

Leadership as a Driving Force in Organizational Culture

(adapted from R. Scott Graham, Principled Leadership in Mental Health Systems and Programs: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers, 2009)

The connection between leadership and organizational culture is paramount. Leaders drive the organizational culture with the development of mission, vision and values and the operationalization of those factors in agency policies, procedures and practice. Leaders can learn the skills and competencies necessary to move their organizations forward to create a recovery focused and trauma informed environment. "Many if not most of the fundamental differences between organizations are due to differences in the quality and effectiveness of the leadership." (Anthony & Huckshorn 2008).

In order to help leaders assess and develop their competencies and skills, Anthony and Huckshorn have identified principles they see as critical to the development and sustainability of an effective and efficient recovery focused organization. These principles encompass both the science and the art of leadership and require not just the attainment of needed skills and competencies but the use of self in leading.

If you are not yet a recovery focused organization and are thinking of embracing these cultures, you can start by talking with your leadership team about how your organization operates, and whether together you are willing and able to support the changes required to integrate and sustain a recovery focused culture. *(Note: while this has been developed around recovery-focused cultures, these principles are equally valid for trauma informed organizations as well.)*

It is important these tough conversations include the leadership at all levels of the organization and demonstrate an open, respectful and participatory process, as an example of how recovery focused cultures operate.

Principles of Leadership

Below are seven principles of leadership, along with questions to help you consider how your team performs given the priorities of a recovery-focused organization.

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Principle 1

Leaders communicate a shared vision

Leaders who can communicate a shared vision promote strong, healthy organizations which lead to excellence in service provision and outcomes.

- How is your mission, vision and values communicated in your organization? Should there be other vehicles for communicating them?
- What are the barriers to promoting a unified mission, vision and values?

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Principle 2

Leaders centralize by mission and decentralize by operations

Leaders make sure all policies, procedures, and operations are in alignment with the mission, set clear expectations and then get out of the way.

- How does the sharing of an organization's mission provide consistency in quality of service provision?
- Are operations centralized or decentralized in your organization? If they are decentralized provide some examples. If not, how would you begin to decentralize?
- Discuss some examples of how your organization manages by adhering to your mission.

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Principle 3

Leaders create an organizational culture that identifies and tries to live by key values

A great leader "walks the talk." The leader's communication and behavior are consistent with the organization's values, and values are applied fairly and equitably throughout the organization and all its practices.

- Does your organization have a set of explicit organizational values? Are they in writing?
- Can you give examples of how you and leadership behave and communicate in accordance with your organizational values?

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Principle 4

Leaders create an organizational structure and culture that empowers their employees and themselves

Great leaders readily recognize the contributions of empowered employees and reflect on their own performance as well. Continuous quality staff development is embedded and embodied in the organization.

- Can you share how empowered employees at your organization have a positive impact on the quality of your services?

- Can you give some examples of how your organization empowers employees or how it might do more in the future?

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Principle 5

Leaders relate constructively to employees

A leader consistently treats all staff fairly, equitably, and professionally, modeling exceptional interpersonal skills at all times leading to the development of trust in the leader.

- What modes of communication do you use in your organization and which are the most effective?
- Give examples of how the leadership at your organization relates constructively to staff.

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Principle 6

Leaders access and use information to make change a constant part of the organization

A leader constantly assesses data and asks, "why or why not"? They take the information they learn and act on it to improve services.

- What kind of information do you collect in your organization and do you use it to make change management decisions?
- If not, how could you use data differently?

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Principle 7

Leaders build their organization around exemplary performers

Leaders recruit, mentor, support, and grow exemplary employees. They are not threatened by someone's talent or experience but understand that this experience and expertise can benefit other staff, service participants, and the organization.

- What is the difference between managing and leading your employees?
- How does your organization build itself around exemplary performers? Can you think of other ways you could do so?

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References

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Anthony, William A & Huckshorn, Kevin A. (2008) *Principled Leadership in Mental Health Systems and Programs*. Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston, Mass.

Graham, R. Scott. (2009). *Principled Leadership in Mental Health and Programs: A Guide for teachers and Trainers*. National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, funded by SAMHSA.

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