**PATRICK TOMLINSON ASSOCIATES**

ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRATION, DISINTEGRATION, AND RECOVERY
PATRICK TOMLINSON (2020)

Introduction

Organizations usually produce an organization chart that shows who is responsible for what, who reports to who, and how different departments relate to each other. The charts tend to consist of lines, arrows, and boxes with the most senior person at the top. Some are perplexing to understand and might look like a complicated piece of plumbing as a headteacher once said to me. Back in 2001, when I had an informal interview with Mary Walsh the CEO and Founder of SACCS in England, she presented a different kind of picture. SACCS by this time was a leading specialist residential service for children. The company had grown from Mary's passion for helping children who suffer abuse and trauma. This stemmed from her practice as a social worker (Walsh and Thompson, 2019). SACCS was a genuinely child-centred service.

Mary showed me a picture to explain the organization. Surprisingly instead of lines, arrows, and boxes, it was a picture of flowers blooming in a garden. It showed the seed, roots in the earth, and the growth into a blooming flower. She explained that she and the Board were in the earth providing the nutrients that would allow the flowers to grow. Managers, care workers, and therapists were above, creating the environment necessary for healthy growth. I was struck by this unique way of presenting her organization. Years later in 2016, I was wondering how to present an explanation of how different roles and functions are connected to the organizational task. It was to a group of staff in another children's residential service in Ireland. The diverse group included social care managers, admin, finance, human resources, and property maintenance. I remembered Mary's 'chart' and drew this not-so-impressive diagram.

Organization Flower Diagram

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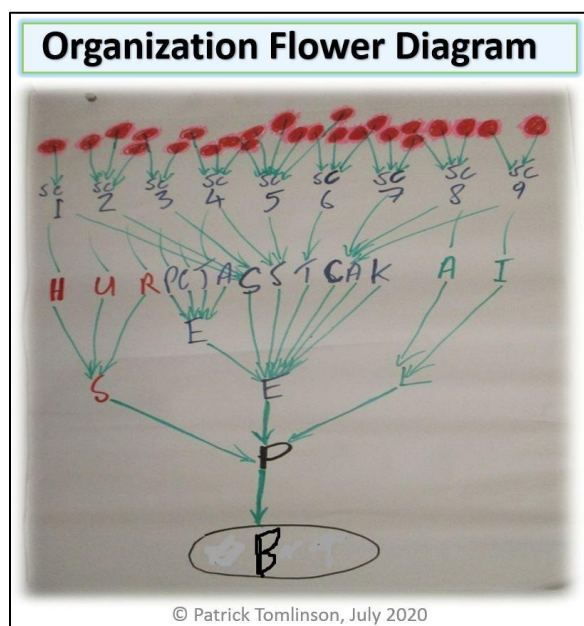
The B at the bottom represents the Board of Directors. The Board, including the owner, holds everything up. Without a Board/Trustees etc. most organizations cannot exist. This means that the Board holds the organization's vision, values, and responsibility for Governance. A functional board is essential for the health of the organization.

The P represents the CEO/Director/Managing Director, which was me. The relationship between the Board and Director is the starting point for the growth of a healthy organization. This relationship turns the vision and values into the organization's mission, structure, and processes.

The next level up has the senior managers of social care, finance, and HR. Their relationship with P, and each other, set the tone for an integrated organization. Integrated means working together collaboratively and implementing the mission. It means valuing each other's function, recognizing differences and that positive outcomes depend upon the power of connected working relationships.

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As the diagram proceeds upwards, all the staff in the organization are included. Everyone supports the work that takes place with the children in their homes. In this case, there are 9 homes. The blooming flowers symbolize the children in each home. It can easily be seen that if any relationship, in the whole system from roots to flowers, is broken there will be a knock-on effect. If that is near the top of the diagram, others who are close may repair the potential damage. If the damage is at the bottom the whole system could suffer.

It is clear how the relationships between everyone in the whole system, contribute to its health, and positive outcomes for children. As in an ecosystem, it is the whole environment that is key to positive outcomes. A change in any one part of the system will affect all other parts of it. At this presentation, it seemed that the whole group, whatever their role, understood how it is the healthy connection and integration of all roles and functions that lead to positive outcomes. Everyone is involved in the process of integration.

In 2018 I was presenting at a conference in Portugal and decided to elaborate on this theme. Recently, someone who was at the conference asked me about it. So, as it seems a helpful and enduring way of explaining concepts about organizations, change, leadership, and culture I have created this article.

