NEITHER LIBERTY NOR SAFETY: THE IMPACT OF FEAR ON INDIVIDUALS, INSTITUTIONS, AND SOCIETIES, PART II

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ABSTRACT *This is the second in a series of four papers that look at the ways that minds and bodies of individuals are affected by severe stress and use that as a way of developing a deeper understanding of what happens to stressed individuals who come together to form stressed organizations and the impact of this stress on organizational leaders. The series will also explore the parallel process that occurs when traumatized individuals and stressed organizations come together to form stressed societies. Part I focused on the basic human stress response. In Part II, we will begin exploring the more extended impact of severe, chronic, and repetitive exposure to stress on the functioning of the emotional system, the ways in which human beings tend to adapt to adversity and thus come to normalize highly abnormal behaviour.*

UNMANAGEABLE AFFECT AND AGGRESSION: LOSS OF 'VOLUME CONTROL'

Infants are born with a number of raw 'affects', the word used to describe the biological building blocks of emotional experience. At birth we have only two settings for our internal emotional 'switch': on and off. As a child develops, caregivers, and later peers, model and teach the management of these raw affective states so that affective arousal comes to match the degree of importance of the stimuli. As early as 11 weeks, babies have already learned to match their mother's expressions of sadness, anger, fear and happiness and have begun to join these expressions with behaviours that suggest that matching is meaningful. They are also beginning the lifelong process that involves using information about emotion to make decisions for their own behaviour, including looking to other people to know whether they should engage in certain behaviours (Salovey and Sluyter, 1996).

As a result of this complex process, by the time we reach adulthood losing a pen should not arouse the same intensity of loss as losing a beloved pet; a neighbour's dog going through your trash (probably) does not arouse the same degree of anger as the neighbour smacking your child; a terrorism alert in another country does not produce the same level of fear as it does when the same alert occurs nearby. We call this

emotional modulation our 'volume control', using the analogy of a knob on a radio or amplifier. Although there is enormous cultural variation in the methods each culture uses to manage specific affect states, all cultures teach their children to do so. Emotional management is critical to learning and the capacity to exercise reasoned judgement. Emotions prioritize thinking by directing attention to important information. Emotions are sufficiently vivid and available to be used as aids for judgement and memory. Emotional mood swings change one's perspective, encouraging multiple points of view, and emotional states differentially encourage specific problem approaches (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Children who are exposed to repeated experiences of overwhelming arousal do not have the kind of safety and protection that they need for normal brain development and therefore they may never develop normal modulation of arousal, and this severely compromises their capacity for emotional management. As a result they are frequently chronically irritable, angry, unable to manage aggression, impulsive, and anxious. This compromised emotional management interferes with learning and the development of mature thought processes. Emotional dysregulation is a dangerous handicap for the individual and for the group because it is so likely to lead to violence directed at the self or others.

Children – and the adults they become – who experience compromised emotional management will experience high levels of anxiety when alone and in interpersonal interactions. They will understandably therefore do anything they can to establish some level of self-soothing and self-control. Under such circumstances, people frequently turn to substances, like drugs or alcohol, or behaviours like sex or eating or risk-taking behaviour, or even engagement in violence, including self-mutilation, all of which help them to calm down, at least temporarily, largely because of the internal chemical effects of the substance or behaviour. Human beings, human touch, could also serve as a self-smoothing device, but for trauma survivors, trusting human beings may be too difficult.

As children or as adults, the experience of overwhelming terror destabilizes our internal system of arousal – the internal 'volume control' knob that we normally use to regulate our emotions. People who have been traumatized lose this capacity to 'modulate arousal' and 'manage affect'. Instead of being able to adjust their 'volume control', the person is reduced to only an 'on-or-off' switch, losing all control over the amount of arousal they experience to any stimulus, even one as unthreatening as a lost pen or a neighbour's dog. They tend to stay irritable, jumpy, and on-edge. It takes only a relatively minimal fearful stimulus for them to experience terror and their own typical defensive reactions to fear.

