

Discussion Paper

Introducing the ACE Model of Personal Transformational Change (PTC): Non-profit Leaders' Accounts of How Their Organisations Bring about PTC in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Introducing the ACE Model of Personal Transformational Change (PTC): Non-profit Leaders' Accounts of How Their Organisations Bring about PTC in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Executive summary

The aim of this study is to explore and code the ways in which non-profit leaders believe their organizations bring about personal transformational change (PTC) in beneficiaries. For that purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with CEOs (N=35) of non-profit organizations in South Africa whose aim it is to bring about PCT. From the analysis of data this study extracts, for the first time in current literature, the fundamental Assumptions (A), the mechanisms for Change (C) and the rules of Engagement (E) of how non-profit leaders believe their organisations deliver PCT and combines insights into the ACE model of change for the non-profit sector. The study is unique in three ways: (1) it explores an important but neglected field in non-profit literature in that it unpacks how and why the PTC work of non-profit organizations is seen to 'work'; (2) it gives leaders a voice in expressing their philosophy, beliefs and experiences of PTC; and (3) it captures insights from the fertile and diverse landscape of non-profit organizations in post-Apartheid South Africa. The article concludes with a summary and discussion of the ACE model.

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Introduction

Surprisingly little is known in current literature about the mechanisms by which non-profit leaders believe their organizations bring about personal transformational change in beneficiaries. ‘Personal transformational change’ (PCT) is defined based on work by Schultz and Buys (2011)¹ as “being personally transformed from a current state to a desired future state through a structured approach”. To explore this process, we are looking to unpack the underlying philosophy and fundamental beliefs of non-profit leaders and the approach that their organizations adopt towards beneficiaries. We are not, in this study, focussed on specific therapies that target particular symptoms. This distinction is important: the authors are aware that there is, of course, ample research and expert knowledge in specialised fields such as clinical psychology, therapy and counselling, which provide guidance to treat specific conditions (i.e. a body of knowledge which many non-for profit organizations will draw on). However, in this study we are looking at the overall approach and general set-up of the work non-profit organizations and the philosophies of their leaders in how they approach the subject of PTC in relation to complex issues that often have multiple causes and symptoms (issues such as, for example, racial tensions, domestic violence, substance abuse) and require a holistic approach towards the engagement with beneficiaries alongside targeted treatment of well-defined or isolated symptoms. In the part that follows we provide background to the motivation and context of our study before outlining our empirical research and results in detail and offering models and conclusions.

Background

What motivated this study?

This study is motivated by many years of observing international non-profit organisations at work. The lead author of this study has worked with non-profit organizations in South Africa since the late 1990s and has since then been twice on a several-months academic sabbatical in South Africa, in the years 2000 and 2015. During the former stay, he worked in-depth with a national crime-prevention non-profit organization while during the latter stay he visited a large number of non-profit organizations and collected data for this study. In addition, both authors are part of a faculty

¹ Schultz and Buys (2011, p. 241) define “change” as “to be transformed from being a dependent, reactive A-level participator to an independent, pro-active B-level participator. To change is moving from point A to B”; and “change management” as “a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state”.

team that lead and support international work projects with non-profit organizations – typically working with beneficiaries on PTC -, and are from many ‘in-country stays’ and in-depth project work, familiar with the workings of international non-profit organizations. From many conversations with leaders, staff, volunteers, donors, beneficiaries, board-members and other stakeholders in these organizations, we found it intriguing to observe that many non-profit organizations seem to start at grass-roots guided by the founding principles of their leaders, often inspired by personal experiences and circumstances. Indeed, the approach and philosophy adopted in many non-profit organizations towards PTC in beneficiaries seems typically guided by strong personal beliefs and assumptions.

As researchers observing a variety of such organizations and leaders in different contexts it appeared to us that there may be important communalities to the ways in which non-profit organizations operate. However, neither the individuals we spoke to, nor the literature could offer us guidance on comparing or synthesizing different approaches. The underpinnings and foundations of non-profit organizations are, indeed, often simply described to be intuitive and led by inspired leaders. This sparked our academic research interest – to explore and code the founding principles by which non-profit leaders operate their organizations and believe their organizations bring about PCT. We were reinforced in our desire to study this subject as an in-depth exploration of existing non-profit literature revealed very little published knowledge about such processes. We believe it is important to unpack the mechanisms by which non-profit leaders believe their organizations bring about PTC in beneficiaries more systematically so that non-profit organizations and future non-profit leaders can benefit from the knowledge, experience and wisdom of others and the field as a whole.

Why South Africa as context for this study?

While we have observed non-profit organizations at work in several countries such as Turkey, England, Germany, USA and Australia, we believe that post-Apartheid South Africa provides a particular useful context to study this subject. South Africa has gone through many changes in past decades and maybe as a consequence of those changes has a particularly versatile, vibrant and active non-profit landscape, with over 100.000 non-profit organizations registered across the country (<http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=4176>). It has been suggested that the post-Apartheid era in South Africa is, on one hand, characterized by a particular need for the work of non-profit organizations addressing a number of complex challenges linked to, and benefitting from, PTC in beneficiaries - including racial tensions, health issues, violence and substance abuse. On the other hand, post-Apartheid South Africa is often described as having achieved remarkable success in the

area of personal and societal reconciliation and positive change against this challenging background (Tutu and Tutu, 2014). Indeed, the PTC work conducted by organizations such as the 'TUTU foundation' and 'The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation' has received international acclaim. The reconciliation work in particular has been widely broadcasted within SA (e.g. was on daily television in the first years after the formation of a democratic government in 1994) and the lessons that have been learned in that time, particularly from the 'truth and reconciliation process', have been applied in places such as Dublin, Bosnia and Ruanda to significantly impact the peace process in these parts of the world.