An Organization is a Living System
The following diagrams and concepts are a development of the previous hand-drawn version. The concept can be applied to most kinds of organizations. The idea that Mary Walsh originally presented me with her picture is helpful because it reminds us that an organization is a living system. It is an ecological model and especially relevant to children, who have become traumatized, within their family system, which is also part of the wider community and societal systems. Therefore, it is vitally important that we do not underestimate the wider systems that the organization sits within, such as family, local community, society, and Government. Relationships with these will have a significant impact on the internal processes of the organization and vice versa. In this paper, I am focusing on the organization's internal dynamics. Much of what I describe applies equally to the relationship with the external environment.

Positive outcomes are dependent on the quality of organization integration and relationship with the external environment. In this case, the organization provides a residential service for children who have suffered trauma and other adversities. Within the organization, the relationships involved can be considered as between people, functions, and processes. For example, there may be difficulty in aligning vision and values, with the mission and task performance. There may be difficulty in a line management relationship, or between heads of departments. Such difficulties may be symptomatic of systemic issues and if not worked with effectively will undermine the potential outcomes of the organization. The same will apply to relationships with external stakeholders.

Edwin H. Friedman (1999) who was a Rabbi, family therapist, and leadership consultant, claimed that all living systems from a human cell to society, share a few universal processes and principles. The main one is that the health of the system requires self-differentiation. The

presence of a self-differentiated leader is central to creating a well-run self-regulated organization. Such a person knows his or her vision, needs, expectations, and goals, and can hold onto this in a steady non-reactive way during times of high anxiety. In such an organization, boundaries and responsibilities are clear. Appropriate levels of responsibility promote effective functioning and growth. The space between people allows room for owning responsibility. As Jaques and Clement (1991, p.145) made clear, each layer in the organization must add value. They argue (p.124) that one of the biggest hindrances to organisational effectiveness is too many layers in the hierarchy. Where managers are doing work that their subordinates are capable of, stagnation and regression rather than growth are likely.

Effective Delegation
This is one of the universal phenomena that support positive outcomes in organizations and human development. It is interesting how similar the following two comments are here. The first is by General Gordon R. Sullivan (quoted in Ulrich, 1998), Chief of Staff to the USA Army,

> Once the Commander's intent is understood, decisions must be devolved to the lowest possible level to allow these front line soldiers to exploit the opportunities to develop.

The second is by Isabel Menzies Lyth (1985, p.239), an organization consultant to human services in the UK,

> It is in general good management practice to delegate tasks and responsibilities to the lowest level at which they can be competently carried and to the point at which decision-making is most effective.

She went on to explain,

> This is of particular importance in children's institutions, since such delegation downwards increases the opportunity for staff to behave in an effective and authoritative way, to demonstrate capacity for carrying responsibility for themselves and their tasks and to make realistic decisions, all of which are aspects of a good model.

Whatever kind of 'institution' (organization) we are talking about the principle is the same. Friedman (1999, p.181) goes as far as to say that the surest way to make a member of any organization or family dysfunctional, is to over-function in that person's space.
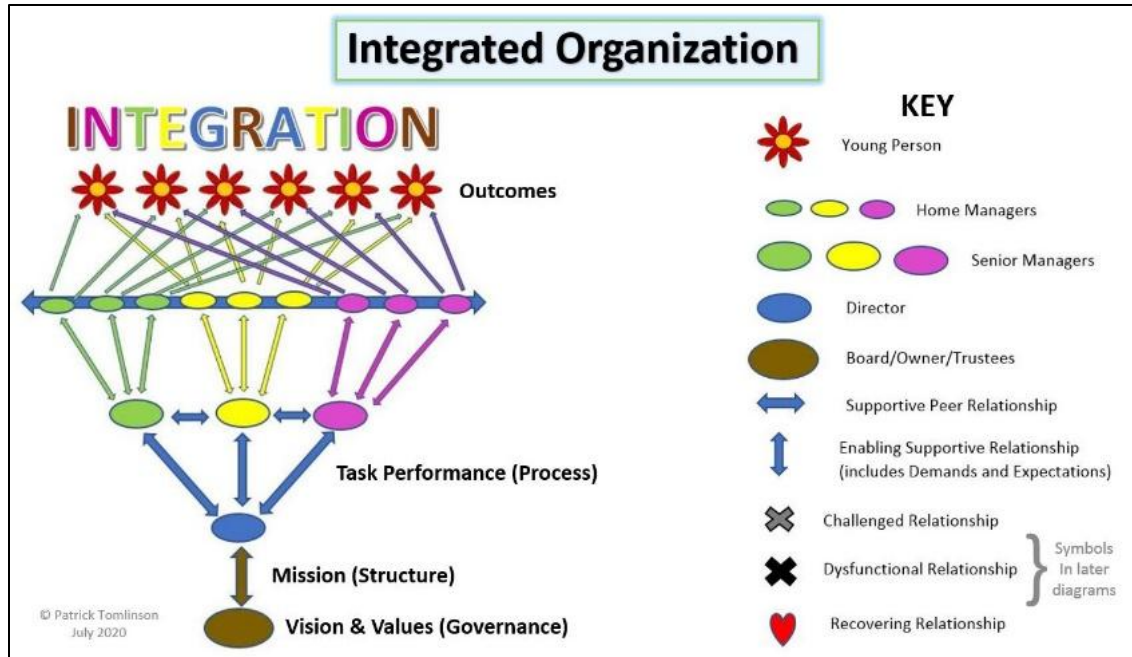
To illustrate why integration is so important we might use an orchestra as a metaphor. The brilliance of one part will be lost if all the parts are not successfully integrated. It is most important that the orchestra is in harmony, where differences complement each other. Similarly, referring to the functioning of the brain, which also has its own 'departments', and sub-systems, the neuroscientist Dan Siegel (2012), talks about integration as being differentiated but linked. He makes the important point that integration does not mean blended. Separation and differentiation are central to the process of becoming integrated. Healthy relationships are connected and separate at the same time. The same applies to organizations, families, communities, and other systems. People need to know what they are responsible for and what they are not. Where one person's role ends, and another begins. Without integration, development and achievement are likely to be undermined by confusion.