To complicate the situation further – emotions can kill. It is possible to die of fright or to die of a broken heart. Most frightened people do not die, however, because of the built-in 'safety valve' that we call 'dissociation'. Dissociation is defined as 'a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity, or perception of the environment' (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Dissociation buffers the central nervous system against life-threatening shock. Through the dissociation of affect we are able to cut off all our emotions and in extreme cases of repetitive and almost unendurable trauma this is known as 'emotional numbing'. We can

also dissociate from the overwhelming event itself so that there are no words available to even recall the event (amnesia). The failure to remember the events or to connect the emotions associated with the events with the memories of the events can doom the person to re-enact the traumatic events later in life (Van der Kolk, 1989; Terr, 1990). Emotions are built-in, part of our evolutionary, biological heritage and we cannot eliminate them – we can only suppress them and this may not generally be a good thing to do. There is an abundance of evidence from various sources that unexpressed emotions may be very damaging to one's mental, social, cognitive and physical health (Pennebaker, 1997).

The failure to develop healthy ways of managing emotional arousal also interferes with relationships. Mature emotional management endows us with the abilities to interpret the meanings that emotions convey regarding relationships, to understand complex feelings, and to recognize likely transitions among emotions. The gradual acquisition of this emotional intelligence allows us to monitor emotions in relation to ourselves and others while giving us the ability to manage emotion in ourselves and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasant ones without repressing or exaggerating the information they convey (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Compromised emotional management skills are also one mechanism of intergenerational transmission since these skills build up over time in the interaction between parent and child. Parents who have compromised skills will be unable to provide the important emotional learning experiences that their children require. Instead, the children will adapt to the parental style of managing emotions.

LOSS OF 'VOLUME CONTROL' IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

How does an organization 'manage' emotional states? It does so through the normal problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict-resolution methods that must exist for any organization to operate effectively. Although most organizations within our society function in a fundamentally hierarchical, top-down manner, in a calm, healthy, well-functioning system there is a certain amount of natural democratic process that occurs in the day-to-day operations of solving group problems, making decisions in teams, and resolving conflict among members of the organization. The more complex the work demands, the greater the necessity for collaboration and integration and therefore the more likely that a system of teamwork will evolve. For a team to function properly there must be a certain level of trust among team members who must all share in the establishment of satisfactory group norms. These are the norms that enable the group to tolerate the normal amount of anxiety that exists among people working on a task; tolerate uncertainty long enough for creative problem solutions to emerge; promote balanced and integrated decision making so that all essential points of view are synthesized; contain and resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise between members of a group; and complete its tasks.

For groups, as for individuals, emotions routinely inform the thought processes of the group and are critical to group learning and judgement; therefore group emotional processes must be constructively managed and contained. This is frequently the critical job of leadership. The more at ease the leader is with promoting democratic processes and transparency while minimizing the

potentially negative impact of hierarchical structures, the more effective the group problem solving is likely to be. In exerting democratic leadership he or she is thereby reducing the abusive use of power while promoting more creative problem solving and diverse input enabling the evolution of far more complex strategies. The greater the availability of conflict resolution techniques, the greater the willingness on the part of all group members to engage in, and even welcome, conflict as a stimulant for creativity and change. When there is less conflict avoidance there are likely to be far fewer long-standing and corrosive buried resentments.

In organizations under stress, however, this healthier level of function is likely to be sacrificed in service of facing the emergency. Hierarchies can respond more rapidly and mobilize action to defend against further damage. Problems similar to those we witness in individuals under chronic stress occur, however, when this emergency state is prolonged or repetitive. Organizations can become chronically hyperaroused, functioning in crisis mode, unable to process one difficult experience before another crisis has emerged. Hierarchical structures concentrate power and, in these circumstances, power can easily come to be used abusively and in a way that perpetuates rather than attenuates the concentration of power. Transparency disappears and secrecy increases under this influence. Communication networks become compromised as those in power become more punishing, and the likelihood of error is increased as a result. In such a situation, conflicts tend to remain unresolved and tension – and resentment – mount under the surface of everyday group functioning. Helplessness, passivity, and passive-aggressive behaviours on the part

of the underlings in the hierarchy increase while leaders become increasingly controlling and punitive. In this way the organization becomes ever more radically split, with different parts of the organization assuming the role of managing and/or expressing different emotions that are then subsequently suppressed. This is not a situation that leads to individual or organizational health but instead to increasing levels of dysfunction and diminished productivity.

In an organization under stress the loss of 'volume control' or 'affect modulation' is evident in emotional extremes and high levels of prevailing tension. At one extreme there may be an emotional numbing, with a severe constriction of emotional expression. Walking into such an environment, one can sense an atmosphere of depression, apathy, a lack of energy, silence and constriction. An absence of humour, camaraderie, and playfulness is evident. In such a depressed organization, an employee can bounce into work in the morning, on top of the world, and upon entering the office experience a sense of clouded misery accompanied by the sensation of an oppressive weight dropping down like a mantle over one's shoulders. Activity may be slowed, workloads become suffocating, thinking is banked down to a minimum, productivity declines. There is also likely to be a high level of illness among the members of the organization.

