotion interventions with adults are designed for individual adults, not organizations, and are largely targeted to prevent pathological outcomes like eating disorders, depression and suicide among high-risk individuals (Bonanno, Westphal, & Mancini, 2011; Zechmeister, Kilian, McDaid, & MHEEN Group, 2008). While these disorders are issues for social change activists, they are not common outcomes of social change activism. These interventions also lack a systemic approach more appropriate for organizations and are designed for particular populations at higher risk of developing the abovementioned psychopathologies. A few resilience-building programs, however, are designed to nurture resilience in family systems and individual adults at low or moderate risk of exposure to potentially traumatic stress and with no greater than average history of psychopathology, and are more relevant to promoting resilience with groups of activists.

One such program, the IY BASIC Program, is designed to support many of the organizational protective factors listed above, like feelings of connectedness, a shared identity and the development of routines and rituals, within the context of the family as a cohesive unit (McCreary & Dancy, 2004). The program has been implemented by multiple research teams using randomized studies and has been found to reduce violent behavior, improve parenting skills and promote family cohesion among participants (Boren, Schultz, Herman, & Brooks, 2010).

Another program designed for individual adults draws on cognitive-behavioral and rational emotional behavioral therapy approaches and uses psychoeducational activities to promote active coping strategies, social support and flexibility under adversity (Dolbier, Jaggars & Steinhard, 2010). Transforming Lives Through Resilience Education consists of four, two-hour weekly sessions emphasizing psychoeducation on typical responses to stress, coping styles, interpreting adverse events and social support. As implemented with a sample of college students in Texas the experimental group showed improvement in resilience and most targeted protective factors compared to a control group (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2007).

A few resilience promotion pilot programs have also been undertaken in low-stress workplace environments. The READY (REsilience and Activity for every DaY) resilience program, designed both for individual adults and employees who share a workplace, is perhaps the closest in structure to this research project curriculum. The program is designed to improve resilience and psychosocial wellbeing by boosting five protective factors: positive emotions, cognitive flexibility, social support, life meaning and active coping (Burton, Pakenham & Brown, 2010). Participants participate in two-hour weekly sessions for 12 weeks using activities adapted from a CBT framework, as well as exercises to encourage mindfulness, psychoeducation on protective factors, group discussions and home assignments. When implemented with a group of university employees in Australia most of the 17 participants reported improvement in measures of the targeted protective factors.

Another similar workplace resilience promotion intervention consists of eleven weekly, hour-long sessions carried out by a trained facilitator and was shown in two pilot

studies with small samples to improve participants' belief in their own coping skills and to reduce short-term stress and depression symptoms (Millear et al, 2007). Although most of the studies on group resilience intervention suffer from a lack of rigor in experimental design, there is clearly evidence that suggests their usefulness in boosting key protective factors.

Finally, I am aware of one resilience intervention explicitly designed for professionals with a social justice orientation. Although targeted towards individuals rather than groups, and emphasizing both recovery and resilience simultaneously, the Trauma Stewardship model is the only one emphasizing a connection between mental health promotion and effective social change (van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009). Under Lipsky's model, wellness intervention trainings – often two hours in length and presented only once – are designed for those at increased risk of "compassion fatigue," her term for secondary trauma (2009). Trauma Stewardship interventions focus on building awareness of stress responses, and supporting training participants to develop techniques to avoid developing pathological symptoms. In addition to supporting self-awareness Trauma Stewardship trainings also offer participants an opportunity to develop self-care practices to boost their resilience to stress and trauma exposure. In contrast to this curriculum, however, the Trauma Stewardship audience is primarily composed of professionals with an occupational connection to mental health promotion. As an intervention it has yet to be evaluated using an experimental design.

A Curriculum Intervention: Cultivating Resilience with Activist Groups

While there are many protective factors underpinning organizational resilience, this resilience promotion intervention is designed specifically to promote flexibility,

increased social support, the establishment of rituals and a collective identity tied to self-efficacy in social justice groups. Although there is very little academic literature on the risks and protective factors most common to organized social change groups, anecdotal studies that have been conducted suggest that awareness of stress adaptation styles (Cox, 2011), intergroup relationships (Maslach & Gomes, 2006), celebration rituals (2006) and a resilient group identity (Downton & Wehr, 1997; Minieri & Getsos, 2007) have been reported as protective factors. In addition, most of these characteristics have been successfully targeted by similar resilience promotion programs carried out with groups of adults (Burton, Pakenham, & Brown, 2010; Dolbier, Jaggars ,& Steinhard, 2010; Millear et al, 2007), and could be addressed within a three-day training intervention.

Increased protective factors may be apparent following the implementation of this intervention, although the exact form this will take will depend on the organization. As an example, all four factors were strengthened during a strengths-based reflection process I facilitated for a conference planning collective. The all-volunteer activist group convened an annual conference on civil disobedience, and asked me for support reflecting on their overall sustainability. Group members had noticed that threats to their homeostasis followed a predictable pattern. In the month before the conference, stress levels spiked, followed by an emotional high the weekend of the conference. Then, exhausted, the members would fail to follow-through on their commitments in the months that followed. Often, many members would immediately quit the planning group, citing burnout, leaving a handful to manage post-conference tasks and recruit more members for the next year's conference, and the cycle would be repeated. During the weekend-long evaluation, the group reflected on the unsustainability of this cycle, and marveled at their ability to

repeat it for eight consecutive years despite obvious challenges (*a new strengths-based perspective on the group's identity*). They eventually decided to change the distribution of tasks to make these less burdensome (*modeling flexibility and adaptation*), and incorporated a reflection on organizational stress into both their annual new member orientation and every other planning meeting in the three months before the conference (*incorporating new routines and rituals*). Participants reported during the session evaluation that they had developed a newfound intimacy and respect for one another during the reflection process (*increased social support*).

Each organization will demonstrate unique approaches to cultivating protective factors. Flexibility may be represented, for instance, as a greater awareness of the organization's common stressors, and collective acknowledgment of techniques for adapting to and learning from them, as has been reflected in anecdotal study of activist resilience practices (Cox, 2011). Groups may also develop new approaches to cultivating social support, or may discover additional perspectives on their existing strength in this area (Activist Trauma Support, 2007). By successfully completing the activities in the training, many of which require participants to consider where they already excel, their organizations should have a new experience of their own self-efficacy. And rituals and routines may be created during the course of the workshop that could improve organizational coping if, for example, a key member of the group departs, or that allow group members to return to a state of reflection on their overall wellness.

Curriculum Design & Intended Population

The curriculum is designed to support North American social change organizations to gain greater awareness of their preparation for and response to everyday

stress and potentially traumatic events, and offer opportunities to generate interventions promoting group resilience. As a psychosocial intervention, it is not necessary for the organizations participating to have an elevated risk of exposure to stress. The content is broad enough that both a group of AIDS activists who often put themselves at physical risk in pursuit of their political goals and a group that runs a weekly soup kitchen would experience enhanced protective factors.

Given the skepticism of many activists towards mental health interventions, the curriculum is designed specifically for organizations that might be wary of applying lessons from mental health research and practice to their organizational life (Bossewitch, 2012; Crossley, 2006; Lehman & Stastny, 2007; Lewis, 2012). Most social change groups fail to identify a connection between their work for societal change and mental health or psychosocial wellness. Many are openly hostile to consideration of psychology-related topics, given what they see as the long history of psychology professionals in supporting established forms of oppression and tyrannical regimes (Crossley, 2006). In the US, for instance, many activists on a range of social issues associate the original inclusion of homosexuality in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and some psychologists' participation in justifying torture by the United States military, with the mental health field overall, failing to distinguish between the actions of a limited number of professionals and recent trends more closely aligned with social justice movements (Dworkin & Yi, 2003; Kakkad, 2005; Lewin & Meyer, 2002). For that reason the activities in this curriculum offer little psychological theory to participants, even as the curriculum itself follows contemporary research on resilience promotion and is designed to be delivered by psychology professionals.

Although there is little explicit information on resilience promotion originating in psychological theory in the curriculum, many opportunities exist to impart psychoeducation on resilience. Being informed by experiential education theory, the curriculum allows the training facilitator to draw on the "teachable moments" (Kolb, 1984) that surface to emphasize the disclosure of specific theories and psychoeducation. And this curriculum offers space for a trained mental health counselor or other psychology professional to offer theory to support learning that matches the openness of the group to psychological theory. For social change activists with high levels of openness to an explicit connection to mental health, the trainer can offer additional theoretical knowledge in the "generalization stage" of each activity. But the curriculum has been written with the mainstream current of social change activists in mind: those that would be unlikely to attend an explicitly mental health-oriented workshop.