It is in this spirit that we set out to explore and code the mechanisms by which leaders believe their organisations bring about PCT in beneficiaries. Our inspiration for South Africa as setting for our study was this broader context of reconciliation and personal/societal change, - particularly as there have been suggestions that the much acclaimed work of non-profit organizations in South Africa would benefit from codification and in-depth exploration (Tutu and Tutu 2014). Importantly, the South African context for PTC includes non-profit work in the areas of violence, neglect, conflict, abuse and related areas, which is in line with our ambition to look at the general set up of non-profit PCT work rather than treatment of an isolated condition. The South African context allows for exploration of a diverse set of organizations, with the common denominator that they are all working in the area of PTC - ultimately aiming for better personal lives and healthier, happier and more peaceful societies.

Why interview the leaders of non-profit organizations?

Non-profit organisations are said to be strongly influenced by the personality and vision of their leaders (who in many cases are also the founders) – suggested to develop and operate organizations based on own beliefs, philosophy and experiences (Kaerns et al. 2012; Carman and Nesbit 2012). Often, a personal experience or a founding philosophy may reflect a recognition of a need in a community. As such, the leader's philosophy is the broader context and culture in which all other dealings and interventions of the organization tend to sit. The study of leader beliefs, assumptions and experiences is thus important if only to make them transparent, and to compare and extract the communalities. While there is no current consensus on what non-profit organizations may have in common in terms of philosophies and approaches to PCT, researchers have stressed the importance of collaborative value creation (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012) and organizational learning (Chen 2012). Despite this ambition, however, differences rather than communalities are often highlighted in current research work. While non-profit organizations will of course have important subtleties and differences, the focus of this study's work with leaders is

to investigate what leaders of these organizations have in common and to provide future leaders with some guidelines as to what is currently seem to provide value in this context.

What do we already know from existing research and literature and how do we build on it?

A review of non-profit literature reveals a seemingly fragmented nature of the non-profit sector with non-profit organizations often serving multiple functions (Kim 2016; Dodge and Ospina 2015; Chenhall, Hall and Smith 2015; Carman and Nesbit 2012); experiencing great demand on accountability and measurement of value creation (Grieco et al. 2014; Coule 2013; Liket and Maas 2013; Knutsen and Brower 2010); and an environment where non-profit leaders are under increasing pressure to make smart choices around resources, strategies and operating practices (Kim 2016; Kaerns et al. 2012; Never 2010; Jaeger and Kreutzer 2010). Furthermore, some scholars go as far as suggesting that the sector is currently confronting a leadership deficit and is under growing pressure to become more business-like (King, 2016; Willems 2015; Suarez 2009).

Indeed, a large part of existing non-profit literature centres around organizations becoming more business-like, with new processes, operations and systems introduced to manage effectively (Grabowski et al. 2014; Liket and Maas 2013). As such, the literature tends to focus on performance measurement (Winand, Rihoux, Robinson and Zintz 2013) and outcome measurement (MacIndoe and Barman 2012). There is also a trend to explore the nature and differences between types of organisations operating in the wider context, including social enterprises (Grieco et al. 2014; Kerlin 2012), hybrid organizations (Bies 2012), community-based impact models (Vermeulen, Minkoff and van der Meer 2014; Paarlberg and Meinhold 2012), relationships between governmental and non-profit organizations as well as between business and non-profit links (Grieco, Micheline and Iasevoli, 2014; Austin and Seitanidi 2012; Harris 2012) and social purpose business models (Cooney, 2010).

While much recent research thus focuses on differences between non-profit organizations, we strongly believe there is value in focussing on communalities. In particular, we are looking for communalities in ways in which leaders of non-profit organizations believe their organizations foster PTC in beneficiaries. While the wider literature reveals a significant lacuna of knowledge in this regard, we found a seminal piece that speaks very closely to the context of PTC. Tutu and Tutu (2014, p.49) describe in what they call the Forgiveness Cycle, how after experiencing hurt, harm or loss, individuals can either get drawn into a cycle of revenge and rupture, or instead choose a cycle of forgiveness and healing. See figure 1 below for a visual illustration of Tutu and Tutu's cycle model.