At the other extreme is the volatile organization, characterized by too little containment of unruly emotions. In such an environment there may be a great deal of free-floating hostility and aggression. This is a climate that supports and encourages bullying and other forms of overtly destructive behaviours. It may also be a climate that supports the use of addictive substances and behaviours. Humour may be

'September 11 may go down as one of the most tragic events in modern history not only because of the thousands of deaths it caused but also because it so seriously distorted American perceptions about itself and the world. It has knocked America down into a dank and dangerous cul de sac, making it susceptible to apocalyptic visions of darkness rather than motivating it toward high visions of human possibility.' (Garrison, 2003, 45)

present but used as a weapon and therefore likely to be brash, provocative, and frequently aimed at a vulnerable individual or group. Volatile organizations are readily provoked to heightened arousal and minor crises are blown up to be major threats. It requires little provocation for a volatile organization to attack an external enemy. Organizations that respond to stress in this way are likely to become 'addicted to crisis' and if external forces are not assailing them, internal conflicting forces will take over the role to guarantee that nothing gets focused on except the response to the immediate threat. Such climates are likely to tolerate excessive drug and alcohol use and misuse, workaholism, and other forms of self-abuse.

Chronically stressed organizations, like individuals, may go through recurrent cycles of these emotional management difficulties. The organizational style is likely to be greatly influenced by the emotional management style of the leaders and likewise, the leaders may be chosen as a response to the emotional management

'We are truly "sleepwalking through history". In my heart of hearts I pray that this great nation and its good and trusting citizens are not in for a rudest of awakenings. To engage in war is always to pick a wild card. And war must always be a last resort, not a first choice. I truly must question the judgment of any President who can say that a massive unprovoked military attack on a nation which is over 50 percent children is "in the highest moral traditions of our country". This war is not necessary at this time. Pressure appears to be having a good result in Iraq. Our mistake was to put ourselves in a corner so quickly. Our challenge is to now find a graceful way out of a box of our own making. Perhaps there is still a way if we allow more time.' (US Senator Robert Byrd, speech to the US Senate, 21 February 2003)

style of the organization. When there is a loss of volume control, minor threats may be blown up into major security breaches, crisis follows and creates crisis. Rumours fly, hasty conclusions are drawn. Propaganda and misinformation can have its most powerful impact on an organization in this state. All combine to urge action that may be precipitous.

Conflict in a group is inevitable and as long as sufficient resources for conflict resolution exist, conflict is a spur to constructive change and growth. However, under stress, groups experience conflict as dangerous and impedance to unified group action. Parties who dissent from group action are likely to be silenced aggressively and in this way emotional conflict is suppressed. The resulting negative and distressing emotions, however, cannot be tolerated to remain within the group since they are so contagious. Instead, the anger is displaced outward onto an external enemy. This form of group affect management can easily lead to conditions that become fertile for warfare between groups, particularly if two groups are both utilizing the same projective mechanisms to manage intragroup conflict.

Organizations under stress may engage in a problematic affect-management process that interferes with the exercise of good cognitive skills, known as 'groupthink'. When groupthink is occurring members try so hard to agree with one another that they commit serious errors that could easily have been avoided. An assumed consensus emerges while all group members focus on the ways they are all converging and ignores divergence. Counterarguments are rationalized away and dissent is seen as unnecessary. All group members share in a sense of invulnerability that is conveyed by nothing except the fact that they are in it together – such a group of intelligent people could not be mistaken. At least temporarily, the group experiences a reduction in anxiety, an increase in self-satisfaction, and a sense of assured purpose. But in the long run, this kind of thinking leads to decisions that spell disaster (Janis, 1982; Forsyth, 1990).

Conformity is another potentially problematic affect management process that occurs in group settings and was well documented by experiments conducted by Solomon Ash. He demonstrated that when pressure to conform is at work, a person changes his opinion not because he actually believes something different but because it's less stressful to change his opinion than to challenge the group. In his experiments, subjects said what they really thought most of the time, but 70% of subjects changed their real opinions at least once and 33% went along with the group half the time (Forsyth, 1990).