In this way, this resilience intervention differs substantially from others reviewed in this paper, which often have an almost exclusive emphasis on cognitive-behavioral psychoeducation. This curriculum, in contrast, is biased towards offering opportunities for reflection on the lived experiences of the group in the training room, and to use those reflections in generalizing theory on how to promote resilience. And as opposed to simply reflecting on protective factors, the training provides multiple opportunities for generating interventions specific to the group in the training room. That way, the participants leave the workshop not only with a deeper understanding of their own resilience but also concrete tools to use in further resilience promotion.

Finally, as this curriculum is designed to serve volunteer-based, social change organizations drawing their membership from multicultural populations, there are

important contextual distinctions not addressed in the existing resilience promotion

literature. And the contemporary literature on organizational resilience has failed to

incorporate useful conceptual innovations of adult resilience researchers. This curriculum

intervention incorporates relevant theory from both disciplines, and utilizes training tools

that have been widely tested with multicultural populations. Many of the tools have been

adapted from existing activities designed by trainers with Training for Change, a

collective of activist educators of which I have been a member for six years. These tools

have been utilized by several thousand activists on five continents over twenty years.

They are adapted here with the permission of Training for Change, which readily offers

original training tools for adaptation and re-publication.

Experiential Education Theory

In offering opportunities to experience actual rituals and design and practice

leading new ones, the curriculum draws inspiration from Dewey's (1966) experiential

paradigm "learn by doing." The theory presented throughout the curriculum builds on the

idea of learning as a series of successive approximations, first articulated by Bandler and

Grinder (1979). Their insight into the concept of "pacing and leading," or matching both

the energy and the learning style of the group and "leading" them towards integrating

new knowledge, is also reflected in the use of repetition (offering multiple opportunities

to reflect on stress response or an experience of ritual) and the gradual pacing from

identifying individual stress responses to developing organizational interventions. The

curriculum also repeatedly returns to the core concepts relating to group stress response

and preventive interventions, emphasizing the value of repetition first articulated by Hebb

(1949).

Overall the activities are designed to reflect Kolb's (1984) four-stage cycle of experiential education. Each begins either by giving the participant group a chance to experience an activity or to recall an experience they've had. The next step is to reflect, or answer the questions, "how did that feel?" and "what happened?" or "what did you do?" The third step, generalization, invites the generation or addition of theory, generalizing beyond the particular learning experience to the broader relevance of insights generated. The fourth and final step, application, offers the participants an opportunity either to apply the learning directly by engaging in a new experience, or to think about how they might apply it in the future.

Agenda and Flow

Although ostensibly a 13-hour curriculum designed to be completed over several days, the workshop can be adapted and individual activities used on their own in shorter sessions. The curriculum is designed with social activists and supporters of grassroots organizations in mind, as people who often struggle with group self-awareness as they remain fixated on resolving external and sometimes trauma-triggering social problems. More activities were considered for inclusion, but to reduce barriers to participation the "full" workshop only requires up to five hours each day.

The first day of the workshop is designed to encourage and elicit participation, particularly important considering that all the theory presented in the workshop is designed to build upon the real-world experiences of the participants, following Freire's (1994) observation that the most powerful learning is often rooted in the seed of the learner's own life experience. If the participants do not feel safe disclosing their

experiences with stress and the interventions they've experienced as protective for their organizations, the activities will not be effective.

It may be that although all participants have shared experiences as group members, not all participate regularly with each other or in the same roles (for example, some may be paid staff, others only occasional volunteers). Understanding that the level of familiarity the participants have with each other in a workshop setting will vary, the first day's session has been designed to reflect Corey's (2011) observation that group safety will be at its lowest point at the start of a workshop. The activities of the first night in particular are designed to support the development of safety by giving the participants an opportunity for structured interactions with many other participants, which are also in themselves seeded with invitations to self-disclose. Participants are also offered the use of a buddy system, which could be particularly useful in a workshop designed in part to elicit memories of stressful experiences. Offering a "buddy" allows participants experiencing strong emotions or painful memories a designated support person, making it more likely that they will continue to stay emotionally present in the workshop.

The first day also invites early reflection on theory related to stress response and resilience, and "primes the pump" of participants' own experience. This is particularly important as many participants may not have ever considered their experiences in terms of their value for learning how to build group resilience.

The second day begins with an opportunity to reflect on each participant's individual learning goals, to reinforce the reality that this is a skills-development workshop. It continues with activities that unpack theory on stress responses at the individual and organizational level, and offers a broader, collectivist framework within

which to consider resilience than that offered by the individualist Western approach. The morning activities further offer a point of access for participants to consider what practices they and their ancestors might have already done, asking a question at the core of Mindell's (1997) theory on supporting groups to grow, "what's right here?"

The rest of the second day offers participants an opportunity to continue to uncover, or recover, practices that may stimulate resilience, and later on in the day (and also on the third day) to design interventions that may be useful in their individual organizational contexts. The second day closes and the third day opens with rituals, modeling options for incorporating simple, grounding exercises in whole-group activities.

On the third day, with a stronger container of safety to "hold" the group through increased risk-taking, a group stress response simulation offers an opportunity both for self-reflection and for integrating theory on recognizing, intervening on and responding to trauma. Most of the third day is dedicated to supporting the participants to think about their home contexts and identify stress responses or traumatic stress that needs attention and to develop interventions appropriate to their contexts.

Curriculum Overview

The curriculum is divided into activities that perform three functions, sometimes simultaneously. Some activities, particularly those towards the beginning, are designed to build safety in the group and encourage active engagement. Others are demonstrative, allowing participants to practice using interventions and rituals that promote resilience. The third type of activities specifically allow participants the opportunity either to reflect on their organizations' existing protective practices or to create new interventions to apply in their home context.

Each activity is designed to follow Kolb's four-stage experiential cycle. Two activities are discussed here in detail to illustrate how each serves to advance the overall resilience promotion goals of the workshop.

Example: "Maximize/Minimize Openness"

Description. This activity explicitly acknowledges that resilience and our experiences with stress are not often discussed in social justice organizations, that discussing them with strangers may be difficult and that self-disclosure will ultimately support their own learning. The activity sets the expectation that each person will ultimately be responsible for their own learning, and offers an opportunity for each participant to consider how to increase their own willingness to self-disclose and to open themselves to what might be difficult subjects.

Goals. Support participants to "warm up" to disclosure of stressful collective work experiences, and encourage individual strategizing on staying present and maintaining openness throughout the workshop.

Running the Activity. *Experience Stage.* Participants are invited to form small groups of 4-5 people. Then the trainer notes that this workshop is premised upon sharing experiences with stressful events, which is not something activists often have the opportunity to do. The trainer continues to contextualize: "There may even be some of you in here are aren't sure you want to do that, or who think you may not have much to add to the discussion. In your small groups, each of you will right now have the chance to share one experience for how you have cultivated openness in yourself around difficult subjects. Think of one time you stayed open to a new experience, to receiving or disclosing information, even though it might have been difficult. What inner quality

allowed you to do that?" The participants are given 8-10 minutes to discuss in their

groups.

Reflection Stage. The trainer invites the participants to share how they have

maximized their own openness, creating a list of personal qualities and intervention

techniques they have used. Once all their responses have been added to the "Maximizing

Openness" list, the trainer invites them to consider how they have minimized their own

openness. "What are ways that you close yourself off to new experiences, to learning or

to sharing your own experiences with others?" Once again the responses are written up,

under the heading "Minimizing Openness."

Generalization Stage. As the "Minimizing" responses are written up, the trainer

uses discretion in asking each participant on how that particular behavior – for example,

letting yourself become distracted – might show up in this workshop, and what would

support them to remain open. The trainer also attempts to use teachable moments in

connecting participant responses to broader workshop learning goals. For example, if a

participant discloses that he or she lets themselves "shut down" during discussion of

difficult subjects, the trainer might note the similarity with organizational avoidance

behavior, given that many activist groups avoid discussing their psychosocial wellbeing.