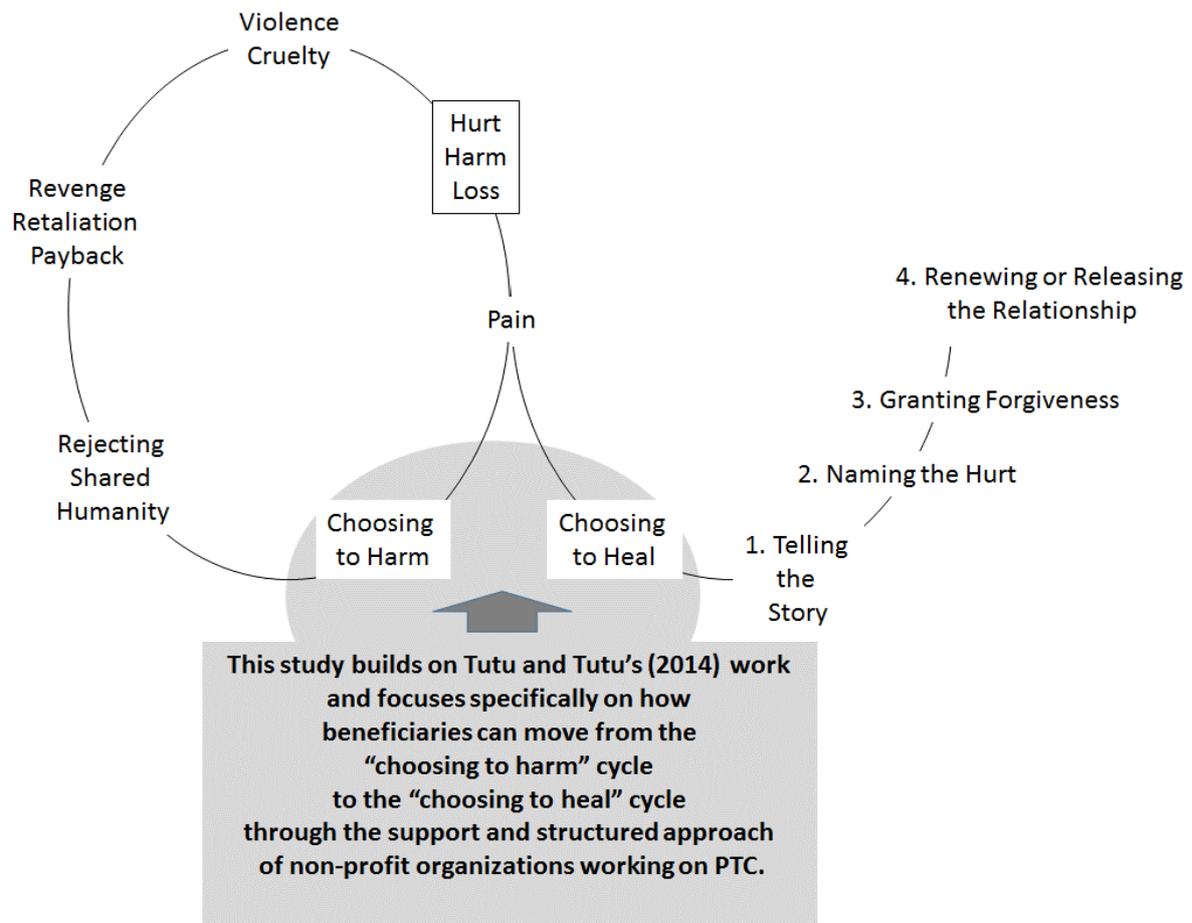


Figure 1: Illustration of Tutu and Tutu (2014) Cycle of Forgiveness, with a note by the researchers how this study aims to complement Tutu and Tutu's work

Tutu and Tutu's Forgiveness cycle builds on their own rich and deep experience of PTC work applied in conflict situations related to race, family, substance abuse and violence and illustrates very powerfully how "two impulses, one toward retaliation and the other toward reconnection, wrestle in our hearts" (2014, p. 48). While the model is extremely beneficial in describing human reactions to hurt and loss, it is not entirely clear from the cycle how individuals make the choice between "choosing to harm" and "choosing to heal" and/or why, when and how an individual will manage to get out of a learned routine pattern and embark on a significantly different way of feeling and behaving. However, Tutu and Tutu (2014) quote examples of individuals participating in reconciliation processes as potential trigger events to choosing a forgiving rather than destructive pattern in their lives and also refer to the work of non-profit organisations and change initiatives in this context. This is in line with our observations of the work of non-profit organizations operating in the space of PCT, who often facilitate and help to initiate a positive journey towards change. It is thus in the choice situation between "harm" and "heal" that this

study is aiming to make a contribution, specifically by examining how leaders believe their organizations bring about PTC in beneficiaries, who would typically be trapped in a negative personal cycle as illustrated in figure 1, but may, with the help of a structured PTC approached offered by non-profit organizations, move towards a more positive personal cycle and more positive life experience.

Our study

Based on the discussion of motivation and context above, the researchers decided to conduct an academic study to systematically explore the communalities in how leaders of non-profit organizations believe PTC in beneficiaries is achieved through the work of their organizations. To this end, we decided to interview leaders of non-profit organizations whose own (often founding) principles are at the heart of their organizations' operations. As explained earlier, this study focusses on exploring the overall approach that non-profit organizations take towards PTC in beneficiaries, not on the treatment of isolated conditions or symptom. (For example, there may be a specific intervention to deal with a condition such as 'anger management' in an individual who exhibits violent tendencies, but that individual may have other or wider issues linked to their violent behaviour that need to be dealt with more holistically. For this, it is important that a non-profit organization has a philosophy that underpins their overall approach towards such an individual – setting the culture and context for change in which care and a range of interventions can be provided). In other words, we aim to understand the overall scope and approach underlying the work of non-profit organizations when dealing with beneficiaries above and beyond specialist treatment or clinical interventions. In many cases, non-profit organizations will choose to employ professionals such as clinical psychologists, doctors or counsellors to offer bespoke interventions. However, non-profit organizations (operate within a broader philosophy) typically interact with beneficiaries in many ways beyond these specialist treatments, and aim to engage people in new ways of living, thinking, feeling, sharing, behaving outside of clinical work.

