Let Us RISE

Restorative Integral Support & Empowerment

A Whole Person–Whole Community–Whole Systems Approach to Trauma-Integrating Organizations

A Working White Paper – Heather Larkin

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Executive Summary

Organizations depend on people's capacity to build relationships, make decisions, learn, develop, and contribute to a shared purpose. Yet these capacities are shaped not only by individual skills or intentions, but also by the conditions in which people work and participate. Adversity, trauma, chronic stress, loss, discrimination, and relational harm can affect people across the lifespan. Organizational conditions can compound these effects—or help create the safety, support, and opportunities needed for healing, development, and meaningful participation.

Trauma-informed, resilience-oriented, and restorative approaches have contributed important knowledge and practices. But an organization can endorse their principles while maintaining conditions that undermine them: workloads that make wellbeing difficult to sustain, responsibility without sufficient authority, expectations of openness without protection from retaliation, or accountability processes that document harm without supporting repair or organizational learning.

RISE—Restorative Integral Support & Empowerment—addresses the relationship between the capacities organizations seek to foster and the conditions their systems make possible. It extends Restorative Integral Support (RIS), which applied Integral Theory to understanding and addressing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma while fostering resilience and healthier development. Subsequent community-based, organizational, and policy work extended this perspective, bringing greater attention to relationships, structural conditions, and equity. RISE carries this work forward by making system design an explicit part of the framework.

A trauma-integrating system is not a system without conflict, adversity, or disruption. It is a system that can recognize what is happening and who is affected, respond with appropriate support, repair harm where possible, learn from experience, and develop the conditions that facilitate future experience. Trauma integration is therefore an ongoing capacity rather than a prescribed implementation model.

RISE brings three interconnected dimensions into view: Whole Person, Whole Community, and Whole Systems. It asks how individual experience, relationships, culture, roles, policies, governance, resources, and accountability interact—and whether their combined effects support or undermine healthy functioning and development.

The RISE Recipe offers a practical companion to the framework. Its six interconnected system conditions provide a lens for examining how an organization is configured to support meaningful participation, wellbeing, relationships, appropriate responsibility and authority, restoration, learning, and development. A companion Testing Worksheet supports reflection on how these conditions are present and functioning in a particular setting.

RISE is an emerging framework to be refined through dialogue, application, and testing. It does not replace approaches that are useful in a given context. Its distinctive contribution is

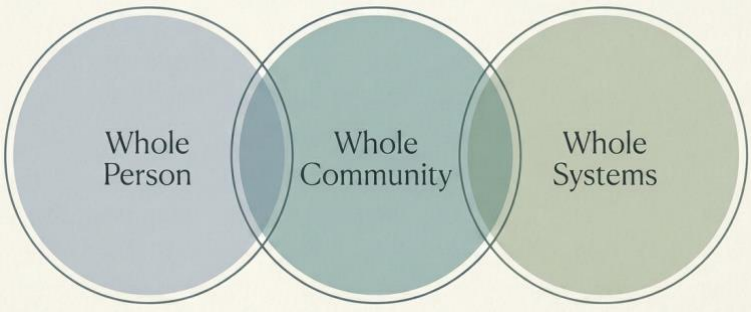
to ask what happens when the conditions needed for healing, development, relationship, and participation become part of system design rather than depending primarily on individual effort, informal goodwill, or exceptional leadership.

> *Healthy systems do more than prevent harm. They create conditions in which people and relationships can develop greater capacity for connection, learning, agency, participation, adaptation, and emergence.*

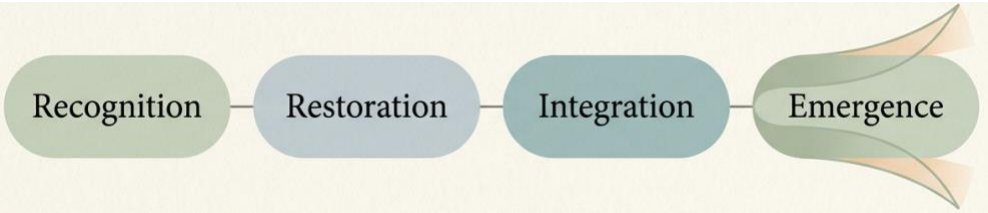
A RISE Orientation

RISE does not prescribe a single organizational structure or implementation formula. Its principles are intended to remain stable while their expression adapts to people, purposes, histories, cultures, and circumstances. The framework therefore emphasizes both design and emergence: enough structure to support safety, clarity, participation, and accountability, and enough openness to allow learning, development, and new possibilities to emerge.