The trainer may also offer examples of either personal or organizational "Maximizing"

interventions that demonstrate the utility of making time for reflection on collective

resilience.

Application Stage. Finally, the trainer asks the participants to turn to a participant

near them and discuss which of the "Minimizing" behaviors they most want to avoid, and

which of the "Maximizing" behaviors would be most beneficial for them to amplify in this workshop. After 4-5 minutes the trainer ends the activity.

Example: "Ritual Scavenger Hunt"

Description. This activity offers participants an opportunity to identify protective practices already in existence in the group or that they have experienced in other contexts.

Goals. Support participants to generate options for organizational resilience-boosting rituals, and offer opportunities for kinesthetic learning and for disclosure of experience with protective practices.

Running the Activity. *Experience Stage.* To begin the activity, the trainer – possibly using a lead-in from a game or energizer – announces excitedly that the scavenger hunt is about to begin, and offers some context for the activity. "What comes to mind when you think of the word 'ritual'?" The trainer takes a few responses and emphasizes that for the purposes of this workshop, rituals are activities that are performed for their symbolic value. "They demonstrate intentions, teach about values, and serve broader goals." The trainer offers at least one example from their personal life or organizational work, and begins to give instructions. "Are there any fun rituals, or traditions or ceremonies? Well, *this* activity isn't one of those! This is a game! Each team will have five minutes to find as many rituals as you can, and then scribe them up on the easel pads." After ensuring that each person has a handout, the trainer begins the game. After a few minutes, the trainer ends the game, when the energy is still high.

Reflection Stage. The trainer invites each participant pair to form a group of four with another pair to share the rituals they found and to look for themes and commonalities in the purpose of the ritual or its mechanics. After a few minutes, the trainer begins to debrief in the large group, generating two lists. One is a list of "Rituals," with a brief description of each; participants are invited to share their experiences with each.

Generalization Stage. Simultaneous to the first list-making, the trainer also invites participants to reflect on the utility of each, and generates the second list, "How Rituals/Traditions Boost Resilience." The trainer may offer theory on protective factors stimulated by the use of rituals and ceremonies, such as how these are found to nurture strong social bonds, and anecdotes that illustrate differing applications of rituals.

Application Stage. To end the activity, the trainer asks the participants to consider which rituals would be most appropriate for their organization.

Each of the following activities in the curriculum follows a similar sequence through the four learning cycle stages. Although not every activity guide explicitly notes the stages in the facilitator directions, the implicit goal is that the facilitator use the experiential cycle as a guide to support the group's learning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This curriculum intervention is unique for a number of reasons. First, it is the only such intervention that I know of targeted specifically to social justice organizations. Whereas some trainings exist to support either individual adults to develop resilience in the context of stress, and others focus on helping activists cope with emotional burnout, none are designed to support the collective resilience of entire organizations. And unlike

every other intervention surveyed, this curriculum embraces activists' skepticism towards

psychology as a necessary prerequisite for working on resilience at the organizational

level. Still, the intervention focuses on enhancing a few protective factors found in the

literature to be the most useful for promoting organization resilience. Rather than devote

several sessions to providing an overview of resilience and psychological research, as is

common in other programs, this curriculum puts more emphasis on returning to

protective factor promotion frequently in each activity.

Also unique, this intervention encourages organizations not only to assess their

existing strengths but to enhance their resilience but developing new practices that

promote resilience, and even offers opportunities to role-play putting them into practice.

Other resilience promotion initiatives rely exclusively on self-awareness exercises and

psychoeducation.

Other similar programs are generally conducted on a weekly basis. The three-day

weekend format allows the participants to build on their learning quickly, and is more

conducive to full participation; many weekly programs experience significant participant

dropout. Finally, unlike other interventions that appear to have very little consideration of

pedagogy, each activity in this curriculum follows the four-stage experiential cycle in

providing moments to have an experience, reflect on that experience, generalize theory

from the reflection and apply the new learning through a new experience. This approach

reflects decades of research on adult learning styles, and is more likely to encourage a

participatory, constructive approach towards organizational resilience promotion than

other interventions that emphasize didactic learning. Although many psychology

professionals lack experience in conducting trainings in this style, I strongly encourage

anyone attempting to implement this curriculum to retain the experiential cycle approach

to achieve the best outcomes with diverse participant groups.

Appendix A – Three-Day Curriculum

DAY ONE: AGENDA OVERVIEW

Time	Exercise	Goal
10 min	Diversity Welcome	Name the range of diversity in the group and welcome it
40 min	One Minute Introductions	Encourage early self-disclosure within the group Build the container or "safety" in the group
10 min	Get-to-Know-You Mingle	Support continued building of the "container of safety" kinesthetically
15 min	Agenda and Goals Review	Set the stage; let people know what to expect; set expectation about attending all sessions
25 min	Maximize/Minimize Openness	Engage participants in becoming responsible for their learning/sharing Generate strategies for maximizing openness
25 min.	Buddy Pairs & Exploring Resilience	Provide a mechanism for getting support in the workshop Invite consideration of resilience practices to set the stage for the next day
10 min	Closing Circle	Closing

* Breaks are not noted but should be taken as needed

DAY ONE: PREPARATION

❑ Write up the Agenda and Goals on large sheets of newsprint
❑ Tape a circle on the ground with masking tape for Comfort Zone tool (or use rope)
❑ Photocopy Handouts:
    ❑ Comfort Zone Concept

Ritual Welcome

TIME 10 MINUTES

GOALS
➢ Create safety by attempting to name and welcome many of the identities present in the group
➢ Name the range of diversity in the group and welcome it

DESCRIPTION

This welcoming is in the style of Process-Oriented Psychology. It is very adaptable to the group.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: Hello. I want to begin our time together with a Welcome.

- I want to welcome the spirit of the first peoples, the ancestors who inhabited this land, long before any foreign presence reached these shores. (Find out what nations and/or tribes lived on the land you are on, and mention their names).

- I want to welcome people who have traveled long distances.   (Specifically name states, provinces or countries are represented -- pause and invite more input).

- Welcome to long time social activists and those just beginning this work.

- I want to welcome transgender people, women, and men.

- I want to welcome people in their 20s, 30s, 40, 50s- 60s and above.

- I welcome all those who are single, married, partnered, sexually active, or celibate.

- Welcome to people who are lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, straight, or questioning.

- I want to welcome people who identify as people of color and those who identify themselves as white.

- Welcome to those who had to make childcare or parental care arrangements to participate in this event.   And give thanks to those who made it possible for you to be here.

- I want to welcome all the languages spoken by people here (try to know as many as possible ahead of time): Spanish, English, German . . .

- I welcome people who are enthusiastic to be here. I welcome people who are doubtful or unsure, or who left a lot behind them to get here.

- Welcome to those living with a chronic medical condition, visible or invisible.

- Welcome to all Survivors.

- I welcome different learning styles: Visual, Kinesthetic, Audio, Emotional

- I welcome the memories of those who support you to be here- those who make it possible- your families, mentors, and loved ones.

- Welcome to mystics, seekers, believers of all kinds

- I welcome into the workshop your emotions: your joy & bliss, grief, rage, imagination, contentment and disappointment.

- I welcome your dreams and desires and passions.

- Welcome to the spirit of our elders: Those here, in our lives, and those who have passed away.

- Anyone else who would like to be welcomed?

    Welcome!

Adapated from an activity written by Judith Jones, Training for Change, which was inspired by the work of Arnold Mindell and his colleagues in Process-Oriented Psychology.

One-Minute Introductions

GOALS

➢ Allow participants time to introduce themselves

➢ Encourage self-disclosure (this workshop is premised on sharing personal experience)

➢ Continue to build safety in the group

DESCRIPTION

One-Minute Introductions create a welcoming space and set a tone and energy for the workshop that invites sharing and participation, and encourages self-disclosure and risk-taking.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: How many people like to talk about themselves? How many people like doing this in front of a group of strangers? Well you will have an opportunity to talk about yourself right now.

SAY: Each of you will have one minute to stand in the front of the room and introduce yourself to the group. You may say whatever you wish, and you may introduce yourselves in whatever order you wish. You will each have one minute.

DO: Stand or sit at the side of the room, and wait until the first person steps up to the front of the room. Time each person's introduction. When the last person has gone, introduce yourself as well.