Methodology and sampling

The methodology in this study draws on in-depth interviews with leaders (N=35) of non-profit organizations operating in the context of PTC in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Interviews lasted between 1-3 hours each and were conducted in spring 2015 during the lead author's extended sabbatical stay in the country. It is interesting to note that participating leaders offered their personal time very generously which allowed for a true in-depth exploration of the leaders' philosophies and beliefs.

In order to identify leaders of organizations in the not-for-profit sector in South Africa whose aim it is to bring PTC in different contexts, the researcher utilised his own network of non-profit contacts derived from two decades of working in South Africa, and also collaborated with local representatives as contact persons who are well connected in the not-for-profit sector, and are, for example, active across non-profit boards.

The sampling frame for participating organizations included non-profit organizations such as charitable organizations, foundations, centres, initiatives and institutes. We purposefully sampled for a variety of diverse organisations of different size, focus and impact, with some organizations working mainly locally, while others working nationally or even internationally, to capture a spread of experience and ways of working. As previously outlined the important common denominator of participating organizations is the focus on PTC work, while the different contexts and circumstances of their work is seen as useful to uncover the core communalities that hold true across different issues and environments in the views of leaders. In this study, we search for the fundamental principles that leaders believe need to be in place for beneficiaries to benefit from PTC work and to achieve and maintain a positive change over a long period of time, regardless of what an individual's specific issue may be. Please note a full description of participating organizations will be provided in the academic publication that is to follow this current discussion paper publication.

Interview design and data collection

The interview protocol and data collection approach in this research study are distinctive for three reasons. First, the deep exploration of an important but thus far neglected area in the non-profit literature was only possible as one of the authors spent several month on a research sabbatical in the field in South Africa with the purpose of collecting data and extensively exploring the key research question of this study (Research Question: "How do non-profit leaders belief their organizations foster personal transformation change in beneficiaries?"). Second, the inductive nature and generous time frame in this study enabled the researcher to collect rich data in a relaxed atmosphere of 1:1 interviews and as thus go a long way in uncovering the underlying assumptions and beliefs of participating leaders comprehensively, capturing leaders' own narratives, rather than imposing an existing frame of reference for questioning. Third, the data collection approach in this study included a triangulation of data to verify, illustrate and contextualise leaders' accounts and the emerging ACE model of change with insights derived from beneficiaries, experts and ethnographic research. However, it is beyond the scope of this discussion paper to exemplifying all these data sources, which will be in full described in the

academic paper to follow- and we will instead focus on the presentation of insights of the leader interviews in this publication.

In this study, we adopted a qualitative line of inquiry, inspired by a grounded theory approach (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1998), in the format of one-to-one interviews so that each individual leader could voice their opinion uninterrupted. While the interview guide was thus discursive in nature, allowing leaders to voice their opinions freely, the researcher had a number of suggested follow-up questions at hand in the format of a 'topic guide' to elicit insights in relation to the research question if needed. The topic guide helped the interviewer to prompt similar questions in different interview. However, the lengths of the interviews allowed the conversation to flow naturally and let leaders voice any opinion they held on their approaches in full, to allow for responsive, flexible, and interactive data collection (Ritchie et al. 2003). The topic guide was piloted to review whether it allowed participants to give a coherent account of the issues they thought were important in relation to the research question (see above) and did not constrain what participants were able to say (Ritchie et al. 2003). As a result, small changes were made to the wording of the questions.

Data analysis

As previously explained, one researcher conducted all interviews which allowed for consistency in questioning. The interview recordings were professionally transcribed and then analysed based on extensive text files. Data were analysed using an inductive approach, in which themes were developed from raw data and then grouped into higher-order clusters (Miles and Huberman 1994). We followed the guidelines for inductive data analysis by Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) and Miles and Huberman (1994), and we analysed transcribed text through an iterative process of first applying codes and then identifying trends and themes in the data via a qualitative clustering approach.

The coding process was data driven, and therefore all coding and emerging themes are the result of the applied cluster analysis procedure. Findings were clustered into three areas of assumptions, mechanisms and rules (see findings below), subthemes were also coded thematically from the interviews to substantiate these three factors. Importantly, the data analysis revealed that emerging themes were often equally strongly expressed by leaders from different organizations and working in different applications of PTC. Subtle differences are noted (for example such as that some participants may refer to the term 'spiritual' while others may refer to the term 'religious' to describe an idea of 'broader connectedness'), however the analysis of such descriptions were grouped together to identify communalities in the first instance.

Findings

From the analysis of data in this study we extract the fundamental Assumptions (A), the mechanisms for Change (C) and the rules of Engagement (E) of how non-profit leaders believe their organisations deliver PCT and combines insights into the ACE model of change for the non-profit sector.

We first define what we mean by each of these terms, before illustrating the findings related to each term in more detail. In the exploration of these three areas, quotations have been chosen because they exemplify how respondents express their views in terms of their assumptions, mechanisms and rules.

