

The SWEET Model in Management and Leadership: A Human-Centered Framework for Transformational Change

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Abstract

In the context of complex organizations and emotionally demanding work environments, effective leadership requires more than strategy—it demands emotional intelligence, relational depth, and existential clarity. The SWEET Model applies the Four-Layered Transformation framework to management and leadership, offering a roadmap for transformational leadership that integrates conscious actions, psychological insight, unconscious dynamics, and meaning-making. This article explores how leaders can apply the SWEET Model to foster engagement, accountability, and sustainable culture change.

Keywords

SWEET Model, SWEET Institute, leadership, management, organizational transformation, conscious leadership, mental health, systems change, applied neuroscience

Introduction

Traditional models of management often emphasize control, metrics, and productivity, overlooking the human layers that drive organizational health and success (Goleman, 1998). Leadership within healthcare and mental health settings is especially complex, as it involves guiding individuals and teams through emotionally intense work while sustaining mission-driven engagement. The SWEET Model offers leaders a human-centered approach grounded in layered transformation.

Theoretical Framework

The Four-Layered Transformation framework applies to leadership as follows:

- **Conscious Layer:** Clear communication, accountability structures, role clarity, and measurable outcomes.
- **Preconscious Layer:** Relational dynamics, team habits, unspoken norms, and resistance to change.
- **Unconscious Layer:** Collective projections, authority transference, avoidance patterns, and unresolved conflicts.
- **Existential Layer:** Shared purpose, values alignment, leadership identity, and organizational meaning (Frankl, 1985; Kets de Vries, 2006).

This model aligns with transformational and servant leadership approaches, emphasizing growth, relational integrity, and systemic impact.

Application and Analysis

Leaders using the SWEET Model practice:

- **Self-inquiry:** “Why am I leading this way? What values am I embodying?”
- **Team inquiry:** Surfacing the unspoken: “What are we avoiding as a team?” “What meaning drives our work together?”
- **Behavioral integrity:** Matching words with action across all layers.
- **Organizational healing:** Addressing systemic trauma, disengagement, and burnout with layered interventions.

By applying the SWEET Formula (Why, What, How, Then What) to organizational challenges, leaders foster thoughtful and inclusive decision-making, while creating space for transformation rather than just performance.

Implications

The SWEET Model empowers leaders to:

- Foster psychologically safe work environments
- Model reflective and emotionally intelligent leadership
- Address not only symptoms but root causes of dysfunction
- Align operations with values and mission
- Create a culture where healing, growth, and innovation coexist

Conclusion

Leadership is not just about moving people forward—it’s about meeting them where they are, across all levels of consciousness. The SWEET Model offers a transformative framework that supports deep, lasting, and human-centered change in organizations. It invites a new generation of leaders to lead with insight, compassion, clarity, and purpose.

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