DO: Watch the group for strong emotions. Reinforce risk taking and rebel energy. Hold firm on the time- if people try to stop early, remind them that they have a full minute in front of the group. Please don't negotiate; hold everyone to the same standard: stand in front of the room, use the whole minute. (You can do this with lightness, humor, etc.)

SAY: How was that for you?

DO: Put people in pairs to debrief their reactions to the experience. Elicit a few responses in the return to the large group.

Adapted from an activity written by Training for Change, author unknown.

Mingle Get-to-Know-You   TIME 10 MINUTES

GOALS

> ➢ Offer an opportunity for structured interaction
> ➢ Continue to build safety through a shared, upbeat experience

MATERIALS

None

DESCRIPTION

The mingle (also called milling) is a kind of simultaneous interaction of the participants. The facilitator creates a limiting boundary, for example, within the circle of chairs participants have been sitting in. Participants are instructed to get up and move about within the boundary, to encounter each other, and to carry out a task.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

<u>DO:</u> Invite everyone to stand.

<u>SAY:</u> We're going to have another way to get to know each other, through an activity we call a "Mingle." Each person will get to share something they like to do when they're *not* thinking and talking about group resilience. For example, I love to ride my bicycle at night. When I say "Begin," find someone to share with, listen to what they also like to do, and then find somebody else.

<u>DO:</u> Encourage them to keep mingling if they get "lead feet" – finding another person to share with can feel risky at the beginning of the workshop!

Adapted from an activity written by Training for Change, author unknown.

Goal & Agenda Review   **TIME** | **15 MINUTES**

GOALS
➢ Set the stage for the training

DESCRIPTION

Reviewing the goals gets everyone on the same page, and lets people know what to expect from the training. The agenda review shows how the goals will be carried out.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: Write the workshop agenda and goals (listed below) up on two large pieces of newsprint and hang them somewhere visible.

Goals:

- o Gain greater self-awareness of personal and organizational responses to stress

- o Generate new options for building group resilience to unexpected events and common stressors

Agenda:

Day One:
- Warming Up and Setting the Stage

Day Two:
- 10am – Opening
- Exploring Stress Responses
- Organizations & Stress
- LUNCH
- Rituals In Our Lives
- How We Intervene
- Closing (4pm)

Day Three:
- 10am – Opening
- From Stress to Trauma
- Stress and Trauma Preparation
- LUNCH
- Options for Our Groups

- Taking it Back Home
- Closing (3:30pm)

SAY: This workshop is designed to support you to develop your skills in supporting collective and individual resilience to stress and trauma.

To support your INDIVIDUAL learning, it is the FACILITATOR'S job to build and hold the container for you.   You don't have to take care of anyone this weekend. By speaking for yourself, you allow and encourage others to speak for themselves. **Use this workshop as a laboratory where you can try on new behavior and try out new interventions for dealing with stress.**

Does anybody have any questions?

Trainer's Note

Should anyone ask whether they could skip a session (or tell you that they will have to skip a session), stress that attendance at all sessions is required. Explain that people who couldn't come to all the sessions have been turned away already (if that's true). Ask if they saw the advance publicity which said attendance at all sessions would be required. Work with them on whether they could postpone their engagement, exchange their theater tickets, celebrate their son's birthday at a different time, etc. **Do not negotiate any absences!** Hype the rare opportunity for the participants to focus on themselves and their learning for a whole weekend with their peers.

If they truly can't change their plans, then find out if they can come to this workshop another time.

This is tricky because you may be seen as inflexible right at the beginning of the workshop, but it will bear fruit later on in commitment to the workshop and strengthening of the container of safety, which is damaged easily by absences.

Maximize/Minimize Openness

`TIME` `25 MINUTES`

GOALS

> ➢ Engage participants in a process of becoming active and responsible for their participation and learning

> ➢ Identify strategies for maximizing openness

DESCRIPTION

Maximize/Minimize Learning is a powerful tool to help participants take responsibility for their own learning and identify personal strategies for them to make the most of the training!

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: "How, in your experience, do you maximize your own openness? For example, maybe a friend offers to show you how to use a new computer program, and you decide to risk getting annoyed at them! Or, you're in a group that includes people you don't know, and you're invited to share experiences of wellness and unwellness. How have you found that in your life you're able to maximize your own openness to learning, and to sharing parts of yourself?"

_DO:_   List the ideas on a large sheet of newsprint. Interact with the group, asking for an example or two, ask for hands on how many others have found that a way of maximizing the value. You are not asking them how other people can help them, or how the environment can be more supportive. The point of this exercise is empowerment. When a participant offers an idea that is not about what they have the power to do, explain again the intention of your question: What do **you** do to maximize **your** openness?

SAY: "How, in your experience, do you minimize your openness, to close yourself off to learning or to sharing about yourself?"

_DO:_   List the ideas on a large sheet of newsprint. Smile, assure them this is "honesty time," give permission for them to do self-disclosure. Interact a lot with them after the first one or two (not at the beginning). Ask them for examples at first, then ask them how that way of minimizing might show up in this workshop. Ask the group for a show of hands for others who sometimes do the same things.

SAY: "If one of these minimizing behaviors shows up in this training, what can you do to bring yourself back or stop it?"

_DO:_   Get some options from participants -- no need to write those up.

<u>*DO:*</u>   Have people turn to their neighbors and share: "What's one or two on this list that I might try (or, not try) to do during this weekend?" (This completes the   4-step process with a mini-application.)

Adapted from an activity written by
George Lakey, Training for Change

Buddy Pairs & Exploring Resilience

Note: If there isn't enough time on the first night, this exercise can be done the next morning.

TIME	25 MINUTES

GOALS

➢ Encourage cognitive access to resilience practices

➢ Set up a mechanism of support for participants to use for the rest of the training

DESCRIPTION

Using sentence completion, randomly assigned buddy pairs identify ways they can provide support for one another throughout the training.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: As we said, this workshop is about individual learning. However, we've found that individual learning is made easier, quicker, and deeper when you have support**.**

SAY: Get into two circles [one outside facing in and one inside facing out] with equal numbers of people in each circle. If you already know someone in this training, stay in the same circle that they do. I will play some music and while the music is playing the inside circle will move clockwise and the outside circle will move counter-clockwise. When the music stops, you stop where you are.

SAY: You may know that circle dances are one of the oldest dance styles, and are used by Greek, West African, Eastern European, American indigenous, Jewish and South American cultures, among others, to encourage togetherness and mark special occasions. In recent decades earth-based feminists have introduced spiral dance rituals to remember those who have passed on. In this workshop we're going to dance towards mutual support for our learning goals.

DO: Stop the music and have people pair up with the person directly across from them. This person will be their buddy for the remainder of the training. If there are an uneven number of participants, form one group of three.

DO: Have the buddy pairs find a place to sit and decide who is A and who is B. Ask A to raise hands. Ask B to raise hands.

SAY: I'm going read four sentences that each person will have an opportunity to

complete. Each time l start this sentence, you'll complete it by using the sentence stem. You'll complete that sentence stem over and over until I give you a new one to complete. For example: "I love to eat ice cream because…" I love to eat ice cream because it's delicious. I love to eat ice cream because it's a way to treat myself. I love to eat ice cream because it's a treat I can share with others.

The reason for using the sentence stem each time is you are reaching for something down inside and the sentence stem is a tool to help you do this. The A's will get the opportunity to respond first. The B's will listen with full attention. This is not a dialogue.

_DO:_   Start with Buddy A. Giving one minute for each sentence, read the following sentences one by one. Then do the same for Buddy B. If there is a group of three, tell everyone else to chat for a minute or two while you give the sentence completion stems to Buddy C.

> o *"One thing my people have done to protect us against harm is..."*
> o *"One thing the people that raised me did…"*
> o *"One thing I do to get through tough moments is..."*
> o *"Something I'd like to welcome more of into my way of interacting with the world during tough moments is..."*

_DO:_   If you notice any pairs not participating or conversing, give a gentle reminder of the purpose of sentence completion. Most people aren't accustomed to intentional support, so they don't know how to use it, and/or are embarrassed about using it.

_DO:_   Have the buddy pairs acknowledge their buddy in any way that feels appropriate. Return to large group.

Trainer's Note: Unless you have specific reasons to put certain individuals together with other individuals, randomizing has advantages, including the opportunity to go to an awareness layer deeper than usual by asking the question, "How is this buddy the perfect buddy for you?"