People are inherently interested in integration, whether they are consciously aware of it or not. This is because it is fundamental to our health and well-being. At the micro-level of the brain, good functioning requires the integration of different brain functions, within the whole-body system. There cannot be good health without the integration of mind and body. Siegel (2006) said,

> The central idea of interpersonal neurobiology is that integration is at the heart of well-being.

And as I have said, the human as with an organization system exists within a wider ecological system. As Isaac Prilleltensky (2006) has argued, wellness is an ecological concept,

> There cannot be well-being but in the combined presence of personal, relational, and collective well-being.

Staying Alive

Susan Pinker (2014, 2015, 2017) referring to studies of thousands of people, their health and longevity, claims that social integration is the number one factor in health and long life.

When it comes to trauma and adversity, we also know that it is not the absence of difficulty that is the main indicator of well-being. A good support network is the single strongest protection against becoming traumatized (Van der Kolk, 2014, p.210, Perry and Szalavitz, 2006, p.231).

Ecological Systems
While trauma may mainly be perceived as an issue between the 'victim' and 'perpetrator' it is not helpful to ignore the context or ecological aspect. Trauma happens within an environment, such as a home, family, neighborhood, community, or society. A model for recovery needs to consider not only the different parts of the context but also the relationship between them. Supporters of the 'ecological model' rightfully argue that outcomes can be improved by intervening at any level of the context. For example, an effective intervention to reduce trauma might be to improve the support provided to primary caregivers, and another might be to reduce poverty.

At the macro level, we can consider an organization as a system that sits within an ecology of wider systems. At the micro level, it is the same for the human brain as a system, within an ecology of wider systems. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1999) bioecological theory of human development has shown how important this is. The individual cannot be understood outside of the context in which she lives. For organizations and human brains, it is the effective integration within and into the wider systems that is vital for healthy functioning and positive outcomes. Not by coincidence as Johnson (2010) suggests,

> The network patterns of the outside world mimic a lot of the network patterns of the internal world.

Leadership
Another universal organization phenomenon is that wherever you find an integrated, successful organization you will also find highly competent leaders with qualities of integrity, self-differentiation, and personal integration. Leadership in such an organization is a life-enhancing protective factor for the system. Friedman (1999, p.234) stated that,

> "Leadership begins with the management of one's own health" and "…a leader functions as the immune system of the institution or organization he or she 'heads' (p.182)".

In organizations, it can be argued that the key task of leadership is to provide the conditions in which organizational integration takes place. The following diagrams show how an organization can move from integration to collapse and recover from collapse back to integration. The process may go backwards and forwards. It may not necessarily progress linearly from one stage to another.