LOSS OF 'VOLUME CONTROL' IN A SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The inability to manage emotions properly can be recognized on a national and international level as well. In a society not doing well with 'volume control' we would expect to see a high frequency of self-destructive coping skills like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual addiction, compulsive spending, greedy acquisition, a preoccupation with risk-taking behaviour and violence. Anger is a particularly difficult emotion to manage in a chronically stressed individual, organization, or society and therefore chronic stress predicts heightened levels of aggression; a preoccupation with weapons, violent amusements, and violence connected with sexual behaviour.

'. . . after 9/11, George W. Bush squandered a unique moment of national unity. That instead of rallying the country around a program of mutual purpose and sacrifice, Bush cynically used the tragedy to solidify his political power and pursue an agenda that panders to his base and serves the interests of his corporate backers.' (Franken, 2003, xv)

Simultaneously, there may be an atmosphere of gloom, loss of humour and extreme gravitas. Alarms are sounded, rumours fly, misinformation abounds. All urge forward action with little consideration of the long-term consequences or 'collateral damage' of the actions taken. Meanwhile, under the impact of stress, the voices of moderation in any group are ignored or remain silent, succumbing to the heavy psychological and emotional atmosphere. The negative emotions that abound in such an atmosphere are contagious, and are exacerbated by the extremist verbal attacks played out on talk radio and advanced by TV pundits.

In the United States, since 11 September, power has become enormously concentrated in the Executive branch of government, and dissent has been stifled directly and indirectly. Government secrecy has escalated to unparalleled levels. The repetitive nature of the security alerts that alarm the public without providing any directions for specific response, produce both heightened fear and anger that is contagious and a sense of helplessness that eventually may result in numbness to response. The Patriot Act, hurriedly approved – and largely unread – by a Congress exiled from its anthrax-contaminated offices, combined with the

'There was a sort of groupthink, an adopted storyline: We are going to invade Iraq and we are going to eliminate Saddam Hussein and we are going to have bases in Iraq. This was all a given even by the time I joined them, in May of 2002, the discussions were ones of this sort of inevitability. The concerns were only that some policymakers still had to get onboard with this agenda. Not that this agenda was right or wrong – but that we needed to convince the remaining holdovers.' (From an interview with US Air Force, Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski in Cooper, 2004)

Homeland Security Act, has compromised civil liberties and seriously disturbed the system of checks and balances that is so necessary for a healthy democracy. Meaningful conflicts in basic assumptions about the nature and appropriate response to the situation cannot be adequately worked through because a culture of inquiry is not tolerated – criticisms of the Bush policies are labelled disloyal or unpatriotic (Susskind, 2004). Conformity to this 'party line' is strenuously promulgated. As a result, problem-solving and decision making – largely confined to a small circle of right-wing ideologues – and the repetitive and now chronic stress state of the entire nation, is creating a situation that is dangerously undermining to the function of a democratic system.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESPONSE: LOSS OF VOLUME CONTROL

When the potent impact that trauma has on the emotions of survivors is recognized, the obvious need is to develop techniques for helping people manage their emotions more effectively. With individuals we can use psychotropic medications to help people more effectively manage their emotions while they are making long-lasting change. But it is difficult to imagine an effective medical response for an entire organization, much less a society.

What we can do is educate people about the nature of stress and its impact on human groups, warning them about the potential negative outcome of crisis-based decision making, the tendency to silence dissent, the inclination to project onto an external enemy in order to solidify group cohesion, and the subsequent loss of complex problem-solving skills. Systems are required that build and reinforce the acqui-

sition of what has been termed 'emotional intelligence', including the development of important stress-management techniques that help groups of people 'think through' a crisis situation, and inhibit unnecessary action that may do more harm than good (Goleman et al., 2002). The group can agree to a 'meta-rule' that insists that any rule or policy created under conditions of stress will be in force for a time-limited period and then reviewed after the crisis has passed. This can help protect an organization against the kinds of knee-jerk changes in policy, position, or philosophy that can easily occur in a crisis situation but that if left in play can adversely affect the well-being of the organization as a whole. A group can learn to recognize the powerful drive to develop command hierarchies under stress, a tendency that can be resisted, or utilized only to the extent that such a command structure facilitates rapid response in times of real need. With this type of conscious recognition democratic processes are less likely to be eroded.