Setup of the activity is adapted from
"Buddy Pairs" by Training for Change

Closing Circle: Day One

TIME 10 MINUTES

GOALS
➤ Closing

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

<u>*DO:*</u>　Ask the group to stand in a circle.

<u>*SAY:*</u>　In one word, what is the attitude you want to bring to the group tomorrow?

<u>*DO:*</u>　Model for the group by starting out the circle, then do a go-around to your left.

DAY TWO: AGENDA OVERVIEW

Time	Exercise	Goal
15 min	Buddy Pairs Check-In	Set learning goals for the rest of the workshop
60 min	Endurance Scale	Offer a historical perspective on resilience Encourage refocusing from post-trauma to preparation for stress
40 min	Recognizing Stress	Support self-awareness and psychoeducation on stress response
50 min	Organizational Stress Response	Deepen awareness from individual to organizational level
60 min	LUNCH	
10 min	Energizer	Re-gather the group
45 min	Ritual Scavenger Hunt	Generate options for incorporating resilience-boosting rituals
40 min	Organizational Stress Interventions	
10 min	Buddy Pairs	Check-in on emotional well-being
10 min	Closing Circle	Close

*Breaks are not noted but should be taken as needed.

DAY TWO: PREPARATION:

❑ Prepare large-scale or taped-together chart paper for timeline
❑ Photocopy Handouts

Buddy Pairs: Goals Check-In   `TIME` `15 MINUTES`

GOALS
➢ Provide support for participants to use for the rest of the training
➢ Clarify what each person hopes to learn at this training

DESCRIPTION
> The buddy pairs which were established the night before meet, and each person sets learning goals with their buddy.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE
SAY: Last night we went over the agenda and goals for this workshop; you know a little bit about who else is here; and you've experienced a little bit of how we're going to lead the workshop. This time is for you to set some goals for yourself about what you want to learn this weekend. Your buddy will write these goals down for you, so that you both can refer back to them later on. Don't overwhelm yourself with goals, but come up with three or four meaningful ones for you. You won't have to share these with anyone except your buddy; no report-backs to the whole group. Questions? Go for it!

Endurance Scale

GOALS

> ➢ Offer a historical perspective for resilience
>
> ➢ Encourage refocusing from post-trauma to preparation for stress

MATERIALS

Easel pad paper, markers

DESCRIPTION

This activity gets participants thinking about everyday resilience – the practices, habits and routines that help us to "bounce back" and be unchanged by stress – through the lens of personal history.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: We are all "survivors" here, in the sense that we have survived challenges in our lives and have made it to this workshop. Those may or may not have been life-threatening challenges – the point is that we have learned something about keeping ourselves and our communities healthy. The fact of our being here means we also have ancestors who survived as well. Some have survived disaster going back several generations. Others of us have faced physical threats, moral or existential crises, and dark nights of the soul. We have found our way through age-related milestones. We're going to take some time to look at how we've gotten through tough times.

DO: Divide the group into trios, and have them sit facing each other around the room.

FIRST OPTION

Endurance Scale

DO: Ask them to draw two lines perpendicular to each other. The horizontal line is their **timeline**, from birth to the present.

SAY: Now we're going to write down experiences and events that have been particularly difficult for us. The vertical line measures the **intensity** or relative importance of each experience. If a given event was particularly stressful, traumatic or painful, it may be placed near the top. The events could be age-related, like puberty, or mark another stage of passing from child to adolescent to adult. They might mark an important loss or a realization that was difficult.

SECOND OPTION

Tri-Timeline

<u>DO:</u>   Instead of introducing a vertical line, ask them to draw three lines. "The first marks milestones for your survival as a people. You might define "your people" as several generations of your family; people who share your ethnicity, nationality or religion; or you may have another generational view of your people as a human species. Mark the most important events that your people have endured, as you have heard or might imagine them."

<u>SAY:</u>   Now, the second line. This line represents the history of your organization/group. This can be your neighborhood or tenant association, or another association, a sports team, a group of friends, or your family. Once again, depict the most significant challenges, stressful events or difficult milestones confronted collectively by the group.

The third and final line is your own "lifeline," from birth to the present moment.

<u>DO:</u>   Give them at least 20 minutes to fill out the timelines. Make sure to circulate and offer support to anyone having trouble filling out their timeline.

<u>SAY:</u>   Turn to someone near you, and check-in about how this activity has been. You may also want to get support in thinking about events for one of the three timelines.

<u>DO:</u>   Once most of the participants have finished their diagrams, invite them to share with their small groups, focusing in particular on patterns they notice in the events they have identified.

<u>DO:</u>   Each person will have three minutes to share something about their timelines. Instruct each group to appoint a recorder to keep track of common themes.

<u>DO:</u>   Next, ask them to switch their focus from simply describing the events, to the time that came before each one. "What did you, your group and your people do to prepare for these events? What came BEFORE that helped you get through those difficult times?" Offer an example from your own life. Remind them to keep notes. Encourage story-telling.

<u>DO:</u>   Harvest their responses, taking one from each group in random order, and harvest a list called "Ways to Prepare for Stressful Events." Affirm their contributions and offer psychoeducation on resilience, the use of rituals and other resilience practices.

DO: To close, instruct them to turn to someone near them and reflect on a kind of preparation that might be useful to enhance in their home context.

Recognizing Stress

TIME	20 MINUTES

GOALS

➢ Identify personal stress responses

➢ Introduce theory on mind-body connection

➢ Bridge to recognizing organizational stress

MATERIALS

Easel pad

Markers

DESCRIPTION

This activity invites reflection on how the participants experience stress in themselves and their organizations, building their self-awareness and their diagnostic skills. It also invites them to consider connections between individual and group stress responses.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: Form groups of three and distribute paper and markers. Ask the participants to draw an outline of their bodies. Then lead a guided visualization on "A recent time you were stressed. There may be several moments that come to mind, but pick one, preferably one that you remember clearly." While leading the activity, remember to direct their attention towards how they were feeling in their body, noticing any tension, their breathing, heartbeat, etc.

DO: Explain what it will be (Include diagnostic question "How many of you have done a closed-eye process, sometimes called a guided visualization . . .")

DO: Form sharing groups and ask them to sit in circles facing each other (3-4 in a group, maybe 5) Ask groups to decide who will share first, second, third . . .

DO: Prompt them to relax (model with deep breathing, letting go of tension in body)

SAY: "I invite you to remember a recent time when you felt stressed." "If you're remembering more than one time like that, choose one for this exercise."

"Bring it as vividly to mind as possible. What did you see? What sounds did you notice? Who else was around you? What were you feeling in your body? In your heart?"

_DO:_   Before asking them to come back to present awareness, "What showed up physically in your body during this experience? What was different about you, about the way you spoke, moved, were in relationship to others?"

_DO:_   When they return to the present moment, invite them to sketch reflections on how their bodies experience stress.

_DO:_   Invite the participants to share their personal stress responses in their small groups. After about five minutes inform them that half their time is up. When most groups appear nearly done, call time.

_DO:_   Harvest a list of "Stress Responses," and add-in theory on the body's coping mechanisms. If a mind-body-related response doesn't make the list, be sure to add it. Invite them to stand, and ask the participants to recall their body's response again, prompting them to consider where they usually hold tension.

_DO:_   Explain that stress can also show up in groups. Ask them to flip over their paper, and invite them to draw a representation of how stress and tension manifest in their group, working with a partner (preferably someone from the same social change group, if there is another person in the room).

_DO:_   Debrief with questions about their diagnostic impressions, and make a list of "Group Stress Responses." "How can you tell stress is showing up in your group? What are the warning signs?"

Offer theory on the connection between individual and group stress responses.

OPTIONAL: If there is still energy, pass around the "Stress and the Body" handout (Appendix A) and conduct a read-around.

Organizational Stress Response   `TIME` `20 MINUTES`

GOALS

> ➢ Generate options for responding to stressful/traumatic events

MATERIALS

Easel pad

Markers

DESCRIPTION

Using humor, participants demonstrate unhelpful responses to specific kinds of stressors and then create useful interventions for the same scenarios.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: Form groups of 5-7. Explain that although we have been focusing a lot of attention on stress prevention, we also need to be ready to respond to stressful events. Invite them to discuss in their groups how their organizations typically respond to stressful/traumatic events. Remind them that "stressful" can be very different depending on the context, from the dismissal or exit of a core member, to a violent event in the larger community.