There are significant implications for leaders who appreciate the systemic nature of organizations. Nearly 30 years ago Jaques and Clement (1991, p.43) summed this up well,

> In view of these severe organizational difficulties, the present-day tendency to see organizational problems in terms of psychologically determined personality conflicts is most unfortunate, because it obscures the organizational sources of most conflict, pointing the finger at individuals rather than at the organizational morass that lies at the heart of the problem. A useful principle is that no difficulties arising between individuals in these organizations is to be seen as arising from personality difficulties, unless and until it has been clearly established that the organizational context is requisite!

In other words, as long as an organization is not functional, focus on fixing the system rather than blaming individuals, whose failings are most likely a symptom of systemic dysfunction.

Characteristics of an Integrated Organization (a few examples)
1. Clear vision, values, and mission, which are shared by everyone and reflected in all aspects of work. If someone from outside the organization meets anyone in it, they will pick up the same core messages.
2. All activity within the organization is aligned. Every department and person understands their role, and how it relates to the mission.
3. Delegation and Boundaries are appropriately clear.
4. Communication is clear, timely, inclusive, open, and transparent. People feel valued.
5. People collaborate positively to solve problems and create new approaches.
6. There is a strong sense of purpose, achievements are recognized, and setbacks are not reacted to with panic or blame. Anxiety is contained. People take ownership of their responsibilities.
7. The culture feels positive and affirming, safe and trustful. People want to be in the organization. Low levels of absenteeism and high levels of retention.
8. The organization is a learning environment. New experiences must be learned from and integrated. Development is a priority.
9. However difficult and threatening a situation, the organization maintains its capacity to think about and respond rationally to challenges. Threats may even strengthen resolve.
10. There is a focus on fixing processes, rather than firefighting problems. As Alexander Den Heijer said, if a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.
11. As with individual integration, organization integration can lead to virtuous circles. One success leads to another, which further boosts, confidence, belief, purpose, etc. leading to

further growth and success. Like being 'on a roll'. Good people want to stay in and join a good team.
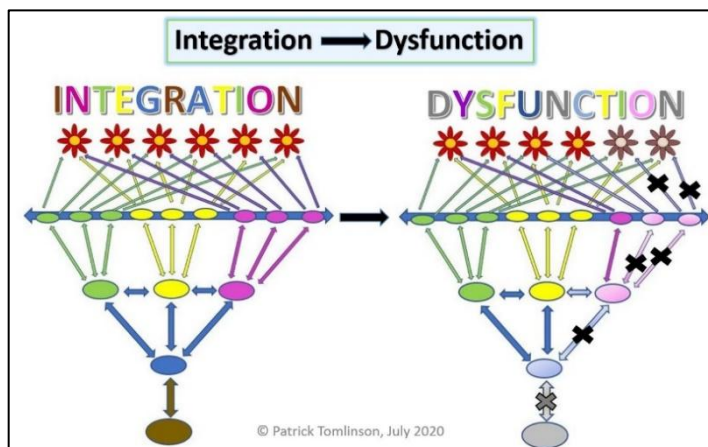
Ideally, if we are in an integrated organization, we would wish it to stay that way. However, the environment is constantly changing, inside and outside and only continual adaptation can maintain integration. Changes can include everything from the retirement of a leader in the organization to the invention of new products, and political changes. Even the success of an organization will change things and require adaptive responses.

Commonly, organizations become dysfunctional to some extent. As with all human development, it is often two steps forward and one step back. In the diagram, the **x's**, fading ovals and arrows near them symbolize areas of difficulty. Some relationships are becoming challenged or dysfunctional. For example, a difficulty between the Board and Director may have a knock-on effect on relationships between the Director and his/her direct reports, and so on. All difficulties may be to do with internal or external factors or both. In organizations that by nature deal with high levels of anxiety, there is a constant challenge to stay on task rather than become defensive. In the case of a residential service for traumatized children, Menzies Lyth (1985, p.254) states,

> There appears to be a need for constant vigilance if the defence system operated in the institution is to be sustained at a mature level and indeed to be adaptive rather than defensive, for it will be under constant threat.

It takes hard work and vigilance to maintain positive functioning. A strong and effective organization will have a culture that protects itself from dysfunction or defensiveness becoming a major problem. Problems and areas of dysfunction are often identified and corrected. Appropriate systems and processes need to be in place to help ensure this. However, sometimes a new problem arises that is outside of the present capacity to respond. For instance, a major external change requiring a significant reorganization. If this does not happen the dysfunction may grow and start to cause a significant dip in performance.

Characteristics of Dysfunction
1. A part of the organization not achieving its usual level of performance.
2. Tensions growing in the organization, possibly with conflicts between departments and individuals in teams. Relationships feel more challenged if not dysfunctional.
3. Communication becoming more reactive and not understood clearly.
4. Problems are increasingly likely to be perceived as existing in events and people, rather than in systems, processes, and culture.

