Working with Fear and Resistance when Fostering Contemplative Spaces

ACMHE webinar with Loretta Pyles, PhD
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Friday, September 27, 2019
Opening Guided Meditation:

Grounded presence
“We cannot bypass the human journey. It is the cocoon that releases our spirit.”

--Mark Nepo
Learning Objectives

- Explore practical contemplative techniques, including somatic, mindfulness, and inquiry-practices, to work with fear and resistance
- Learn how compassion, trust, and surrender can be powerful forces for generative change
- Discuss some basic ideas in organizational change theory to address systemic resistance
- Review previous lessons learned in how to work with fear and resistance
Comfort Zones, Learning Zones and Trauma

The discomfort zone, courtesy of Training for Change.
Disentangling Fear and Resistance

- Normalization versus exceptionalism
- Adaptive responses versus trauma responses
- Leaning in versus avoidance
- Transformation versus managing
- Surrendering versus controlling
- Compassion versus judgment
## Sources of Fear, Experiences, and Defense Mechanisms

**Sources**
- Self
- Students
- Colleagues
- Institutional
- Socio-Economic/Cultural

**Experiences**
- *Somatic*: Tension; constriction; palpitations; butterflies; numbness; tiredness
- *Emotional*: Worry; agitation; confusion; sadness
- *Cognitive*: Narratives, stories, beliefs

**Defense Mechanisms**
- Overcompensation
- Projection
- Derided as “woo-woo” or “hippie-dippie”
- Checking out
- Doubt
- Sabotaging
Stories that Feed Fear and Resistance

– **Self:**
  – “I have to do this alone.” “I’m out here on my own doing this.” “I’m the only one that cares about this stuff.”
  – “I’m going to get fired.” “If anybody finds out I’m doing this, I’ll be in trouble.”
  – “Everyone hates this.” “I’m not qualified to do this.” “I’m not good enough to do this.” “Who do I think I am?” “I have to do it perfectly.”

– **Colleagues/Institutional:**
  – “This is not traditional pedagogy.” “This is too ‘out there’.” “This is too touchy-feely.”
  – “This is neither productive nor efficient.” “This is a waste of time.” “This will not result in desired outcomes.”

– **Students:**
  – “This is not learning.” “This is not real knowledge.” “This seems like something for kindergarteners.”
  – “This is not my thing.” “I’m not a good meditator.” “I don’t believe in this stuff.” “I’m just too uncomfortable.”
Working with Stories and Beliefs

- Could this be objectively true? Who would determine whether it was true or not?
- What stories from the dominant culture does it resemble?
- What stories from my family of origin does it resemble?
- Where else have I seen these beliefs appear in my life?
- What would happen if I let go of this story?
Supports for Working with Fear and Resistance

- Contemplative practices
- Communities of practice with colleagues
- Reinforce connections to personal values and align actions with values
- Transform the challenges and fruits into something shareable with others (presenting at academic/professional conferences including ACMHE; doing a study; publishing)
- Organizational change
Contemplative Practices for Working with Fear and Resistance

- Grounding Presence, Somatic experiencing
- Cultivating Expansiveness
- Movement, Art
- Ritual, Nature
- Noting, Journaling
- Breathing practices
- Set of 3 Inquiry Questions: (with gratitude to Miranda Macpherson)
  - Tell me something you fear when facilitating contemplative spaces.
  - Who does this fear belong to?
  - What’s alive in the space beyond fear?
Planned Organizational Change

Template for a Force Field Analysis

Change Goal:

Critical Actors:

Facilitating Actors:

Potential Allies:

Driving Forces for Change:

Restraining Forces for Change:

-Kurt Lewin

THANK YOU!
Questions?

To learn more or to reach out:

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