DO: After about 15 minutes or when the conversations appear to be dying down, ask them to share and harvest the responses as "Kinds of Events," a list that will be used in the next activity. Then give them their next set of instructions.

SAY: You'll have 10 minutes to come up with a skit that dramatizes UNHELPFUL organizational responses to traumatic events. Please feel free to ham it up, but try to draw from your own actual experiences.

DO: Debrief for "Unhelpful Stress Responses."

DO: Watch for feelings of shame or guilt that may surface – reinforce with psychoeducation normalizing pathological stress response.

DO: For the generalization stage, split each team in half and inform them it's time for a

creative challenge. They'll each have 25 minutes to come up with 3 alternate responses for events on the list. Encourage them to scribe on easel pad paper. Each alternate response should include suggestions for the day after, the week after, the month after and the next year.

_DO:_   Invite the teams to share their strategies with the large group, one at a time. Harvest and scribe a list of "Stress Response Interventions."

_DO:_   Ask them to reflect on which of the interventions they would feel most comfortable suggesting in their home context, and which might be riskier to implement.

Ritual Scavenger Hunt

GOALS

➢ Generate options for resilience-boosting rituals

➢ Continue to invite self-disclosure

➢ Support kinesthetic participants

MATERIALS

Scavenger Hunt Handout

Easel pad

Markers

DESCRIPTION

The group uncovers its own hidden wisdom on the use of rituals and routines by using a "scavenger hunt."

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: Invite them to get with someone they haven't worked with yet in this workshop.

SAY: "What comes to mind when you think of the word 'ritual'?" Take a few responses, popcorn-style.

DO: Note that there is broad diversity in what could be considered a ritual, but for our purposes, they are activities that are performed for their symbolic value. They demonstrate intentions, teach about values, and serve broader goals. Give a few examples from your own life. (For instance, when my mom's family gets together, we always spend at least one entire afternoon and evening making and eating a special soup, and telling stories from her homeland. This is never explained, we just do it.)

SAY: Rituals are often also used by our organizations, sometimes unconsciously. For example, opening meetings with a check-in question, or holding an annual retreat to examine our history.

SAY: Are there any fun rituals, or traditions or ceremonies? Well, this probably isn't one of those! This is a game! Each team will have five minutes to find as many rituals as

you can, and then scribe them up on the easel pads. The team that completes the task with the most integrity wins! *(wink)*

DO: Tell them to begin. After five minutes (or more for a large group) end the exercise.

DO: Ask each pair to get with another pair to compare notes. Have them look for themes or commonalities.

DO: Debrief in the large group for common elements, and be sure to leave time for each person to explain how each ritual they reference is used and how they have seen it be beneficial. Simultaneously harvest lists of "Rituals" (briefly noting the name and purpose of the ritual) and "How Rituals/Traditions Boost Resilience." Invite them to offer others that are not yet on the list.

DO: Offer theory on protective factors stimulated by the use of rituals and ceremonies, like the development of strong social bonds.

DO: Finally, invite them to think about which of the rituals they learned about would be most useful to their group.

For Handout:

Find one example of a ritual, ceremony or tradition from the participants in this workshop to address each type of scenario/goal:

- Strengthen bonds between people
- Pass on group/family memory & history
- Mark anniversaries
- Teach about values
- Pass on stories & lessons
- Honor people (living or passed on) or important events
- Welcome or say goodbye
- Stay balanced when being overwhelmed
- Heal conflict or physical pain
- Acknowledge ancestors, roots
- Express gratitude

TRAINER NOTE
This activity can also be adapted as a stand-alone intervention, either to support self-awareness about rituals present in the lives of individual group members or towards another kind of inquiry. For example, the prompts could be geared towards self-diagnosis ("find someone who thinks they know one way we have coped with stress recently as a group") or resilience promotion ("find someone who has an idea for something we could do to boost our resilience for the next time the City Council votes against our agenda").

"In-the-Moment" Interventions   `TIME` `20 MINUTES`

GOALS

  ➢ Support greater self-awareness of personal organizational stress response style

  ➢ Practice designing resilience-boosting interventions "in the moment" for specific scenarios

MATERIALS

Group descriptions taped to the four walls, but covered up.

DESCRIPTION

This activity adapts Laura van Dernoot Lipsky's theory on organizational stress response – itself adapted from native traditions around the world – as a point of departure for participants to design "in-the-moment" interventions.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

<u>DO</u>:   Read them one of the following scenarios, based on your judgment of which will be most relevant for the particular group:

Your organization has been preparing for its annual celebration for nearly three weeks. Several people have begun dedicating up to double their normal hours to the preparations, and in the process have made less time for their own personal wellness activities, like going to the movies and sleeping. One gets sick in the middle of May and is out for a week. There is more tension between group members; sometimes it seems as if the slightest miscommunication leads people to snap at each other. Still, the date to the event draws closer each day, and the list of tasks remains high. Many group members since that there is a problem, even as they remain busy yourself with their own tasks.

A key member of the group announces s/he is leaving abruptly the following week. No reason is given, and with only six other members left this will leave a distinct burden on the others.

A tragedy has struck the community – two people your group often works with in partnership with have died in a car accident.

Your organization has invested months of energy into a campaign that fell short of its goals. You gathered your people together on the final day and noted the many positive accomplishments accrued, doing your best to declare victory and set an upbeat tone for the road ahead. But over the next month, as together you all struggle to regroup and define next steps, several core volunteers stop

showing up to planning meetings. Despair hangs in the air, but everyone struggles on – failure is never mentioned openly.

<u>DO:</u>   Explain that four approaches are being advocated by group members. Explain each, simultaneously uncovering its description on each wall as you go.

Group 1 – Support emotional recovery and building unity, focused on people who feel bruised

Group 2 – Look at how this reflects the future plans and vision for the group

Group 3 – Act immediately to move the group forward towards its goals

Group 4 – Re-focus on this incident in the context of the group's history

<u>DO:</u>   Invite participants to consider which of these most strikes them as the appropriate approach for this scenario.

<u>DO:</u>   Encourage them to move into one of the groups and begin discussing specific interventions to use to support the group in the scenario. If anyone is unsure or confused, meet with them in the center.

<u>DO:</u>   Circulate among the groups and assist any that are having trouble. Make sure they are generating interventions.

<u>DO:</u>   Invite them to share what they've come up with and their considerations for each, and scribe up both a list of "Interventions" and "Considerations for Interventions." If using a crisis scenario (such as the death of a group member), offer theory on considerations for crisis interventions, as appropriate.

<u>DO:</u>   Ask them to return to their small groups and invite them to generate other options for resilience or wellness practices that could be useful six months later.

<u>DO:</u>   Describe Laura van Dernoot Lipsky's theory on the "five directions," and its basis in the Medicine Wheel and Celtic Wheel of Being. Distribute handout.

<u>DO:</u>   Invite them to reflect with someone in another group how their choice of intervention level in this activity relates to their typical response in their home group context.

Buddy Pairs: Emotional Wellbeing Check-In

GOALS

➢ Provide support for participants who may be experiencing strong emotions

➢ Check-in on learning goals

DESCRIPTION

Buddy pairs offer each other support after a long day of recalling emotional experiences and planning interventions that may be emotionally "loaded."

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: We're coming to the end of day two, and we've done a lot of work today. We started out looking at our own personal and organizational timelines, and ended by putting our experience into practice designing resilience-boosting interventions. Now might be a good time to check-in with your buddy about how it's been for you today, and to ask for their support holding onto key reflections you want to take back home with you. Feel free to walk around the space if you'd prefer that to sitting. You'll have ten minutes.

Closing Circle: Day Two

TIME 10 MINUTES

GOALS
➢ Closing

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

_DO:_   Ask the group to stand in a circle.

SAY: Bad news: the sky has fallen. It's very heavy, so we're going to have to work together to get it up again. We've got to grab it at the edge and pull up at the same time…

_DO:_   Model for the group by dramatizing the heaviness of the sky (dramatic grunting, huffing and puffing are encouraged!) and tell them they have to yell to make it stick. Count down 3, 2, 1…

_DO:_   Afterwards, ask each person to bring an object in the morning that represents something they've learned about getting through tough times.

Adapted from "Life the Sky" activity, unknown origin.