5. Blaming and reactivity becoming more common.
**6.** Growing uncertainty about the future.
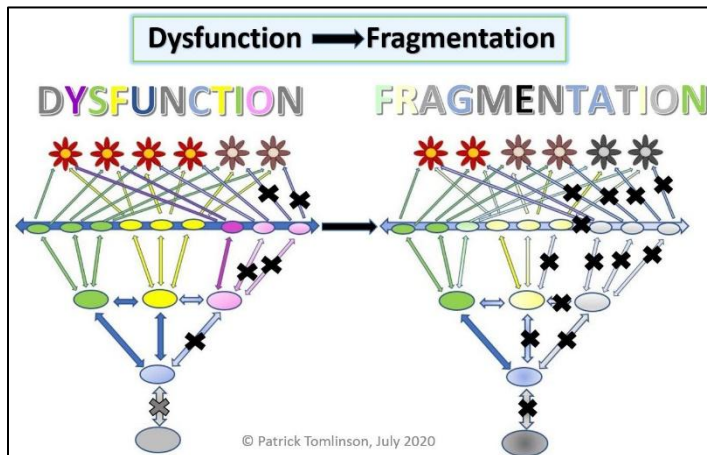
Often a period of dysfunction is soon recovered from. As the saying goes, Crisis, what Crisis? Effective leadership and a strong culture can see many difficult periods through. However, it is also possible that things get worse. The next stage after dysfunction takes root is fragmentation. In this situation, the problems are becoming more entrenched. There are more **x's** and fading colors on the diagram. Negativity is contagious in relationships, up and down, and sideways. The organization is fragmenting into parts that are no longer working together. This is a challenging and serious state that needs turning around. It is clear to see in these diagrams that individual and relational problems are mainly influenced by their position in the system. We cannot consider the functioning of one part without looking at its relationship with other parts. The same applies to all systems, from the human body/mind to organizations.

Characteristics of Fragmentation
1. A sense of crisis pervading the organization.
2. Escalating demoralization, tensions, disagreements, and conflicts.
3. Departments and individuals compete against each other. The sense of a shared mission is lost. Values are no longer being lived and may even be contradicted.
4. High levels of reactiveness and blaming.
5. Breaches of trust. Boundaries becoming unclear. A lack of transparency.
6. Clear crises, such as financial, serious errors, complaints, bad publicity, etc.
7. Absenteeism and turnover increasing.
**8.** Questions over the quality of leadership.
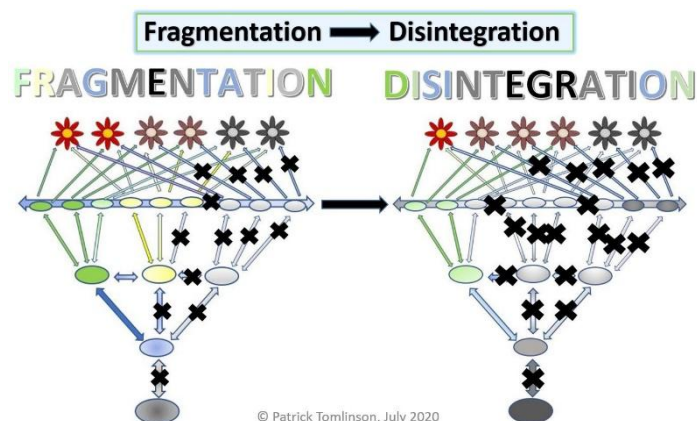
As with the previous stage, recovery can be made, with movement from fragmentation back towards integration. When this is happening, dysfunctional elements are identified and rectified. There will still be a vulnerability and potential for relapse.

If things do not improve, the next stage is disintegration. Here the x's have taken

over the organization. Signs of life and healthy functioning are fast disappearing. Lanyado (1989, p.140) talking about a children's trauma service, says,

> Disintegration is catching – and the staff are prone to it too. At times staff may feel anxious that they too could collapse like a house of cards.

While the situation appears and can be ominous, we should keep in mind that in organizational life and growth that there are periods of crisis. Some of these are arbitrary, and others are a part of ordinary growth.


