Trauma-Informed Leadership Research 2024

Understanding Transformational Impact: Pocket Project Report

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What is transformational change in the context of the Pocket Project's work?

- <u>What is Transformation</u>: Transformation is a shift in our ways of understanding, engaging with, and relating to the patterns of trauma that manifest in ourselves, in our collectives / teams, and in our wider systems. This process of transformation involves a greater ability to work with and integrate trauma which can enable new insights, processes of relational restoration, and shift repetitive and reactive patterns of being and doing.

- <u>Why is Transformation Necessary:</u> Trauma occurs when the bodies and minds of individuals and collectives are not able to process and integrate an overwhelming experience. This leads to unconscious and repetitive patterns of being and doing that are driven by the need to avoid past trauma or have similar experiences in the present and include reactions such as hyperactivation (fight/ flight/ freeze response), numbing (collapsing, absencing, lack of compassion) and fragmentation (polarisation, separation, isolation, othering, loneliness). Over the course of human history these trauma patterns have become pervasive as individual, collective, and ancestral trauma have accumulated within cultures and systems and they are now driving many of the global crises that humanity is facing. Trauma-informed practices and processes of trauma integration are what are needed to address these challenges.

- <u>What is the Deep Dimension of Transformation:</u> Unresolved individual, collective and ancestral trauma are the root causes of many of the world's crises as they reduce people's ability to sense and respond to the world around them. Unconscious and reactive patterns of being and doing reduce people's ability to experience and relate to themselves, others and the living world perpetuating cycles of violence, destruction, and injustice. The same reactive patterns also prevent the insights, creativity and collaboration needed to address global challenges. Deep change involves becoming aware of these unconscious trauma patterns and working with unresolved trauma and those dark and unpleasant experiences that have been suppressed, avoided, and denied by individuals and collectives. Over time this can result in a deep shift from unconscious, frozen, and contracted ways of being and doing to those that are more receptive, fluid, expansive and able to respond to the world's challenges.

- <u>How does Transformation Happen:</u> Transformation is a process of healing that involves moving from trauma-inducing and trauma-blind systems and cultures to ones that are trauma-informed and trauma-restorative. The process involves developing trauma-informed ways of understanding and acting that acknowledge and work with the existence of trauma

and trauma patterns. This creates the foundation for individual and collective processes of trauma-integration that can increasingly be with, and learn from, traumatic experiences leading to new insights, possibilities, and ways of being, doing and relating. The process of trauma-integration also creates the potential for the restoration of relatedness between individuals, collectives and the living world including the ability to resolve ethical transgressions, learn from each other, and collaborate better. This process of transformation happens gradually through individuals and collectives developing their capacity to work with trauma and creating and expanding 'pockets of healing' within existing cultures and systems.

- <u>What is the Organisation's Role in Supporting Transformation:</u> The Pocket Project supports the emergence of a global healing movement of trauma-informed individuals, collectives and organisations that are able to create 'pockets of healing' that are able to address and integrate 'pockets of trauma'. In order to do so, the Pocket Project researches and raises awareness of trauma and the need for trauma-informed approaches, provides training for trauma-informed leadership and practice, supports communities of practice, and designs and facilitates processes of collective trauma integration that work with both past trauma and current trauma inducing situations. These initiatives support the ability and agency of individuals to work with and respond to trauma patterns in a way that does not perpetuate them while also contributing to supportive contexts where trauma integration can occur.

- <u>How does the Organisation do Change Differently:</u> The Pocket Project approaches transformation as a continuous process of healing. Rather than trying to change people or solve situations, the idea is to provide resourcing for individuals, collectives and systems to turn towards trauma and enter into their own process of healing. A healing process that does not have an end and is not trying to get rid of trauma, but to continuously integrate traumatic experiences so that individuals and collectives can hold trauma more spaciously, learn from it, and incorporate these experiences into their lives without becoming identified with them. This is a process of change that is understood as unpredictable, uncontrollable and which moves at its own pace through cycles that involve resourcing for healing, turning towards trauma, staying with it, taking it in, going away, learning from it, resourcing, coming back etc. A gradual process that slowly melts the ice of trauma and may take generations depending on how deep or extensive the trauma is.