DAY THREE: AGENDA OVERVIEW

Time	Exercise	Goal
25 min	Altar Sharing	Model a flexible opening ritual Continue inviting self-disclosure
60 min	Village Game: Stress to Trauma	Clarify the distinction between stressors and progression to trauma response Support self-awareness of trauma exposure response
10 min	Buddy Goals Check-In	Offer participants an opportunity to check-in on their learning goals, and setup the next activity
60 min	LUNCH	
15 min	Individual Time	Support reflection on learning goals
40 min	Fishbowl: Getting Support	Generate options for dealing with real-world challenges
25 min	Taking it Back Home: Application	Practice integrating new learning and suggesting new practices in home context
10 min	Buddy Closing	Close out buddy relationship
15 min	Closing Circle	Close

*Breaks are not noted but should be taken as needed.

Protective Factors Altar Sharing   `TIME` `25 MINUTES`

GOALS

➢ Model a flexible ritual opening activity

➢ Offer an opportunity for continued reflection on protective factors

➢ Continue to build group safety through invitation for increasing self-disclosure

MATERIALS

Altar – can be a simple piece of fabric stretched over a low table or a large pillow, adorned with a lit candle or other simple decorations, or a more elaborate construction.

DESCRIPTION

Participants share protective factors that have contributed to their own resilience using the style of a sacred or solemn ritual.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: Welcome everyone. Invite them to place their sacred objects on the altar.

DO: Invite participants to share something about their objects, and how it represents their ability to "get through," in the order "that the spirit moves you/you feel called to do so…" If participants offer comments on the activity or the words of others, encourage them to allow space for silent reflection, "there will be time to debrief this activity later."

Adapted from "Altar Sharing," origin unknown.

Village Game: From Stress to Trauma

GOALS

> ➢ Clarify the distinction between stressors and trauma exposure

> ➢ Support self-awareness of stress/threat response

> ➢ Build the group container through a shared kinesthetic challenge

MATERIALS

Lots of crayons/markers
Easel pad
Some clothing change can be great (e.g. suit or tie)

DESCRIPTION

Participants get to roleplay responding to a stressful event and then use the experience to reflect on how their organizations have responded over time to stressors, using Bessel A. Van der Kolk's theory of trauma progression.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

<u>DO:</u>   Tell the group that this is their chance to create an ideal community. Divide into small groups (4 to 6 in size) and give each group large newsprint on the floor. Ask the group, "What would you like to see in an ideal community or village?" When people give examples, give them markers and encourage them to draw or represent their ideas on the paper at their feet. As ideas proliferate, give out markers to the various groups and encourage them to draw together. Announce they have ten minutes to draw. Give updates on the time.

<u>DO:</u>   After 10 minutes, ask groups to "take a tour": looking at the other communities and explaining their community to others. Then invite people to return to drawing for one more minute, to add anything more to the community. For this exercise to work well, it is important for each group to feel attached to their created community. At the end of one minute, take away markers.

<u>DO:</u>   Then, slide smoothly into a trainer role change, informing participants that you are the CEO of a multinational corporation. As you are telling them information about your corporation, circle the papers, until finally you step in and snatch some of the paper – for your factory, or plant, or mall or whatever. (You might even have a marker to mark

up their community – e.g., to add a McDonald's.) Continue taking away paper in small amounts and continuing to talk about the advantages of development, etc. *It is imperative to time your paper snatching so that it is slow enough that groups are not devastated, and have motivation to organization.*

<u>DO:</u>   More activist/confrontational groups will be able to tolerate faster snatching, "beginners" will need you to go *very* slowly. You do *not* want to create despair. Nor do you want to "win." Continue to take away paper until the group has organized sufficiently against you so that they have had an experience of nonviolent action. If the group is completely unable to organize itself to resist you, simply end the game.

<u>DO:</u>   Debrief the roleplay for feelings, first. Support them to stay in touch with their feelings before allowing the debrief to progress to analysis. "What happened? What was it like having the community taken away? How did you respond?" Encourage them to think in terms of sequential steps: First the "developer" did this, then we responded this way, then we talked to each other to come to a consensus, then s/he started taking more…

<u>DO:</u>   Acknowledge that this was a very specific roleplay scenario and may not look like their typical organizational stressors. Invite them to reflect on how their responses to this roleplay might be similar to their organizational responses to stressful or traumatic situations. How do their organizations respond to an urgent threat or a crisis, and how are the impacts felt after the crisis has passed? Ask them to discuss this in their small groups.

<u>DO:</u>   After about 10 minutes, debrief their answers. Offer Bessel A. Van der Kolk's definition of how stressors prompt a progression through the stages of trauma, and the Trauma Exposure Response graphic from *Trauma Stewardship*. Invite discussion on how the participants have seen stressful situations become traumatic, and scribe up a list of "Signs of Trauma Exposure." Offer the handout "How to Cope in a Crisis."

Adapted from an activity created by Training for Change

Buddy Pairs: Goals Check-In

GOALS

➤ Provide support for participants

➤ Allow an opportunity to check-in on learning goals

➤ Support self-disclosure for the next activity (Fishbowl)

DESCRIPTION

The buddy pairs meet again to check on their learning goals with their buddy.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

<u>SAY:</u>   We've only got lunchtime and the afternoon left in the workshop. Now is a good time to check-in with your buddy, specifically on your learning goals for this workshop. There will also be an activity after lunch in which you'll have the opportunity to get support from the group on a challenge related to building resilience. You might want to talk over that opportunity with your buddy.

<u>DO:</u>   Allow them to continue with their check-in until lunch is ready.

Fishbowl: Getting Support

GOALS

> ➤ Provide a structured method for soliciting support with actual organizational

challenges

> ➤ Generate creative options

MATERIALS

Chairs arranged in an inner circle and an outer circle

DESCRIPTION

This activity gives participants an opportunity to give each other support – in the form of questions, suggestions, advice – on real-world challenges they're currently facing, or have dealt with in the past.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

_DO:_   Ask the participants to get with someone they haven't worked with much this weekend. "You're about to get time to get support from your fellow resiliency explorers in designing interventions for your particular group context, through something called a 'fishbowl.'" Invite them to share with their partner 1-2 organizational challenges that they might get help on from the group.

SAY: These should be challenges that you have come up against in a group in the community, at work, in your house, with your family, or another group. They might provoke stress responses, or might be related to a trauma from which the group is still feeling the effects.

_DO:_   Setup the fishbowl. Place five chairs in a circle inside the large group. Invite four people to sit in the chairs before giving the instructions. Now invite one person to share one of their challenges with the small group. Explain that there will be multiple opportunities both to share and to receive support from the group in developing options for boosting resilience and changing or perturbing a group's stress response. Ask that person to take the fifth seat.

SAY: When I say "begin," our first explorer will describe the challenge s/he has come across, and will get advice from the others in the inner circle. If others have ideas for

her/him, they can "tap in" from the outside group and replace someone on the inside.

_DO:_   Run the fishbowl. If the discussion peters out early, try jump-starting it with a question to someone in the inner circle. Sometimes people in the inside circle develop "lead feet," leading to a stagnant fishbowl. Look for participants on the outside who seem eager but might be hesitating – encourage them to jump in.

_DO:_   More than other activities in this curriculum this one may surface strong emotion. Be prepared to step in to support the person expressing emotion if the "mainstream" group sentiment is not supportive of emotional expression.

_DO:_   After running the fishbowl with a few different "explorers" at the center, invite them to return to their partner from the beginning of the activity and share how they might apply the suggestions offered to the challenges they brainstormed and did not get to discuss in the fishbowl.

Taking it Back Home: Applying the Concepts

TIME **20 MINUTES**

GOALS

➢ Provide an opportunity to gather lessons from the workshop for application in participants' home contexts

MATERIALS

None

DESCRIPTION

Participants have an opportunity to practice sharing the most important moments from the workshop with other people in their home context.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

_DO:_   Separate the group into two parallel lines, facing each other. A good way to find out if each person has a partner is to ask them to shake hands. If there's an odd number, have one person pair up with you.

_DO:_   Point out to them that they have (almost) successfully completed a workshop on group resilience, which is grounded in research on mental health and emotional wellness. "Since very often we are taught in this society that only mentally ill people can benefit from mental health promotion, a belief that often trickles down into our social justice groups, it can be useful to prepare to have conversations with people who might be skeptical. When they ask them what you learned this weekend, what do you want them to know?"