THE FIVE PHASES OF GROWTH
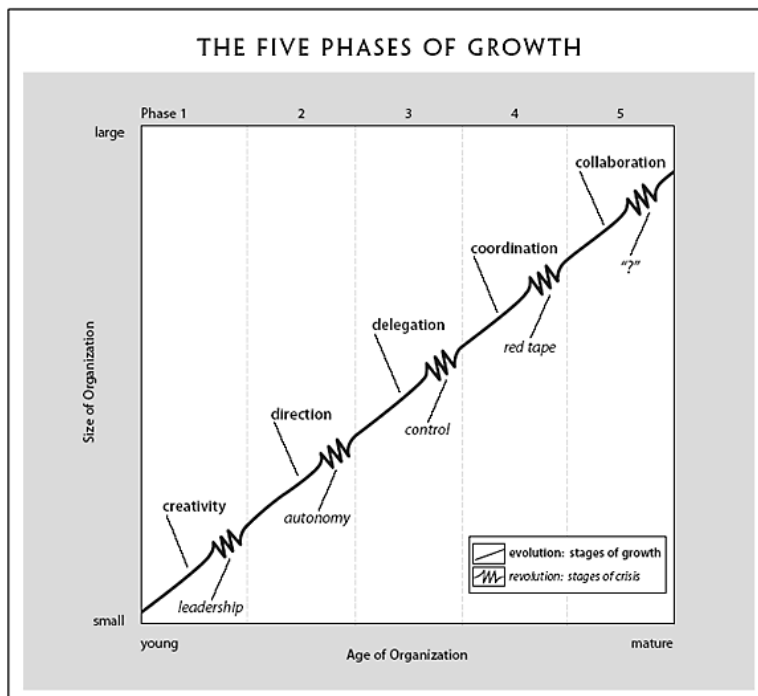
Larry Greiner (1972, 1998) has described five phases of organizational growth. The movement from one phase to another is a major change and is often experienced as a crisis. There is a challenge to the organization and a threat that it may not be able to evolve.

This diagram shows the underlying issue of each crisis. Therefore, we should anticipate crises and not be too alarmed by them. The role of leadership is vital. Friedman (1999, p.19) argues, "For it is the integrity of the leader that promotes the integrity or prevents the "dis-integr-ation" of the system he or she is leading." The extent of the difficulty during the crisis may depend upon the quality of leadership and culture, anticipation, and adaptation. Friedman (p.89) claims that the presence of a well-defined leader is the distinguishing factor in the process of recovery.

Characteristics of Disintegration
1. An atmosphere of severe crisis with all manner of problems escalating.
2. A complete loss of vision and mission. Survival feels like it has become the mission.
3. Blaming, scapegoating, and conflict are the norm. A lack of ownership.
4. Breakdown of trust, safety, and boundaries.
5. People may seem out of touch with reality.
6. Leaders, if they are surviving are reactive.
7. A sense that nothing other than a radical urgent change will keep the organization alive.
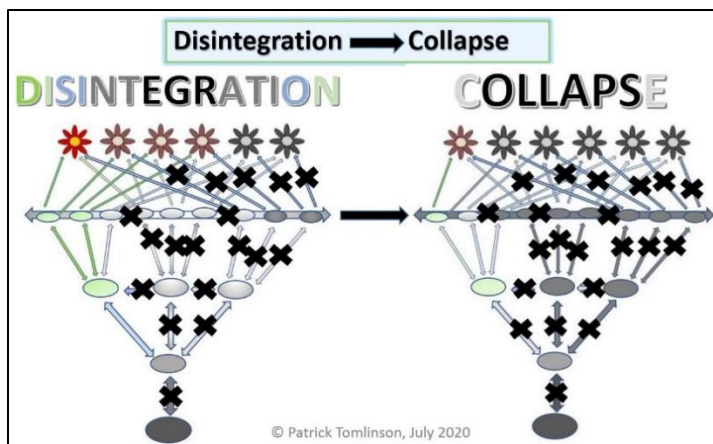
It is possible as before that the organization stabilizes and begins to recover. Maybe a huge difficulty has been resolved. Maybe a new troubleshooting leader has been appointed.