Fundamental Assumptions (A)

The term “fundamental assumptions” is used to describe the assumptions that non-profit leaders hold which allow their organizations to engage in process related to the PTC of beneficiaries. These assumptions often relate to the fundamental beliefs **WHY** PTC is possible in the first instance. They often relate to the assumptions of positive human potential, connectedness and goodness. These beliefs often don't rely on empirical evidence or are in fact beyond empirical investigation, i.e. they can't be proven to be right or wrong and may be contested by other people, but they are what these leaders choose to believe and are at the heart/core of setting up a process. Importantly, with these assumptions in place, non-profit leaders often invite beneficiaries to believe similar things.

1. Assumption about a positive core of all human beings

Explanation: One common assumption is that “everyone has a positive core”. It does flow that everyone has the potential to change for the better. However, if someone's starting point was that some people have a negative core and some people have a positive core it may flow that in negative situations change is not possible.

‘At the core, we are all positive energy.’

ZBCA

‘There is good at the core of every human being.’

ZBMC

2. Assumption that positive change is always possible (including a belief that even in negative situations there is a potential and longing for goodness)

Explanation: This is strongly linked to the first assumption that people are good at their core. Positive change is therefore not so much about removing negativity, but rather about rediscovering the positive core and understanding what has stopped the positive core from expressing itself.

‘The belief that healing is always possible.’

YUDN

‘I would not say always good... But there is always a longing for goodness.’

HYDN

3. Assumption about the process by which negativity manifests (for a variety reasons, negativity is a function of somebody not living out their positive core (yet or any longer))

Explanation: Assumptions that across all different situations negativity manifests through somebody not living their positive core. This, for example, might be about society that your gender or race prevents you from taking a certain role. It may be happening at a societal, cultural, personal level, which suppresses the expression of the positive core. Negativity is thus seen to be a misalignment between the current behaviours and beliefs of an individuals, and the potential of their positive core.

‘Coming to South Africa, especially because of apartheid, I believe that when you perpetuate the idea of certain people that have a different colour of skin to you as “other”. The wounding operates at the level of the psyche. So when we “other” we dehumanise. In fact, in order to other, we have disconnect first from ourselves and then from the “other” and the process requires dehumanisation. And I feel like Apartheid did that and on a massive scale.’

ZBGR

4. Assumption of broader connectedness (or consciousness) among people and/or the potential thereof

Explanation: Belief in broader consciousness or connectedness between human beings and nature. For some individuals, this connection is spiritual, but not for all. A belief that positive

change is facilitated through connectedness with others and bringing all of the self into the change process. (This includes notions of physical and non-physical self).

‘Recognising the fullness of our humanity and stating, for example, our intellectual capabilities, the emotional aspects of who we are as human beings, our physical selves and our spiritual selves, all have a place. They all have value and we bring that into the workshop.’

ZBGR

‘It is not necessarily religious, but there is a recognition that there is kind of a higher consciousness and that we are more than our physical selves. We are our spiritual selves.’

ZBDN

5. Assumption that personal change can be facilitated (at least in parts) through social processes

Explanation: The process experiencing social connections in a positive way helps people to make sense of their own lives and build a positive narrative in two ways- first by consciously making sense past events and secondly by acknowledging negative aspects, learning from these and reflecting on a possible future. (The view is that before PTC people often have very negative and very self-critical narratives- in which they see their ‘core’ as negative. The process sharing and witnessing stories challenges this because the attribution of negative events will not always been the individual). The importance of recognising misalignments between values and behaviours as a journey towards alignment of the self (this is often seen to lead to resilience, performance under pressure, pride and positive relationships).

‘When you hear my story, and I hear your story, we become part of a bigger story. We are connected and support each other and support positive change in each other.’

ZBMK

Mechanisms for Change (C)

The term “mechanisms for change” is used to describe leader accounts of **HOW** PTC happens. It entails the description of the mechanisms for the personal processes of change – which, in turn, are facilitated through the social processes of the change process.

1. Feeling recognised and accepted by a group of people for “who I really am”, thereby releasing shame

Explanation: Feeling recognised and accepted by a group of people – whatever negativity is shared – fosters a sense of connection and releases toxic shame – since shame is seen to grow through silence or rejection rather than acceptance.

‘The idea that everyone’s story has value and that there are things that work in the story- in the truth telling and in the deep listening, so there is a witnessing process that happens.’

YUGR

‘to speak to what has been, what their experience has been and there is also something about being able to witness and hold, so I am speaking from the point of view from the person that speaks and also those that are witnessing and holding’

VAGR

‘We have a need to be accepted. You will not believe some of the things I have heard. How ugly. But unless we are see, however ugly our past, we cannot connect and move on. That’s why I go there’

ZBJP

2. Feeling safe to release destructive emotions such as fear and sadness

Explanation: The importance of sharing shame, guilt, fear and sadness can lead to pride and empowerment at a later time.

‘Abuse is something that is not often spoken about. That is just how things are. So I was internalising that and that is extremely unhealthy...and then later in life, it is normal to enter relationships that replicate that... For healing and transformation to kind of happen. It’s almost like you have a wound and maybe the issues are invisible. But it’s like a flesh wound – you might put on some salt, cover it up. But you also need to give it air. So the principles are like that. You need to put the process in place to allow transformation.’