_DO:_   Identify each line as either "A" or "B". Explain that line "A" will be participants of this workshop returning back to their home context to share insights with another group member about how they can strengthen their own group's resiliency. Participants in line "B" will be other group members. Line "A" will have to share a compelling insight to line "B" to get them interested in hearing more.

SAY: "Remember, you only have a few minutes to make your case."

DO: When the conversations have died down or descended into laughter, call time. Debrief for the feelings of line "A", and ask line "B" what was most compelling about what they shared.

DO: Note the different approaches being offered. You might offer theory around storytelling: stories have a beginning, middle and an end, are often made more compelling with a dramatic "twist." For instance, maybe you came to this workshop skeptical, and suddenly pushed through your own skepticism to reveal a connection between your work back home and mental health.

DO: Ask them to think about what might be both the most important and most difficult learnings to share. Invite them to try those out in this activity.

DO: Then ask them to switch roles, and run the role-play again. Debrief the same way, and note any commonalities in "what worked" between the two.

Adapted from the "hassle line" activity created during the
Black Freedom Movement, unknown origin.

Buddy Closing & Closing Circle   TIME 20 MINUTES

GOALS
➢ A time for closing and sharing personal feedback between buddies
➢ Closing the workshop

DESCRIPTION
> Buddies reflect on their time spent together, and share observations and feedback about each other's strengths. Participants come together for final circle to close the workshop.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

SAY: As a way of closing your time with your buddy, give them some feedback using these sentence stems (3-4 min each way):

> o   A way I have seen you shine in this workshop is…
>
> o   One hope I have for you in the future is…

_DO:_   Ask them to stand up with their buddy and mingle with others while answering the question "One way I have seen you shine in this training is . . . " After there have been enough rounds of the mingle invite participants to make a circle as they continue to ask and answer the question. The exercise ends (and the workshop) with everyone in a closing circle.

SAY: This is the end of our time together. We're all about to go back to our everyday lives, which may feel quite different from how we interacted together here. You just spent a moment with your buddies sharing and now we are all standing together. Look around the circle and acknowledge the other participants in any way that feels appropriate.

_DO:_   Once the energy has died down, begin the closing circle.

Closing Circle: Day Three

GOALS

➢ Closing

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: The group should already be standing in a circle from the last activity. Invite them to think of one new insight they are taking away about how to build resilience.

SAY: Some of you may have seen pictures of mangroves or banyan trees. They grow rooted together along coastlines, they can withstand high and low salinity, flood conditions and droughts, and they keep the shore from washing out to sea. As we each report back, we're going to build a resilient group mangrove by interlocking and building on the contribution of each person. Whoever wants to can begin.

DO: Acknowledge the group.

"Stress and the Body Handout"

Stress Affects the Entire Body

We carry our stress with us for a lifetime. Our bodies have biological systems that respond to life-threatening danger, acting like fear alarm systems that are critical for survival. When faced with a threatening situation, such as being attacked by a tiger, a flood of hormones and chemical messengers is released into our brains and bloodstream almost instantly.

These hormones rapidly shift our energy resources away from noncritical tasks, and toward more critical tasks that are required for survival. Energy is shunted to the brain and the muscles to help us think fast and run quick, and away from the stomach and digestive track as well as the reproductive system, since we are not now under a time pressure to eat lunch or reproduce.

This stress-responsive activation of biological systems helps us to shift our priorities in use of resources and energy, and to focus the body in a variety of ways on doing whatever it takes to survive. If we later encounter a similar threatening situation, specific fear-related areas in the brain turn on more quickly and activate the fear areas with greater efficiency, because the stress hormones more strongly engrave the circumstances surrounding the life-threatening event in memory, by acting on brain areas that are involved in memory.

The short-term survival response can be at the expense of long-term function. For instance, release of stress hormones can cause thinning of the bones, ulcers, and damage to a part of the brain involved in memory. Surprisingly, the same biological systems that help us survive life threats can also damage the brain and body.
A central theses of this book is the development of the idea that stress-induced brain damage underlies and is responsible for the development of a spectrum of trauma-related psychiatric disorders, making these psychiatric disorders, in effect, the result of neurological damage.

Another primary thesis of this book is that there is no true separation between what happens in the brain and what goes on elsewhere in the body. Our old distinctions – between mind and brain, psychology and biology, mental and physical – increasingly appear to have no meaning as science deepens our understanding of how the mind and body function in health and disease. This leads us to the final thought that stressors, acting through a depression or disruption of mental processes, can translate directly into an increased risk for poor health outcomes, including heart disease, cancer, and infectious disease, in addition to the increased risk for psychiatric disorders.

Bremner, D.J. Does Stress Damage the Brain? Understanding Trauma-Related Disorders from a Mind-Body Perspective. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002. Pages 3-8
More…

Many of these effects are mediated by increased release of the body's hormonal systems – including cortisol – that act like fire alarms to mobilize resources of the body in life-threatening situations. The hormones cortisol and adrenaline travel throughout the body and brain and have a number of actions that are critical for survival during life-threatening danger.

Adrenaline has a number of actions in the body, including stimulation of the heart to beat more rapidly and squeeze harder with each contraction, whereas norepinephrine acting in the brain helps to sharpen focus and stimulate memory.

Blood pressure increases to increase blood flow and delivery of oxygen and glucose (necessary energy stores for the cells of the body to cope with the increased demand). There is a shunting of blood flow away from the gut (digestion of the pasta salad you had for lunch can wait for awhile) and toward the brain and the muscles of the arms and legs.

The spleen increases the release of red blood cells, which allows the body to send more oxygen to the muscles. The liver converts glycogen to glucose, the type of sugar that can be immediately used. Breathing becomes heavy, so that extra oxygen can get to the lungs, and the pupils dilate for better vision.

Release of endogenous opiates acts on the brain to dull our sense of pain, so that the pain of a physical injury incurred during an attack does not impair our ability to escape from the situation. More delayed stress responses include release of cortisol, which dampens the immune system (we are less likely to die immediately from an infection than from an attacker), and conversion of fat to glucose in the liver.

These stress hormones can have more insidious, detrimental long-term effects. For instance, excessive levels of cortisol result in a thinning of the lining of the stomach, which increases the risk for gastric ulcers. Cortisol also results in a thinning of the bones, which increases the risk of osteoporosis or bone fractures in older people, or impairment in reproduction.

Other diseases that have been linked to stress include heart disease, diabetes, and asthma. Stress also impairs the immune system, which can lead to an increase in infections and possibly even increased rates of cancer. Chronic stress with decreased blood flow to the intestines can result in chronic ulcers.

High-Risk Stress Simulation

Blanket Game: Enacting Stress Response   `TIME` `20 MINUTES`

GOALS

➢ Examine organizational stress response through enactment

➢ Generate options for dealing with stressful moments

MATERIALS

Blanket or sheet. This should be measured in advance based on the group size. If, after 10 minutes, the group appears to have made no progress flipping the blanket due to its size, announce that one person can step off the blanket to help the group strategize. Increase to two or more if necessary.

DESCRIPTION

This activity supports looking at a group's stress response in the moment and examining options for dealing with stress. It is a higher-risk activity that is not encouraged for groups without a strong container of safety and preparedness for risk-taking. This activity is especially suited to a group with a high acceptance of physical closeness and in which the group members feel very safe around each other.

RUNNING THE EXERCISE

DO: Place a blanket on the floor. Have the group stand on the blanket (they should be only slightly packed on the blanket).

DO: Then, give them the challenge: turn the blanket over (flip it over) without anyone stepping off the blanket. (So no leaving the blanket, leaning on walls, getting on each other's shoulders, etc.) Some groups may take longer than others, allow the group to take as long as it takes. If the group steps off the blanket, or someone steps on the ground, start over again. It's a very do-able task!

_DO:_   After the group completes the task successfully, help the group self-reflect. Invite them to reflect on the feelings that came up for them. Give ample space to process – some people can be triggered by particular aspects of being packed-in with a task to complete.

_DO:_   Ask them what they did that helped them get through this difficult moment. Encourage a focus on specific behaviors, like asking for direction, supporting others, breaking the rules, etc.

_DO:_   Find a segue into the generalization stage. "What are other ways this organization/a group your part of deals with being overwhelmed?" Harvest a list of "Practices for Dealing with Group Stress."

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