Two complementary orientations organize the framework:



and



These are not linear stages. They represent interconnected dimensions of an ongoing developmental process.

The goal of RISE is not to create perfect organizations. It is to help systems develop sufficient relational, structural, and developmental capacity to remain responsive when mistakes, conflict, harm, disruption, uncertainty, or outdated practices arise.

A trauma-integrating system is therefore not a finished state. It is a system capable of recognizing reality, responding wisely, repairing what has been damaged, learning from experience, adapting its structures, and continuing to develop in relationship with the people and communities it serves.

Why RISE?

RISE emerged through a long exploration of the relationships among individual wellbeing, community support, organizational systems, leadership, policy, and human development.

My early professional practice in community mental health exposed me to fragmented systems in which mental health, hospitals, schools, substance use services, social services, housing, nursing homes, and other community institutions often addressed different parts of people's lives without a sufficiently integrated understanding of the whole. I returned to doctoral study in part to understand systems as well as individuals. My dissertation examined systems integration in substance abuse service delivery through systems theory and Integral Theory (Larkin, 2010). This work deepened my interest in how organizations develop, how structures influence relationships and practice, and how policies and interorganizational relationships affect functioning.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study demonstrated the cumulative and interconnected effects of adversity across the life course (Felitti et al., 1998). Its implications extended beyond individual experiences: fragmented services and policies could fail to address problems that were themselves interconnected (Larkin & Records, 2007; Larkin, Felitti, et al., 2014).

At UAlbany, I began translating ACE and resilience research into program development and community supports through ACE Think Tank and Action Team meetings. This work contributed to the HEARTS Initiative and the MARC Project (Larkin, 2009; Larkin et al., 2018; Larkin & Park, 2012; Larkin et al., 2017; Larkin, LaBrenz, et al., 2020; Larkin, Shields, et al., 2012; Larkin, Wallace, et al., 2020). The Pair of ACEs framework (Ellis & Dietz, 2017) offered a particularly useful way to communicate how community and structural conditions shape adversity. It gave accessible expression to a wider systems perspective: human development takes place within relationships, communities, institutions, and policies.

Restorative Integral Support (RIS), co-developed with John Records, grew from applying Integral Theory to understanding and addressing ACEs and trauma while fostering resilience and healthier development (Larkin & Records, 2007). Integral Theory provided an orienting framework for considering multiple dimensions of experience and systems (Wilber, 2006). RIS offered a way to bring relevant approaches together in response to the needs and circumstances of particular agencies and communities. Trauma-informed practice, resilience approaches, restorative practices, and other methods could contribute where they were appropriate; they were not a single prescribed package that every setting needed to adopt.

The HEARTS Initiative, MARC Project, and subsequent scholarly and applied work further developed this thinking (Larkin, LaBrenz, et al., 2020; Larkin, Wallace, et al., 2020). Over time, applying and extending RIS also brought greater attention to policy equity: not only how organizations could change their own policies and practices, but how ACE and trauma

research could inform advocacy concerning the structural conditions affecting communities (Duncan et al., 2023; LaBrenz et al., 2020; Larkin, Felitti, et al., 2014; Larkin, Shields, et al., 2012; Larkin, Wallace, et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017).

RIS therefore had a systemic intent from the beginning. It sought to address adversity and trauma while fostering resilience, strengthening relationships and communities, and supporting healthier organizational and policy conditions. Its application, however, relied substantially on leaders' ability to understand the principles and use their authority to translate them into organizational change (Larkin, 2015; Larkin & Records, 2007, 2011). The framework did not offer the same degree of explicit guidance about how roles, authority, accountability, governance, participation, resources, and other features of system design could be configured to sustain that work.

My subsequent experiences in higher education further exposed the gap between trauma-informed principles and the organizational conditions in which people are expected to enact them. Applying RIS revealed another layer of the problem: even when people understand the effects of adversity and the importance of relationships, the systems in which they work may not provide the conditions, resources, authority, or support needed to put that understanding into practice. RISE represents continuity with RIS as well as an extension of it. It emerged from a question raised through the experience of applying RIS: *What would it look like to make the conditions that support healthy development part of the system's design itself?*

These experiences also clarified a broader insight: capacities for leadership, resilience, and development emerge within systems, and those systems need the capacity to evolve in ways that facilitate rather than undermine the capacities they seek to cultivate.