HOW DOES THE POCKET POCKET KNOW WHEN TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IS HAPPENING? (INDICATORS)

INDICATORS OF TRANSFORMATION BASED ON THE POCKET PROJECT LITERATURE AND INTERVIEWS:

- New healing architectures are developed in individuals' spheres of influence e.g. support systems for self-regulation, co-regulation, active listening, support systems for the centering of marginalised voices, acknowledging ongoing systems of privilege and oppression.

- Individuals and collectives have a new or greater ability to turn towards, go towards, or to stay in places of confusion, suffering, pain and deep discomfort e.g. experiences of hyper-activation / stress, numbness or separation, conflict.
- The existence of non-emergent and repetitive processes is being acknowledged and presenced with more spaciousness and potential for initiating healing impulses.
- There is a greater understanding of the root causes of reactivity which enables greater compassion and ability to stay in a listening mode.
- Conflict and other challenges have become a valued source of learning and growth within teams and organisations.
- There is a shift to processes and responses that are more emergent, related, connected, warm and developing / evolving.
- There is a greater capacity for systemic sensing that enables individuals and collectives to slow down, create space when necessary, and evolve towards individual and collective coherence, relatedness and connection.
- There is an experience of more co-creativity that allows for new possibilities and opportunities to innovate, fulfil shared potential, or move beyond stuckness.
- Individuals and collectives are able to sense and feel things that they could not before and to access new and profound learnings, insights, inspirations, or understandings.

How does the Trauma-Informed Leadership Course contribute to the Pocket Project's approach to transformational change?

- The TILC is one of the core learning programs offered by the Pocket Project and which aims to develop trauma-informed practitioners who can bring trauma-informed practices and processes into their spheres of influence and enable a greater capacity for working with trauma within families, organisations, communities, systems, and societies.
- The TILC contributes to the Pocket Project's larger objective of supporting a global healing movement of trauma-informed individuals, collectives and organisations that are able to create 'pockets of healing' that can address and integrate 'pockets of trauma'.
- Graduates of the TILC are invited into a larger healing movement and are supported by an ongoing community of practice that includes community calls, follow-up trainings, and practice groups.
- The work of TILC graduates is supported by the Pocket Project's wider efforts to raise awareness of the importance of trauma-informed approaches to leadership and change.

The following key causal factors were identified from the Pocket Project literature and interviews. The understanding is that these key causal factors need to be present or come together in the TILC in order to enable participants to have the experiences and develop the skills and capacities need to support transformational change in the world:

★ Key Outcomes from the TIL: Leaders who have the concepts and capacities to enable trauma-informed practice and support the integration of traumatic content through relational and systems sensing within themselves, with others, within their community or organisation and/or the wider cultural context. Personal changes of leaders/participants include:

- Less isolation and a greater sense of relatedness
- New personal insights that have come from my ability to integrate trauma
- Greater sense of agency or possibility
- Greater awareness of my own individual, ancestral or collective trauma
- Shift from seeing trauma as an individual experience/situation to a collective one
- Increased capacity to access resourcing
- Increased capacity to be with one's own emotions and / or with the emotions of a group
- Increased capacity for openness and vulnerability, even in moments of discomfort
- Increased capacity to stay related when different viewpoints are expressed
- Increased capacity to stay related to one's own embodiment
- Increased capacity to recognise and relate to symptoms and patterns of personal, ancestral and / or collective trauma when they are present
- Increased capacity to initiate new behaviours and solutions
- Increased capacity to contribute to trauma-integrative or trauma-restorative processes

★ Key TIL Learning Processes: Participants are introduced to transformative concepts and practices, have the opportunity to work with them, hear examples of how they can be applied practically, ask questions, and continue to experiment at home and in the community of practice. Key processes include:

- The way personal practices for resourcing are introduced at the start of the course before moving into exploring how trauma shows up in oneself and one's own life, and then how trauma shows up in teams, organsation/s and the wider world.
- The way in which trauma-informed concepts and practices are introduced e.g. having the opportunity to work with them, hear examples of how they can be applied practically, ask questions, and continue to experiment at home and in the community of practice.
- The process that is woven throughout the course of turning towards trauma and challenging situations, then resourcing and returning so that trauma can be gradually integrated.
- The way that group coherence is developed throughout the course, enabling participants to feel more and more into the group and to go deeper and deeper into the awareness and integration of trauma.