Unless something incredibly significant has changed the likelihood is that the next stage will be to collapse and close. The reason for closure at the end could be financial or numerous other reasons. Whatever it is, ultimately it is a symptom of the failure to halt the downward spiral that may have begun a long time ago. The characteristics of collapse are simply a complete lack of function. While collapse may lead to closure, closure is not always due to collapse. Some organizations choose to close when they are still functioning reasonably well.
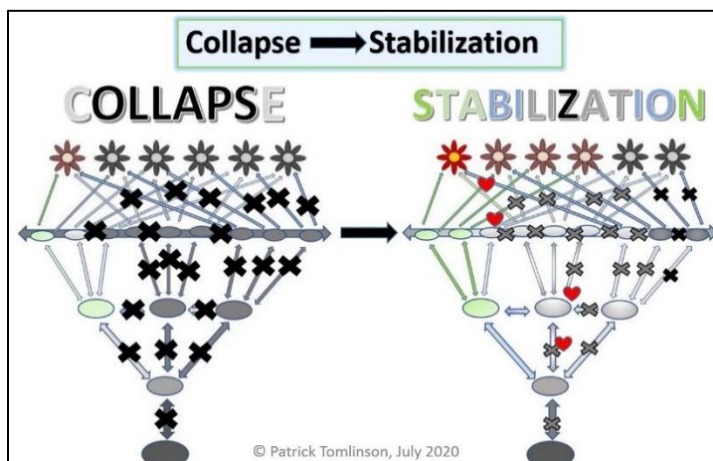

Even when it seems an organization is in collapse there may still be a glimmer of hope and the possibility of recovery. This is symbolized in the collapse diagram by the light green oval and the few relational lines without an **x**. This is like a glowing ember where new life might take hold. However, for this ember to stay alight there will need to be a life-saving change. Usually, this will be in the form of a new leader, CEO, Director, etc.

A highly competent, self-differentiated leader may have a calming, self-regulating, stabilizing effect on the organization. Such a leader can be present amid emotional turmoil, actively relating to key people while calmly maintaining a sense of direction. With this capacity, he or she can affect the whole system of relationships and reduce the level of anxiety in the organization network. This is most likely to happen when there is an adaptation to strength. One of the symptoms of a collapsing organization is an over-adaptation towards weakness. Boosting health and strengthening the organization's immune system, may begin to see many problems (symptoms) self-correcting (Friedman, 1999, p.38, p.69).

Friedman (1991, p.194) referring to Murray Bowen's work talks about a 'natural systems view of healing'. He argues that two fundamental principles of healing are that 'life moves to life' and that 'processes of maturation have their own time frame'. Therefore, in the organization's recovery, a focus on life rather than pathology will be vital. Time and patience are necessary to allow life forces to grow and develop.

In the stabilization diagram, the hearts symbolize recovering relationships and levels of functioning. Many of the relationships that seemed terminal appear to have steadied, symbolized by the lighter x's. As with the negative, positive states are also infectious and have influence up and down and sideways in the organization. With stabilization, while performance indicators are not likely to be great the slide will have been halted.
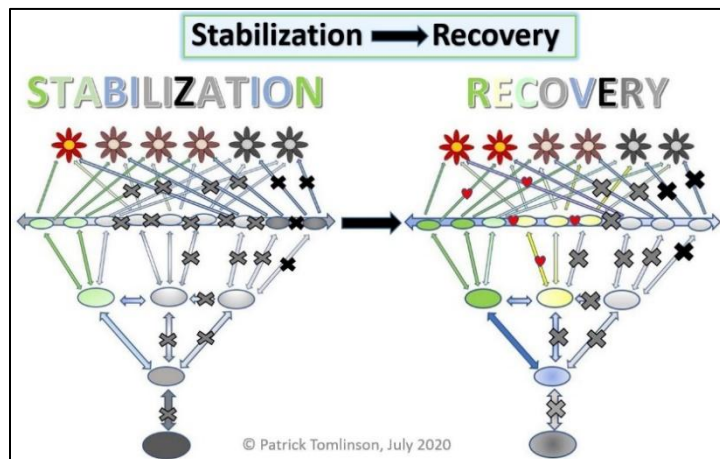
In the stage of stabilization, there will be strong vulnerability and fear that things might regress. An organization that has reached a position of near collapse and closure, to some extent will resemble a traumatic state. Small setbacks in recovery may trigger previous levels of dysfunction. In fact, some of the necessary positive changes may also trigger negative reactions. Getting out of such a state is not easy. It takes, time, patience, and resolve. There will be a lack of trust, especially toward leaders. A leader who begins to take a stand can expect to experience serious testing and sabotage. Friedman (1999) advises leaders to expect sabotage and argues how it is often a sign that he or she is doing the right things. There may be many mini-crises as the organization moves from stabilization to recovery. At this point, growth begins to take off and there is an increasing feeling of hope, along with signs of accomplishment. This can be seen in the diagram with the hearts, return of color and areas of functioning.
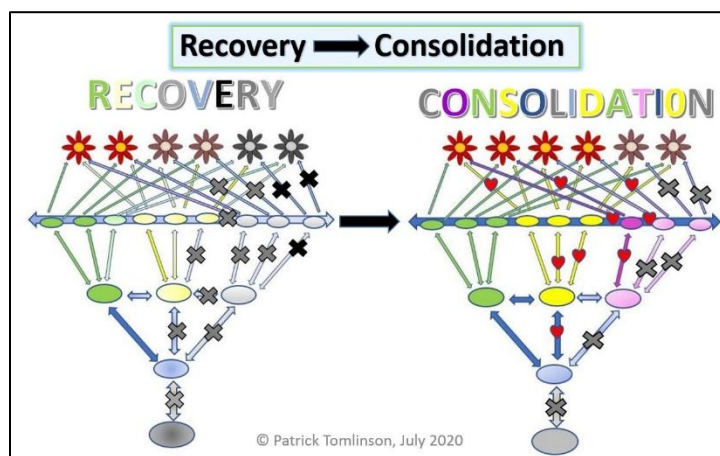