In a crisis when people's affect management is obviously compromised, it is important to provide accurate and balanced information, to root out false rumours. Sensationalistic reports provide short-term excitement but over the long haul tend to produce apathy. The role of the media in a crisis is critical. Television and radio reporters especially have influence over their tone of voice, facial display of emotions, and body gestures as well as the actual content of the material they are delivering. Emotional contagion is a very real phenomenon and happens within one-twentieth of a second (Hatfield et al., 1994). Balanced, calm reporting may not be what people *want*, but it is what they need.

In times of crisis, people look to their leaders for guidance about how to manage

the fear that threatens to overwhelm them and that can dangerously inhibit logical reasoning. Leaders can model a balanced, calm approach or a radical, raging and dichotomized approach. Those seeking greater power are likely to seize the moment of crisis as an opportunity to enlarge their scope of influence. Regardless of their previous history, when they voice sentiments that cater to the instinctual needs of crisis-focused human beings – even when those instinctual desires are not necessarily in the best interests of long-term survival – they are far more likely to be heard and given what they want by a populace desperate for someone strong to tell them what to do. Crisis is an opportunity for bullies to gain ascendance within any organization because their sense of confidence, outwardly directed aggression, and willingness to take control appeals to people who feel helpless and scared.

Leaders can, of course, model an entirely different approach in recognizing and directly countering the effects of stress in the people they govern. Leaders rise to positions of leadership in part because they seem able to manage their own emotions more successfully under stress than members of the more general population. But often their apparent superiority is a matter of having better skills at disguising stress rather than not experiencing the effects of stress. In bringing diverse voices together in a crisis, in encouraging reasoning and careful deliberation, in soliciting many ideas, in calling upon people to provide mutual support, by inspiring everyone to hold to a higher vision, leaders can provide everyone in the organization with effective affect management tools that do not lead to a systemic abuse of power.

Any organization and the society as a whole can increase its level of emotional intelligence by taking seriously the importance of emotional management and setting expectations that everyone – from the boss to the new employee – will learn to manage their own emotional states effectively without overly suppressing them. The insufficient containment of social anxiety leads to bouncing stock markets, panicky behaviour, and increased calls for action regardless of how dangerous to future safety and security that action may be. Under such conditions there is an increased likelihood that 'groupthink' mechanisms will be put into play. Bullying and other forms of organizational aggression so typical of life in America are as important to stop in the workplace and in the society as in the classroom. A national example of this problem is located in the American equation that more guns equals more safety, while denying the clear reality that more guns equal more deliberate and inadvertent deaths and an overall increase in societal danger. This is similar to the equation individual victims make when they equate enhanced coping with cocaine or alcohol abuse and thus compound their problems for the sake of short-term relief.

Many of the maladaptive symptoms that plague our social environment – substance abuse, risk-taking behaviour, suicidal and other forms of self-destructive behaviour – result from the individual's attempt to manage overwhelming emotions related to repetitive exposure to overwhelming stress. These solutions, though effective in the short-run, are clearly detrimental in the long term. However, many of our organizational and societal responses are punitive rather than corrective. It makes no sense to further punish the already downtrodden. Punishment frequently rebounds back on the punishers sooner or later, often creating a situation worse than the original one. For

example, in developing an increasingly punitive response to drug abusers, we have greatly increased prison and costs to society, overburdened the criminal justice system, imprisoned a significant percentage of historically oppressed minority groups, and failed to inhibit drug abuse. Meanwhile, money that could have gone into preventing the development of conditions that promote exposure to violence of the nation's children is funnelled into this punitive and largely unsuccessfully system. If we fail to protect children from overwhelming stress, then we can count on creating life-long adjustment problems that take a toll on the individual, the family, and society as a whole. If we expect people to give up their self-destructive addiction to substances and damaging behaviour, then we must be willing to substitute supportive human relationships. Managing aggression that is directed either at the self or others is the most challenging aspect of developing health promoting systems that can adequately address the needs of trauma survivors. Creating environments that consistently endorse and model social norms of non-violent interaction are critical (Bloom, 1997, 2000).

ADAPTATION TO ADVERSITY: HELPLESSNESS

Human beings deplore being helpless. In fact a situation is not traumatic unless we are helpless to prevent it. Placed into situations of helplessness we will do anything to escape the situation and restore a sense of mastery. If we are helpless, we are out of control. The sense of losing control over what is happening to us and of not being able to protect ourselves triggers rising feelings of fear that edges into panic. Fear precipitates the compulsion to fight or flee

but when you can do neither the biologically induced state of hyperarousal, with its accompanying feelings of fear and aggression, is toxic to mind and body. Too much stress can kill you. Frozen by the forbidden possibility of taking action, the stressed person can do nothing but adapt to the changed and aversive conditions. Helplessness in the face of danger threatens our survival and our carefully established sense of invulnerability and safety. Under conditions of repeated exposure to helplessness we are compelled to adapt to the helplessness itself, a phenomenon that has been termed 'learned helplessness' (Seligman, 1992).

