

The SWEET Model in Leadership and Management: Cultivating Transformational Leaders in Mental Health

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Published: August 15, 2025

Abstract

Effective leadership in mental health settings demands more than administrative skills; it requires transformational capabilities that engage the full complexity of human experience. The SWEET Model offers an integrative framework for cultivating leaders who operate across conscious, preconscious, unconscious, and existential layers, fostering environments of psychological safety, innovation, and ethical practice. This article examines how the SWEET Model informs leadership development, management strategies, and organizational culture transformation within mental health systems.

Keywords

SWEET Model, SWEET Institute, leadership, transformational leadership, mental health management, organizational culture, psychological safety, ethical leadership

Introduction

Leadership in mental health is uniquely challenging, requiring the navigation of complex clinical, organizational, and human dynamics. Traditional leadership models often emphasize transactional skills or hierarchical authority, which may fall short in addressing the relational and existential demands of this field (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The SWEET Model, grounded in layered transformation, provides a robust framework for developing leaders capable of fostering meaningful change at both individual and systemic levels.

Theoretical Framework

The SWEET Model integrates leadership development with the Four-Layered Transformation framework:

- **Conscious Layer:** Leaders develop clear strategic competencies, communication skills, and operational knowledge.
- **Preconscious Layer:** Reflective awareness of interpersonal dynamics, biases, and organizational culture.
- **Unconscious Layer:** Exploration of shadow aspects, defense mechanisms, and personal triggers influencing leadership behavior.
- **Existential Layer:** Connection to personal values, ethical commitments, and the larger purpose of mental health leadership (Frankl, 1985; Goleman, 2006).

By engaging these layers, leaders cultivate authenticity, resilience, and emotional intelligence necessary for transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Application and Analysis

The SWEET Method guides leadership development through its Formula (Why, What, How, Then What), Framework (Principles, Techniques, Steps, Do's and Don'ts), and Paradigm (Socratic Method, Desire Method, Collective Learning, Critical Thinking, Mastery). Leaders use self-inquiry and reflection to align actions with core values and organizational mission. For example, in managing conflict, leaders move beyond surface solutions to address underlying relational and existential tensions.

This process supports creating psychologically safe environments where staff feel heard, valued, and empowered, which is critical for reducing burnout and improving clinical outcomes (Edmondson, 1999).

Implications

Implementing the SWEET Model in leadership development has broad implications:

- Cultivating leaders who are self-aware, emotionally intelligent, and ethically grounded.
- Shaping organizational cultures that prioritize connection, learning, and adaptability.
- Enhancing staff engagement and retention through transformational practices.
- Supporting sustainable mental health systems that balance operational demands with human needs.

Conclusion

The SWEET Model redefines leadership in mental health by integrating technical skill with deep personal transformation. By working across all layers of consciousness and identity, leaders become agents of systemic change, capable of fostering environments that promote healing, growth, and ethical practice.

References

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