Chapter 2
Organizations and Exposure to Trauma at a Collective Level: The Taxonomy of Potentially Traumatic Events

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ABSTRACT
Organizational trauma is a contemporary construct that highlights long-lasting negative psychological consequences of various internal and external events that overwhelm the capacity of people in organizational settings. This chapter proposes that a typology of “potentially traumatic events” (PTEs) and the taxonomy of these events’ attributes can be developed by conducting a comprehensive literature review. The search of databases for the period of 1995-2016 revealed 81 articles on which inductive qualitative content analysis was conducted. Analysis brought three PTEs: “events resulting from organizational processes”; “adverse experiences in trauma-prone occupations/sectors”, and “catastrophic events caused by economic/social/environmental conditions”. These events’ attributes appeared distinctive under three themes: “features of traumatic events”; “human behaviours”; “internal and external organizational environment”. As the final step, the proposed taxonomy was applied to real traumatic business cases happened in 2015 and early 2016 so that the taxonomic model was tested.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter aims to bring forward a taxonomy of potentially traumatic events that organizations and their members may be exposed to. Organizations are idiosyncratic social systems that are composed of sub-systems with particular technology, structure, culture, and human capital at managerial and non-managerial levels. This peculiarity emerges as a consequence of the interaction of these sub-systems, which can be defined as the internal environment of organizations. Of course organizations are open systems that both affect and are affected by their proximal and distal external conditions. Employees perform in the settings where these internal and external conditions are continuously interacting and

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Organizations and Exposure to Trauma at a Collective Level

are presumably productive and constructive. Nevertheless, internal dynamics and external conditions of organizational systems can be destructive at individual and collective levels. Dysfunctional processes, improper methods, imprudent decisions, unacceptable behaviours, or catastrophic interpersonal relationships, to list a few as weaknesses may be present in the layers of organizational hierarchy and may ignite failures at individual and organizational levels and cause damage. Besides, environmental, economic, social, political, and technological external conditions may threaten survival and bodily integrity of people. The amalgam of organizations’ unique internal and external attributes intending to be beneficial for all may suddenly transform into a circumstance that potentially harms people and sometimes with long-lasting impact which is named as trauma.

Although researchers have diverse perspectives related to trauma as a construct, they unanimously agree on the fact that trauma is the consequence of overwhelming events (e.g., Herman, 1992; Saakvitne, Tennen, & Ameck, 1998; Steinkamp, 2014) that exceed people’s capacity to deal with them. Akin to this definition, staggering events that unfold in organizational settings can cause strain at collective levels and people may experience negative emotions like anxiety, depression, rage, and helplessness. Problem solving skills, concentration on tasks, performance, and interpersonal relations may be negatively affected (Kahn, 2003). This emotional state at the collective level can be named as organizational trauma. Steinkamp (2014) underpins that if not handled properly, the traumatic experience leads to dysfunctional behaviours as a collective phenomenon. However, responses to traumatic conditions show enormous interpersonal differences. The same traumatic event may create enduring effect on physical and/or psychological health and well-being of some people; but for others, it is simply a distraction and recovery happens in the blink of an eye. How intolerable the adverse event is experienced certainly varies from person to person, but it would be doubtful to claim that people show persistent tolerance levels across time and space; indeed, there is intrapersonal variance. The same is true at the organizational level. Organizations at the collective level show diverse reactions when a traumatic condition is faced. A traumatic event may paralyze functionality of some organizations and may cause decline and even death if we borrow the terms from organizational life cycle research (Adizes, 1979; Miller & Freisen, 1980; Lester, Parnell, & Carraher, 2003); as the others rebound easily and convert this adverse experience to organizational learning to polish their resilience.

Organizations’ capacity and strength in dealing with the unfavourable conditions and recovering from them, their speed in taking action, collective reactions, and solidarity among the members are the distinct features to understand elasticity of organizations facing traumatic conditions. The characteristics of adverse conditions are critical determinants of traumatic consequences; how extraordinary the event is, severity of its consequences, if it is man-made or natural, or if its impact is only on a single organization or exceeds to other stakeholders out of the company are among a few characteristics or attributes of traumatic events that researchers are addressing. Some conventional concepts like organizational failures/errors (Aini and Fakhru’l-Razi, 2013; Reason, 2002), crisis (Antonacopoulou & Sheaffer, 2014; Constantinides, 2013; Powley & Piderit, 2008), disasters (Bozeman, 2011a, 2011b; Waring, 2015), and catastrophe (Kumar, Gupta, Agarwal, & Singh, 2016); or more contemporary terms like organizational wounds (Kahn, 2011), implosion (Bozeman, 2011b), miasma (Gabriel, 2012; Stein, 2007), darkness (Gabriel, 2012; Griffin, & Lopez, 2005; Griffin, & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004; Linstead, Maréchal, & Grif-fin, 2014; Stein, 2007), and zemblanity (Giustiniano, Cunha, & Clegg, 2015) are cited in the literature in order to differentiate the adverse events that organizations may encounter.

Bozeman (2011a) attempted to distinctively summarize the definition of various conventional concepts currently available in the literature. Errors are defined as the unintended deviations from organizational