Like animals in a cage, with enough exposure to helplessness we will adapt to adversity and cease struggling to escape from the situation thus conserving vital resources and buffering the vulnerable central nervous system against the negative impact of constant overstimulation. Later, rather than change situations that could be altered for the better, we will change our definitions of 'normal' to fit the situation to which we have become adapted. Even when change is possible, our formerly adaptive response of simply buckling down and coping can create a serious obstacle to positive change, empowerment, and mastery. This may contribute to the dynamic of revictimization.

As a result of this adjustment, people who have had repeated experiences of helplessness will exhibit a number of apparently contradictory behaviours. On the one hand they are likely to demonstrate 'control issues' by trying to control other people, themselves, their own feelings – anything that makes them feel less helpless. At the same time, they are likely to be willing to turn over control to substances or behaviours that are frequently destructive.

They are also likely to turn over their own sense of authority to anyone who appears confident, seems to 'know what they are doing' and who promises to restore a sense of safety and security. Under conditions of desperation and fear, people may have difficulties discriminating between abusive and healthy authority and may be willing to give up control to abusive authorities.

The adjustment to adversity also keeps them from making positive changes when they could do so. Once a human being has adjusted to adverse conditions, these conditions are accepted as normative. Changed conditions become a habit. We are basically conservative creatures and we resist changing habits once we have developed them and the more the habit formation has been associated with danger and surviving a threat the less likely we are to change it and the more likely we are to resist attempts to get us to change. Instead we shift our internal norms. For people who have had to adjust to repeated threats, their internal although usually unexpressed normative and guiding philosophy is 'better the devil you know' and 'things can always get worse'. Once we have reset our norms, we tend to repeat the past over and over again, which only works when the past is worthy of being repeated. When the past is a traumatic one then we are likely to be victimized again and again in a progressively downward spiral, while we internally believe that there is really nothing we can do about it – it's just the way things are.

ADAPTATION TO ADVERSITY IN AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

In an organization that is adapting to adversity we are likely to see escalating experiences of helplessness, passivity, and passive-aggressive behaviour on the part of
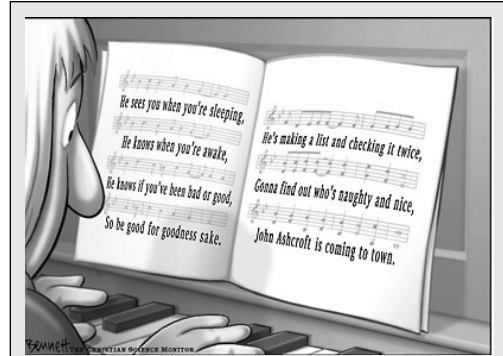
'Privacy is the bedrock of other freedoms – to think, to differ, to worship, to create households, to pursue intimate relationships. It depends on a tacit assumption that the government will not be watching or listening to what we seek to shield from public view . . . After 9/11, the administration proposed an array of new interventions into the privacy of daily life . . . Liberty can be eroded in many small steps as well as a few big ones. And the administration's zeal for privacy erosion continues in new proposals for ever greater surveillance measures. (Kathleen M Sullivan, 'Under a watchful eye: incursions on personal privacy' – Leone and Anrig, 2003)

employees, while those in authority tend to become increasingly controlling. Healthy and active responses to problematic situations may actually require relinquishing or sharing control but organizations in the grip of this dynamic are unable to adequately respond and will actively resist power sharing. This situation lends itself to the emergence of controlling and even abusive authority figures, while those reporting to these figures may become increasingly obedient, even to directives that they believe are ill-advised, unethical, or just wrong.