★ Key TIL Enabling Contexts: The community of practice to support learning and experimentation as well as course supports - counsellors available, translation into different languages, the ability to join the course live or watch the recordings and join another session. Key enabling contexts include:

- The creation of a "We space" of shared nervous systems, group coherence and safety that allows participants to process and integrate trauma during the course.
- Participants engaging with each other as a "community of practice" where participants can meet and experiment with the different practices, learn from each other, and share experiences.
- Feeling connected to a larger field of trauma work including the work of the Pocket Project and other individuals and organisations that are working to integrate individual, ancestral and collective trauma.
- Having key course supports that enable participation including the ability to meet in an accompanying triad throughout the course, participate in affinity groups, receive translation support, or watch recordings of the modules.

★ Key TIL Learning Practices: Practices that enable participants to develop their capacities for presence, relating, and creativity when dealing with individual, ancestral or collective trauma e.g. trauma-informed presence, self- and co-regulation, titration, coherence building. Key practices include:
- Presencing: Practices that allow participants to become aware of their nervous systems, trauma responses, and to stay with these for longer and find new responses e.g. embodiment, self-regulation, titration practices, witnessing and grounding.
- Resourcing: Practices that allow participants to resource themselves during the course so that they can turn towards and work with trauma experiences, patterns and content e.g. self-care, dance, rhythm, being in nature, regular cultural & spiritual practices.
- Relatedness: Practices that support experiences of relatedness and enable participants to come back to relatedness and coherence in the group e.g. co-regulation, "feeling you feeling me" exercise, relational sensing, system sensing, group coherence practices.
- Triads & Small Groups: The opportunity for intimacy, safety, integration, and deep insight through the small group and triad discussions.

★ Key Content: Leaders have the concepts to support the shift from trauma inducing and trauma reactive cultures, to trauma-informed and restorative cultures.
- The concept of leading edge around collective trauma
- IAC fluidity - understanding individual ancestral collective trauma as one
- The insight that "challenges are not in the way, they are the way".
- The insight that "this is not my problem and I cannot solve it alone".
- Learning about nervous systems and the ability to read one another e.g. neuroscience, attunement, relational and systemic sensing
- Becoming aware of "power over" structures and the importance of dismantling these structures.
- The concept of resourcing and its importance when working with trauma e.g. titration

- ★ Key Self-as-Instrument Factors in the TIL: TILC facilitators show up in a way that supports the learning journey of participants. Key self-as-instrument factors include:
  - The ability of facilitators to be in the We space with participants, the way that they sense, act and facilitate as the collective.
  - The ability of facilitators to hold and work with discomfort and imperfection including working through missteps that are painful for participants.
  - The feeling of coherence in the facilitation team.
  - The open way in which the course content and process are held by facilitators without being too tied to structure, and with openness to what emerges in the modules.

REFLECTIONS ON CAUSALITY

- The interviewee indicated the importance of the life-changing content that is provided through the course and which may allow participants to name and understand the role of trauma for the first time.
- The interviewee also indicated that the process and experience of transformation that occur both within and outside of the TILC are impossible to control or predict and that the TILC may not be personally transformative for some participants.
- The interviewee indicated the importance of participants being situated in an increasingly supportive context for trauma-informed practice as the world "wakes up" to the presence and importance of trauma due to the work of trauma-informed organisations, thinkers, events, courses and a growing body of research and information on trauma.
- The interviewee also indicated the importance of having a supportive community of practice that participants can connect with and draw on for support and to develop their practice both during and after the course.

What is the Evidence of Transformational Impact for the Trauma-Informed Leadership Course?

To gather evidence of transformational impact, the case study incorporated an online survey that was sent to past participants of the TILC. There were 103 respondents to the survey out of a total number of X graduates of the TILC with 93% of respondents indicating that they have been able to better recognise and respond to symptoms of individual, collective and ancestral trauma as a result of the TILC. Of this group, 84% of respondents indicated that their greater ability to recognise and respond to trauma symptoms had allowed them to have a significant impact in their own life, their relationships and interactions with others, the groups or teams they work with, their communities, or at larger scales including the national and international.