The Challenge: When Trauma-Informed Practice Meets Organizational Reality

Trauma-informed approaches have helped organizations recognize how adversity and trauma can affect experience, relationships, and behavior. They also offer principles for creating greater safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and responsiveness (Hübl, 2026; University at Buffalo Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care).

These principles matter in organizational life. People need sufficient safety to participate, trust influences collaboration, and opportunities for choice and agency affect whether people can contribute meaningfully. Relationships shape wellbeing and development. Yet an organization's structures and everyday practices can contradict the principles it formally endorses.

Consider a few common tensions:

- Practitioners are expected to regulate themselves while working under chronic overload.
- Leaders are held responsible for outcomes without sufficient authority or resources to influence them.

- Employees are encouraged to speak openly but learn that disagreement carries professional risk.
- Formal processes document harm without creating meaningful opportunities for repair or learning.
- Organizations promote collaboration while fragmenting responsibility and accountability.
- Policies endorse wellbeing while workloads, staffing, or everyday expectations undermine it.

These are not simply problems of individual skill or commitment. Organizational structures affect what people can realistically do. A person may receive a leadership title without adequate preparation or authority. A capable leader may recognize the need for change but lack influence over the policies, resources, or incentives that need to change. People at different levels of an organization may work from different assumptions about priorities, responsibilities, and what is possible.

RISE therefore brings responsibility, authority, accountability, role clarity, resources, and support into the same field of inquiry. When these are misaligned, organizational problems can become personalized: the person closest to a problem becomes the visible location of a failure that is distributed across roles, structures, policies, and relationships.

This does not eliminate individual responsibility. It expands the inquiry.

What was this person responsible for?

What conditions shaped what this person was able to do?

RISE seeks to hold both questions together. It asks not only whether people have the skills and commitment needed to contribute, but whether the system enables them to use those capacities and respond when conditions need to change.

Building Capacity While Changing What Requires Resilience

Resilience research has moved beyond an emphasis on individual toughness. It has helped illuminate the capacities and protective conditions that support individuals, relationships, and communities in responding to adversity, recovering, adapting, and developing. These conditions may include supportive relationships, community connection, meaningful participation, resources, identity, purpose, and opportunities for growth (Bender, 2025; Duncan et al., 2023; Gerlach, Morris, et al., 2021; Keyes, 2004; Larkin, LaBrenz, et al., 2020).

At the same time, it is inadequate to expect people and communities to remain resilient while experiencing ongoing policy and system dysfunction (Benedict et al., 2024; Duncan et al., 2023; LaBrenz et al., 2020; Larkin, Felitti, et al., 2014; Pyles et al., 2025).

Resilience cannot substitute for addressing conditions that repeatedly generate adversity. RISE therefore holds two questions together:

How can people and communities develop the capacities needed to respond to adversity?

How can systems change the conditions that repeatedly make such adaptation necessary?

Both matter. The Pair of ACEs framework helped communicate how adversity can arise not only through experiences within families but also through broader community and structural conditions, including poverty, violence, racism, oppression, exclusion, and inequity (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). It offered an accessible way to express a systems perspective that recognizes how human development is affected by broader relational and structural contexts (Duncan et al., 2023; Disney et al., 2025; Gerlach, LaBrenz et al., 2021; LaBrenz et al., 2020; Larkin, Wallace, et al., 2020).

RISE carries this insight forward by asking how organizations, institutions, governments, and policies can themselves operate in healthier ways.

Trauma-Informed, Restorative, and Trauma-Integrating

Trauma-informed practice contributes an understanding of how adversity and trauma can affect people and relationships, along with principles and practices intended to support safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and responsiveness (Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; University at Buffalo Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care).

Resilience approaches illuminate the capacities and protective conditions that support adaptation and development. Restorative approaches, including restorative justice, contribute perspectives on accountability, dialogue, repair, reconnection, and addressing harm (Armour & Umbreit, 2018; Benedict et al., 2024; Benedict et al., 2026; The Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue; Restorative Justice Institute; Umbreit & Armour, 2010). These approaches can complement one another, but they are not interchangeable. Nor does RISE assume that every organization needs to adopt the same set of programs or practices.