'The government of the United States reacted to the terrible events of September 11, 2001 with sweeping policy departures at home and abroad. To date, there has been remarkably little debate about many of the changes in national policy, especially those that have significantly compromised the civil liberties of US citizens. Yet history teaches us that bypassing public deliberation almost inevitably leads to outcomes that the nation ends up regretting.' (Richard C. Leone, 'The quiet republic: the missing debate about civil liberties after 9/11' – Leone and Anrig, 2003)

Under crisis conditions, obedience to authority may be life saving. Someone in a position of authority, or someone with the confidence to assume authority, gives orders that may help us to survive and we automatically and obediently respond. However, if the authority is abusive, wrongheaded, or leading us 'down the garden path', the outcome for the individuals involved and for the group as a whole, may be disastrous. After World War Two, psychologist Stanley Milgram wanted to understand how so many otherwise reasonable people could have willingly participated in the Holocaust. What he found was startling and disturbing. In the experimental setting, 65% of his experimental subjects would obey an authority and administer shocks to another person even when the victim cried in pain, even when he claimed heart trouble, even when he pleaded to be freed. When assured by apparently legitimate authority that there was good cause for the experiment they overrode their own sensory impressions, empathic responses and ethical concerns and automatically obeyed authority without questioning the grounds on which this authority is based or the goals of established authority. In his conclusion, Milgram warned: 'A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority' (Milgram, 1974).

Dissenting voices are silenced. Over time, there is a loss in what are frequently quite natural democratic processes within the organization. This leads to a loss of ability to deal with complex situations. Dichotomous thinking increases as does projection onto external enemies and even former allies become enemies. As this situation continues, it further compromises the ability to resolve complex problems.

The erosion in previously held democratic norms within an organization does not happen overnight. There is an insidious process of adjustment and readjustment as control measures are instituted, the numbers of rules and regulations are increased, and punitive measures for responding to infractions in these rules are instituted. Because the change is gradual, not sudden, the entire organization adjusts to the adverse conditions, which are always
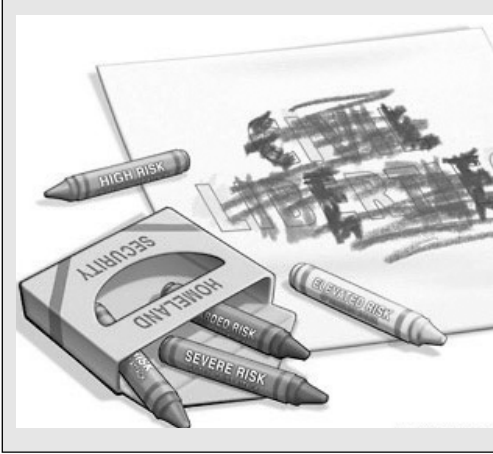
'The struggle against terrorism could continue for generations, and we run the risk of finding ourselves on a slippery slope, making decisions in which freedoms that are set aside for the 'emergency' become permanently lost to us. In the end, the freedoms we abridge in the interests of security will be largely the result of choices that we, not the terrorists, make.' (Richard C Leone, 'The quiet republic: the missing debate about civil liberties after 9/11' – Leone and Anrig, 2003)

created in the name of 'safety' or 'security' from some perceived negative environmental force or 'control' over negative influences within the organization itself. As the changes are accepted they become the new social norms and therefore the very definitions of normal, expectable conduct within the organization change, even while actual behaviour is becoming increasingly aberrant and even ineffective. When someone mentions the fact of the changed norms, about the differences between the way things are now and the way they used to be (when the organization was more functional), the speaker is likely to be silenced or ignored. As a result there is an escalating level of acceptance of increasingly aberrant behaviour toward clients, toward and among staff, and toward leaders.

ADAPTATION TO ADVERSITY IN A SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The issue today is the same as it has been throughout all history, whether man shall be allowed to govern himself or be ruled by a small elite. (Thomas Jefferson)

Socially as well as individually, we adapt rapidly to adverse conditions and the more

'September 11 introduced a discontinuity into American foreign policy. It created a sense of emergency that the Bush administration skillfully exploited for its own purposes. Violations of American standards of behaviour that would have been considered objectionable in normal times came to be accepted as appropriate to the circumstances, and the president has become immune to criticism, because it would be unpatriotic to criticize him when the nation is at war with terrorism.' (Soros, 2003, 13–14)

'...And we're supposed to report anyone behaving unusually.'

stressful the circumstances are, the more reluctant we are to change that adaptation once we have made it. As a result, we adjust to appalling situations and then simply accept them as unchangeable norms. At a societal level, apathy and passive acceptance of the status quo can become so great that people do not even bother to vote, as so frequently happens in the United States. In refusing to perform this basic civic duty, people demonstrate not only their protest but also their sense of helplessness.