Immediate Impact: Survey respondents identified with all of the personal changes that were present in the TILC's intended outcomes indicating the relevance of these personal changes to participants

with at least a third of all participants identifying with each impact. Responses were fairly evenly spread indicating the diversity of participant outcomes that occur through the course and/or the relatively equal likelihood of each of these personal impacts happening. Over half of all participants experienced the following changes:

- Greater awareness of my own individual, ancestral or collective trauma (67%)
- Increased capacity to recognise and relate to symptoms and patterns of personal, ancestral and / or collective trauma when they are present (57%)
- Increased capacity to stay related when different viewpoints are expressed (54%)
- Increased capacity for openness and vulnerability, even in moments of discomfort (54%)
- New personal insights that have come from my ability to integrate trauma (52%)
- Increased capacity to contribute to trauma-integrative or trauma-restorative processes (52%)
- Shift from seeing trauma as an individual experience/situation to a collective one (50%)
- Increased capacity to be with my emotions and / or with the emotions of a group (50%)

The impacts that were experienced by less than half of respondents were:
- Increased capacity to access resourcing (48%)
- Greater sense of agency or possibility (48%)
- Increased capacity to stay related to my own embodiment (43%)
- Less isolation and a greater sense of relatedness (41%)
- Increased capacity to initiate new behaviours and solutions (37%)

The two immediate outcomes that demonstrated the greatest variation were the higher proportion of respondents that experienced "Greater awareness of my own individual, ancestral or collective trauma" (67%) and the lower proportion of respondents that experienced an "Increased capacity to initiate new behaviours and solutions" (37%). This contrast potentially indicates the lag time or challenge in transformational shifts of being/doing that involve moving from new awareness and experiences of being to new actions and ways of doing that manifest this.

Causal Factors - Immediate Impact: In terms of the TILC causal factors that contributed to these immediate outcomes, the course processes and content demonstrated a fairly balanced perception of importance, while the course's enabling contexts, practices, and facilitator qualities demonstrated clearer patterns of importance among respondents as outlined below:

- Context: Out of four options, the TILC's We space was ranked above median by 71% of respondents while the community or practice and course supports (e.g. translation support) were ranked below median by 60% and 64% of respondents respectively.
- Practice: Out of four options, presencing practices were ranked above median by 79% of respondents while resourcing practices and triads/small groups were ranked below median by 63% and 66% or respondents respectively.
- Facilitator Qualities: Out of four options, the facilitator's ability to be in the We space and to work with discomfort was ranked above median by 70% and 65% of respondents respectively, while coherence in the facilitation team was ranked below median by 87%.

Overall responses did not indicate a strong ranking preference for any one aspect of each of the different causal factors indicating that the combination of these different aspects is important for each factor and the diverse needs of program participants rather than any one aspect. Across all of the ranking questions, the ranked importance of only 2 aspects of a causal factor that were agreed upon by over 50% of respondents. Those aspects being:

- Practices - Presencing: Practices that allowed me to become aware of my nervous system, my own trauma responses, my own experience, and becoming able to stay with them for longer and find new responses e.g. embodiment, self-regulation, titration practices, witnessing and grounding. (Ranked highest by 55%)
- Facilitator Qualities in the TILC - The feeling of coherence in the facilitation team. (Ranked lowest by 57%)

A significant proportion of respondents (48%) also identified additional aspects of causal factors that were important for the immediate impacts that they experienced. There was one consistent pattern in terms of responses in that 4 out of the 24 respondents highlighted the importance of taking the TILC alongside other courses or trainings (both those associated with the Pocket Project and Thomas Hubl and those that were not). Some responses also indicated that it was hard to distinguish the impact of the TILC from these other courses that either happened before, during or after the TILC. This theme suggests the entangled causality of the TILC and the importance of the different learning contexts and life journeys of the TILC participants with regard to their impact.

Ongoing Impact / Ripple Effect: Eighty four percent of respondents indicated that the personal changes that they experienced through the TILC had enabled them to have a positive impact through their own trauma informed practice. These impacts were identified across all of the scales and contexts presented in the survey with the most common context being in the health and healing sector (50%) and the most common scale of impact being at the individual level (94%). The scale of impact consistently declined from the individual (94%) to the international scale (6%) possibly indicating the existence of a ripple effect from individual to systems scale. It is also interesting to note that scale of impact declines markedly beyond the team or group scale (dropping from 75% to 28%) indicating a potential challenge for impact to continue beyond this scale of influence. Respondent's written descriptions of their most significant impact (26 responses) also echoed these different scales of impact:

- The change that people have been able to bring about in their own lives and their own ways of experiencing and living based on trauma awareness (11).
- The ability to engage with others in a different way leading to new kinds of interactions (8).
- The effect that one's own shift in trauma informed awareness and capacities has indirectly had on those around them through the influence of this new way of being and doing in others lives (3).
- Being able to work with groups and teams in a different way that enabled new kinds of results and changes to take place (3).