UIGR

‘Vulnerability is a strength, it is often characterised as a weakness and it takes courage so there is a level of being open to what unfolds. A relief and release because I am not holding it anymore. I realise I am still here and I am still OK. There is no judgement’

OUDN

3. Recognising one is not alone, i.e. other people have similar problems and have found or are working towards solutions.

Explanation: Recognising one is not alone- that other people have similar problems and have found/ are working towards solutions- provides a sense of hope and helps people to make the choice to heal). A process of witnessing and sharing life accounts/stories authentically.

‘You are invited to stand if a question is true for you and the questions are hard questions. They are about acknowledging the wounding. There is a sense of “Oh my word, I am not alone.”’

ZBGR

4. Understanding different perspectives/learning from different perspectives

Explanation: Understanding different perspectives/learning from different perspectives. Encouraging people to witness and share positive learnings from negative experiences can both aid learning from one’s own life, but can also help to build relationships with others, as understanding of others grows. People share their own perspectives and they witness other perspectives on the same issue.

‘Everything is done by invitation in the workshop. You cannot force healing, so healing is an invitation.’

HIDN

5. Relating to other people in new ways – i.e. resonating emotionally and sensing other people’s experiences

Explanation: By engaging in non-judgemental listening people start to relate to people in new ways- they learn new rules of engagement with themselves and others and the change happens through a process of emotional resonance with each other. In essence this is a process of reciprocal healing through acceptance. A sense of extended identity in which people’s personal identities are changed in a reciprocal process with others.

‘Through a process of sharing and witnessing, participants develop a sense of acceptance for themselves and others. They make changes to the personal psyche and their collective psyche (because there is a) deeper level of conditioning that is happening.’

YOGR

6. Experience social connection in a safe and routine way and hence embed new ways of connecting as new ‘learned behaviour’

Explanation: By institutionalizing affirmative sharing and witnessing through the use of rituals and rewards, new behaviours and ways of thinking can be established as new social norms which reinforce positive emotional, cognitive and social change.

‘There are principles and kind of conditions that are necessary for healing and transformation.’

HIDN

‘That is where the wounding happens. Most of the time that conditioning means being boxed in a particular way. So we use binaries in the workshop- but we also allow for people’s identities to have full expression.’

HIDN

Rules of Engagement (E)

The term “rules of engagement” is used to describe **WHAT** processes need to be in place to allow PCT to occur. These rules flow from the fundamental assumptions and the mechanisms for change and include themes like creating safe spaces to share and witness stories and the use of rituals to embed new learned behaviour and emphasize human connectedness. As such, connections are made in the explanation below to the previous two themes.

1. Tell the truth, even if it’s emotionally difficult

Explanation: Connection can only happen if people are seen for all they are, both in terms of positive and negative self-perceptions. Hence, telling the truth is important. It links important to (C) 1 – ‘the importance of being recognized for who I really am’.

‘By holding the intention of a safe community, a healing intention, together with the truth and wanting to stand in ones truth of what they have experienced – the pain – because it is mostly about the pain and challenges (of their lives) works together to bring about something of a transformation.’

MNGR

2. Maintain (emotional) care for people at all times, ensure environments are affirmative and non-judgemental and (emotionally) safe spaces for sharing

Explanation: Positive change happens through acceptance, as does the release of toxic shame. This happens through witnessing and affirmation and the establishment of new social norms and is linked strongly to (C)2, the assumption that 'positive change is always possible' and (C)6, 'embedding new ways of connecting as new ways of behaving'.

'By holding the intention of a safe community, a healing intention'

YIGR

'The space is about being recognised and accepted for all of who you are – not about judging or being judged.'

NOJP

3. Create spaces for sharing stories that are personally important and relate to the self as well as others

Explanation: Change occurs through understanding different perspectives and knowing that you are not alone. This links strongly to (C)3 'recognising that you are not alone' and calls for the spaces that are created to include room for both cognitive and emotional sharing.

'In the workshops we ask questions that allow people to share their truth. Things like what did you learn from your mother or mother figure about being a girl or a woman?'

HIDN

4. Listening deeply to others and try to listen for meaning

Explanation: Witnessing others brings about positive change to both the witness and the sharer of the story. The witness learns through understanding new perspectives, which is captured in (C)4, 'knowing that you are not alone', and both the witness and the sharer can positively change through learning new ways of relating to each other.

'The role of the witness is often forgotten. It's like the pots you use in cooking. Everyone focusses on the ingredients, but if you are using a different pot, the food tastes different. Witnessing is like the pots. Unless they are there, the change can't be held safely.'

NNDN

5. Role-model positive ways of interacting and encourage authentic vulnerability

Explanation: Change happens through people learning new roles and rules of connecting. By witnessing positive interaction, they will be invited to experiment and have the courage to also engage authentically.

‘The role of the facilitator is to very consciously support and hold a safe (non-judgemental) space, and allow what needs to come forward to come forward’

NIGR

‘I am prepared to make myself fully vulnerable.’

NIJP

6. Use rituals to create safety and rewards, i.e. set out rules of engagement explicitly

Explanation: Rituals create a sense of occasion and a sense of closure around difficult events. They also create a structure and a sense of safety. The use of rituals and rewards help to embed an affirmative structure of engagement when one perhaps previously did not exist. This is strongly linked to (C)6 ‘embedding new learned behaviour’ and also (A)4, ‘encouraging a broader sense of connection’.