At any of these points, there is always the possibility of setbacks, maybe sending the organization back in the negative direction. Sometimes, the initial period of recovery achieves some quick wins, only to uncover more entrenched difficulties. Consolidation may feel more like a marathon rather than a sprint. However, as things begin to consolidate, the feeling that the change is not a fluke and is here to stay will grow. Performance Indicators will begin to show consistent improvement. Problem areas are more likely to be worked on collaboratively. A continual focus on adaptation to strength will be shifting the culture. Most people will move in the direction of health. Those that cannot, will either leave voluntarily or on occasion be removed through disciplinary procedures. In my experience, this has very rarely been necessary, but it does need to be made clear what is acceptable and what is not. In a recovering organization, this will always be

needed, as in the previous decline many examples of poor practice and standards will have become the norm. A culture change must be demonstrated.
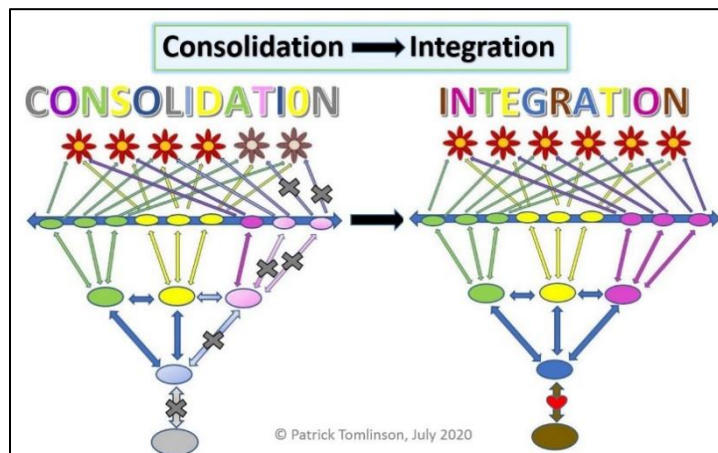
The longer that the period of consolidation continues the more likely it is that integration will be achieved. In the case of a recovering organization, there may be changes needed at this point to reflect a more stable ongoing situation.

In the new integration diagram, a healthy situation exists across the organization. The positive relationship between the Board and Director is restored and symbolized by the heart. Performance Indicators are likely to show excellent results. In some ways, becoming an integrated, high-achieving organization can be even more satisfying when it has been a hard journey. Many adversities will have been overcome and valuable lessons learned. Strong bonds will have been made. But as soon as evolution stops, stagnation sets in and within that are the seeds of decline. A living system is in constant interaction with itself and its environment. Every interaction leads to some degree of change, however small. As said at the beginning, ongoing integration is never guaranteed, and continuous evolution will always be necessary.

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Patrick Tomlinson Brief Bio

The primary goal of Patrick's work is the development of people and organizations. Throughout his career, he has identified development to be the driving force related to positive outcomes - for everyone, service users, professionals, and organizations.

His experience spans from 1985 in the field of trauma and attachment informed services. He began as a residential care worker and has since been a team leader, senior manager, Director, CEO, consultant, and mentor. He is the author/co-author/editor of numerous papers and books. He is a qualified clinician, strategic leader, and manager.

Working in many countries, he has helped develop therapeutic models that have gained national and international recognition. In 2008 he created Patrick Tomlinson Associates to provide services focused on development for people and organizations. The following services are provided,

- Therapeutic Model Development

- Developmental Mentoring, Consultancy, & Clinical Supervision

- Character Assessment & Selection Tool (CAST): for Personal & Professional Development, & Staff Selection

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