- The ability to influence large scale systems through introducing trainings that used trauma-informed concepts and practices and seeing the ripple effects of these trainings throughout the system (1).
- A new focus on where, how, and with whom to engage during systems change work (1).

The survey responses also confirmed the transformational nature of participants impacts including the ability to shift trauma patterns and the presence of indicators of transformation. Over 50% of respondents indicated that they had been able to recognise and respond to each of the trauma patterns presented in the survey as part of their impact. The majority of respondents also indicated that they had seen positive changes in each of the transformational indicators presented in the survey as a result of their impact/s. The indicators that had the highest degree of significant positive change according to respondents were:

- e) There was a greater understanding of the root causes of reactivity which enabled greater compassion and ability to stay in a listening mode (76% either saw a significant or very significant positive change)
- b) There was a new or greater ability to turn towards, go towards, or to stay in places of confusion, suffering, pain and deep discomfort e.g. experiences of hyper-activation / stress, numbness or separation, conflict. (61% either saw a significant or very significant positive change)
- a) New healing architectures were developed in my spheres of influence e.g. support systems for self-regulation, co-regulation, active listening, support systems for the centering of marginalised voices, acknowledging ongoing systems of privilege and oppression (55% either saw a significant or very significant positive change).
- c) Experiences or expressions of trauma were really being looked at, acknowledged, and became the basis for integration, new learning and wisdom (55% either saw a significant or very significant positive change).

Only one to two respondents (3 - 6%) identified an indicator that was not applicable to the change they saw, suggesting that these are relevant indicators for transformational change in the context of working with trauma symptoms, responses and patterns. In particular, one indicator was recognised by all respondents: "A new or greater ability to turn towards, go towards, or to stay in places of confusion, suffering, pain and deep discomfort e.g. experiences of hyper-activation / stress, numbness or separation, conflict". Some respondents did indicate that they saw no positive change in an indicator as a result of their impact with every indicator receiving between one to two responses (3 - 6%) that identified no change.

Overall these findings suggest a strong likelihood that ongoing transformational change is occurring through the impacts that survey respondents have been able to have as result of participating in the TILC. The majority of these transformational impacts are currently occurring at the individual to the team or collective scales but survey responses also demonstrate the ability for these impacts to ripple out further and influence transformation at larger scales up to the international and systems scales.

Causal Factors - Ongoing Impact: Survey respondents were also asked how the Trauma-Informed Leadership Course most enabled participants to have the impacts they described. There were 22 written responses to this question out of which four key themes were identified:

- TILC Content and Practices: The importance of the combination of TILC content and practices for developing new capacities (12 respondents) including the importance of practices for resourcing oneself (5), practices for slowing down and connecting with others (2), the value of working in triad groups (2), and learning about polyvagal theory (2).

- TILC Learning Community: The importance of the learning community and the focus on practice (9) particularly meeting and learning from other leaders or professionals who were trying to bring trauma informed approaches into their work and the value of connecting concepts to practical challenges and work contexts.

- TILC Insights: The value of the powerful insights that several participants gained through the program (6) including new perspectives, new understandings of leadership, the role of voice and speaking one's truth, and the introduction to a deeper kind of work and inquiry.

- Complementarity of TILC and Other Courses: The importance of engaging with the TILC alongside or in relation to other trainings and deep inquiries or practices that participants were engaged in and which enabled a deeper engagement with TILC and vice versa (5).

How does Pocket Project perceive the wider ecosystem of transformational change organisations?

- The interviewee states that there are a lot of organisations and initiatives that are working towards cultural transformation and shifts to regenerative cultures but that these initiatives tend to stall when they encounter unacknowledged and unresolved trauma that begins to act like "sand in the system" inhibiting the ability of individuals and collectives to collaborate, work through conflict, and support transformation beyond a certain level or degree of action and change.

- The interviewee indicated that there are not many social change or sustainability organisations that are working with a focus on trauma and trauma-informed practice but that there is a growing awareness of the importance and pervasiveness of trauma that is now entering the public consciousness.

- The interviewee mentioned several organisations that are demonstrating an ability to work towards cultural transformation and regeneration including the Global Ecovillage Network, Gaia Education, the Transition Town movement, the Permaculture Network, Pioneers of Change, and Dragon Dreamers.