‘At the start of every session, we invite someone to talk through their mantra. The group agreement. At the end everyone cheers. But it’s not just the mantra – what we are building is resilience – the ability to face a fear – speaking in public – and to perform under a kind of pressure and be rewarded for it.’

NCJP

‘So there is a chronological way things will unfold, there is a kind of structure, but we allow them to experience the process by them participating fully in it.’

NCGR

‘There is an agreement between the facilitator and the group. This should be the first thing, one of the most important things, it is not rules set one way, it is always a two-way process and one in which people are mutually accountable.’

NIJP

‘We have what we call an ethical agreement. Ethical Community Agreements. There are eleven of them and we share them with the participants and we get them to actually agree.’

HIGR

Summary model of findings

In table 1 below we combine the findings described in the previous section and outline the ACE model of change in detail. In particular we illustrate how the fundamental Assumptions (A), mechanisms for Change (C) and rules of Engagement (E) interact. In the first instance the Assumptions (A) form the foundation of the model- in that they define the mechanisms for Change (C) and these in turn help to define the rules of Engagement (E).

What is striking is that the **Fundamental Assumptions (A)** include a very positive view of human nature and potential. Essentially defining human nature and potential as pro-social and positive in nature. Negativity is thus framed as a prevention of what would come most naturally to us as a species. Negativity is seen as something that is learned through dysfunctional states or family systems. This view is perhaps best summarised by the famous Nelson Mandela quote in his book 'Long walk to freedom', that was made even more famous for being popularised by Barak Obama in response to the Charlottesville riots in the USA, in 2017:

'No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.'

Nelson Mandela, in his book *Long Walk to Freedom*, 1990.

Table 1. The ACE model populated with headline findings and explanatory links

Levels	Mechanisms for Change (C)	Rules of Engagement (E):	Explanation for how C and E are linked
<i>Emotional</i>	1. Feeling recognised and accepted by a group of people for “who I really am”, thereby releasing shame	1. Tell the truth, even if its emotionally difficult	<i>Since feelings of shame often grow through rejection rather than acceptance, feeling accepted by a group of people helps to release shame</i>
<i>Emotional</i>	2. Feeling safe to release destructive emotions such as fear and sadness	2. Maintain (emotional) care for people at all times, ensure environments are affirmative and non-judgemental and (emotionally) safe spaces for sharing	<i>Releasing fear and sadness can lead to a sense of calm, pride and empowerment</i>
<i>Cognitive</i>	3. Recognising one is not alone, i.e. other people have similar problems and have found or are working towards solutions	3. Create spaces for witnessing and sharing stories that are personally important and relate to the self as well as others	<i>Recognising cognitively that one is not alone provides a sense of hope and helps people to make the choice to heal</i>
<i>Cognitive, emotional and social</i>	4. Understanding different perspectives emotionally and cognitively and learning from different perspectives	4. Listening deeply to others and try to listen for meaning	<i>Reflecting on positive learnings from negative experiences (both experiences of self and others) can aid learning from critical situations. It can also help to build relationships with others and connect emotionally</i>
<i>Social and emotional</i>	5. Relating to other people in new ways – i.e. resonating emotionally and sensing other people’s experiences	5. Role-model positive ways of interacting and encourage authentic vulnerability	<i>By a social mechanisms of modelling people start to relate to people in new ways- they learn new rules of engagement with themselves and others and the change happens through a process of emotional resonance with each other</i>
<i>Social</i>	6. Experience social connection in a safe and routine way and hence embed new ways of connecting as new ‘learned behaviour’	6. Use rituals to create safety and rewards, i.e. set out rules of engagement explicitly	<i>Provide safety through rules and rewards and thereby allow participants to experience and embed new ways of interacting – and as such institutionalize change</i>
Fundamental Assumptions (A)			
1. Assumption about a positive core of all human beings 2. Assumption that positive change is always possible (including a belief that even in negative situations there is a potential and longing for goodness) 3. Assumption about the process by which negativity manifests (for a variety of possible reasons somebody is not living out their positive core (yet or any longer)) 4. Assumption of broader connectedness (or consciousness) among people and/or the potential thereof 5. Assumption that personal change can be facilitated (at least in parts) through social processes			

Based on this positive foundation, the leaders in this study outline **Mechanisms for Change (C)** that emphasise the importance of social processes in bringing about change. The importance of both sharing and witnessing of stories in affirmative social settings is a key theme that emerges. Much previous work has emphasised the importance of telling stories (see also Tutu and Tutu's cycle in figure 1) - but what is striking from the findings in this study is that the role of the witness is seen to be critical in bringing about change in all parties involved: the witness, the story-teller and wider society. Furthermore, the change process is seen to rely on emotional, cognitive and societal elements, as outlined in the right hand column in figure 2. From a societal perspective the importance of connection is highlighted as mechanism for change- with this comes the requirement to share the truth- not matter how negative it is- and to encourage affirmation and acceptance between individuals. In emotional terms PTC is seen to occur by shining light on issues that could cause toxic shame and stopping the cycle of silence or judgement that can allow shame to become toxic. In cognitive terms witnessing and sharing brings about important benefits associated with taking different perspectives and realising that one is not alone. It is interesting to note that the mechanisms for change embrace a connected sense of identity that is in line with the philosophy of Ubuntu (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_philosophy) - that suggests our identities and wellbeing are tied up in the wellbeing and identities of others- rather than defined by personal success. This is perhaps best described by the Desmond Tutu quote in relation to Ubuntu:

'Ubuntu ... speaks of the very essence of being human. It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, a person is a person through other persons. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.'