As they refuse to exert the influence they have as citizens it gives license to the more injured elements in society to give free rein to their destructive impulses leading to a further deterioration in social norms. As vast numbers of people adjust to changed social norms, only rarely does anyone call to memory that not only was it not always this way, but it doesn't have to be this way now. The changes are simply accepted as inevitable. In fact, the voices of those less injured parties, those who do believe that the present reality could be changed for the better, are first ignored and ridiculed, then labelled as divisive, even dangerous, malcontents who should be censured, or are simply called naïve, absurd 'utopians', wishing for a society that never did and cannot ever exist.

A crisis may mobilize participation but the stressed state of the leaders may have the unfortunate consequences of silencing opinions that challenge their own. This is

'People are not aware of how dramatic the changes are partly because the changes are seen as a continuation of tendencies that have been in effect for some time and partly because they are seen as concomitant of the war on terrorism. Yet September 11 marks a transition when the abnormal, the radical, and the extreme became redefined as normal.' (Soros, 2003, 16)

'Now just act normal.'

'We parents spend much of our time absorbed in nurturing thoughts about school and doctors and the perfect play date – but very little time thinking about the world these painstakingly brought-up children will face as adults.' (Hirsh, 2003, xiv)

'... No, Dick isn't running for cover...'

particularly true when those voices are attempting to bring to mind past social norms that endorse calm deliberation, collaboration, and reasoned action and how these are being threatened by the emerging crisis. As leaders become more focused on taking aggressive action, the social norms consistent with a warrior culture will be used to counter voices of dissent and calls for reason to prevail in the situation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESPONSE: ADAPTATION TO ADVERSITY

The fact that human beings adapt so quickly to adversity and then are slow to make changes, even when they are able to do so, suggests that they form habits easily, particularly when a particular behaviour has been associated in some way with threats and surviving those threats. Changing those habits will take experimentation, multiple tries, and much repetition. Exposure to helplessness means that interventions designed to help people overcome traumatizing experiences must focus on mastery and empowerment while avoiding further experiences of helplessness. The prolonged hyperarousal and the loss of the ability to manage emotional states appropriately, both of which accompany traumatic exposure, imply the need to understand that many behaviours that are socially objectionable and even destructive are also the individual's only method of coping with overwhelming and uncontrollable emotions. If they are to stop using these coping skills, they must be offered better substitutes – most importantly, healthy and sustaining human relationships.

One does not have to be a Luddite to believe that changing is not always for the best, that in fact we seem to often 'throw out the baby with the bathwater'. As individuals and in groups we commonly fluctuate between extremes instead of finding a moderate place of planned, organized, and constructive change based on a vision of where we really want to go. Stressed organizations and stressed societies do not take the time to envision the future in anything but the vaguest of terms and it is difficult to get somewhere if you have to idea where you want to go.

'The history of civil liberties in America, like the history of civil rights, is a story of struggle. Even in peacetime, Americans have engaged in an ever-changing negotiation between the demands of liberty and the demands of order and security . . . In most crises, governments have [used] the seriousness of their mission to seize powers far in excess of what the emergency requires. At such moments, it has been particularly important that vigilant citizens make the case that the defense of

'Have you seen any dangerous-looking characters?'

our liberties is not an indulgence but rather an essential part of our democratic life.' (Alan Brinkley, A familiar story: lessons from past assaults on freedoms, in Leone and Anrig, 2003, 23)

Likewise, it is hard to discern the potential risks and obstacles involved in getting where you want to go without understanding how you got to where you are.

Since habit formation and changing norms happens so readily and usually out of conscious awareness, healthy organizations and societies must assess how they have arrived at the present in order to formulate a strategy for moving into the future. A healthy response to changed social norms is to create a new, internally consistent, values-based vision for everyone to strive toward. A ship that has headed off course may require time and the expenditure of significant energy and resources to steer back on course. A healthy plan is likely to involve a combination of retaining the old and achieving something new – evolution not revolution.

This requires the ability and willingness to look at the patterns of the past, including reviewing past mistakes and poor judgements. Given enough information and a sufficient number of intelligent, reasoning, and diverse minds, it is possible to anticipate future outcomes of present decisions. To do so however, requires curbing the powerful human tendency under stress to see oneself in only positive terms while demonizing the other. Beating the tribal drums and demonizing a sabre-toothed tiger serve the interests of the tribe. Demonizing an entire class, race, nation or religion is a prescription for disaster. Unlike the tiger, 'they' are always just as smart and vengeful as we are.

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