Desmond Tutu, in his book *No Future without Forgiveness*.

The **rules of Engagement (E)** flow directly out of the fundamental assumptions and the mechanisms of change. These sets of 'rules' set the templates for how people engaging in PTC can support each other in this process. The rules of engagement build on the behavioural principles of Ubuntu in that they emphasise listening and caring for others – as well as setting the example for others to follow in connecting with others. What our results perhaps suggest newly is the importance of institutionalising this positive interaction and positive connection through making oneself vulnerable. The use of rituals, role models and above all the presentation of 'spaces' in which people can learn a new normal- a socialisation of interaction that is functional and embeds

positive change – is key to the description of rules of engagement derive from leaders in this study. One quote that describes the importance of rules of engagement comes from an anonymous adult participant in a PTC based programme:

‘If someone shares who they are it allows you to connect to them. Vulnerability allows you to connect. My time in the programme has institutionalized intimate conversations – so that I can now be more intimate with my family and friends. The process of sharing and witnessing allowed me to get in touch with the person I wanted to be. What was new to me was the shared responsibility between the witness and the sharer’

Anonymous

Conclusions

To conclude, figure 2 below graphically illustrates the findings of this study in the format of a pyramid which has the assumptions (A) as a foundation and the Mechanisms for Change (C) and Rules of Engagement (E) build on top. We offer figure 1 as the summary version of the ACE model and a graphical illustration of our work and hope it acts as an invitation to non-profit organisations to explore how the ACE model can be used to build case studies that bring non-profit leaders’ approaches to life, by telling the stories of their important work in PTC.

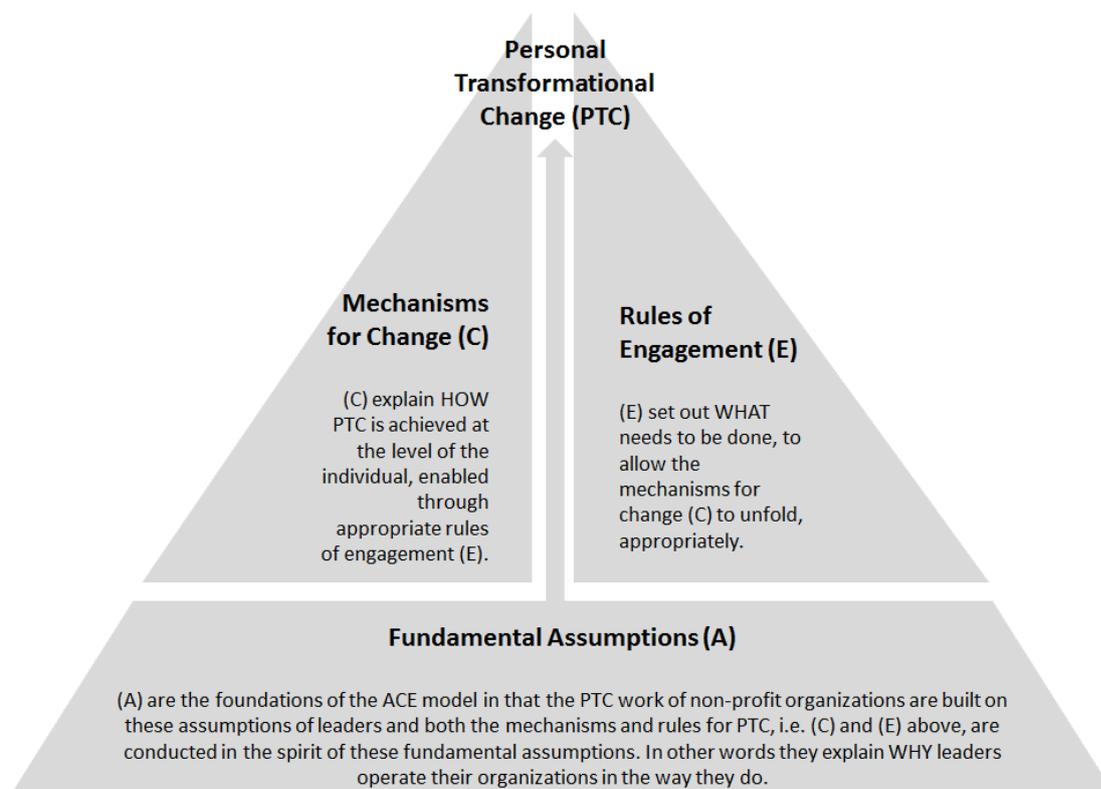


Figure 2: The ACE Model of Change in Summary

We also hope the model may serve as a vehicle by which leaders can connect these three intersecting aspects of their work- and as such bring about even more positive PTC- by drawing closer links between the assumptions, mechanisms of change and rules of engagement adopted by their organizations. In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal a number of key insights derived from leaders of non-profit organizations that different organisations share and practice in various ways. Importantly in this study, we aim to systematically capture communalities in how non-profit leaders believe their organizations bring about PTC in beneficiaries and as such hope that the wider sector and future non-profit leaders can benefit from the results of this study.

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