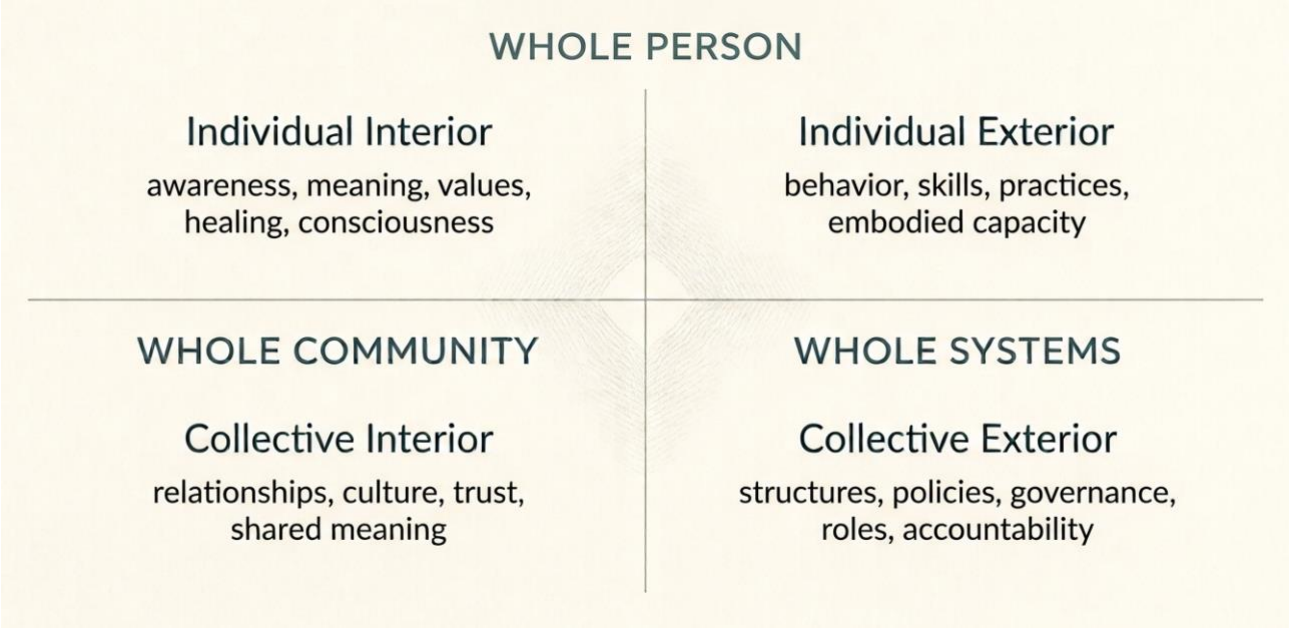
RIS applied an Integral framework to understanding and addressing ACEs and trauma while fostering resilience and healthier development. It provided an orientation for considering multiple dimensions of adversity and identifying approaches suited to the needs and circumstances of particular agencies and communities. RISE retains that flexibility while making the design and ongoing development of organizational conditions more explicit.

A trauma-integrating system does more than recognize trauma or implement responsive practices. It develops the capacity to recognize what is happening, support people affected, address relational harm, learn from experience, and adapt structures that facilitate future experience. This capacity is ongoing and context-dependent; it cannot be established simply by adopting a label or completing a program.

The distinction is therefore not between approaches that matter and approaches that do not. It is between using valuable approaches within existing conditions and also examining whether those conditions enable the approaches to work.

Whole Person–Whole Community–Whole Systems

RISE approaches organizational wellbeing through three interconnected dimensions: whole person, whole community, and whole systems. Integral Theory offers a way of understanding human experience and social life through multiple, interconnected dimensions. It attends to both individual and collective experience, and to interior dimensions such as meaning and relationships as well as exterior dimensions such as behavior, practices, and structures (Larkin & Records, 2007; Wilber, 2006). This can be depicted as:



Together, these perspectives offer an integrated way of understanding human experience, relationships, and the systems in which people participate (Wilber, 2006; Wilber, 2024). The following sections explore each dimension while recognizing that none operates independently of the others.

Whole Person

People are more than the roles they occupy, the diagnoses they carry, the problems they present, or the outputs they produce (Larkin & Records, 2007, 2011; Larkin, 2015). A person may simultaneously be a parent, partner, caregiver, employee, leader, learner, friend, community member, spiritual practitioner, and embodied human being.

Organizational systems often privilege one dimension of a person's life while treating other dimensions as secondary. Work may be treated as primary while caregiving, family responsibilities, health, relationships, rest, or meaning are treated as private matters that people are expected to manage outside the system.

RISE recognizes that these dimensions are not neatly separable in lived experience. Whole-person participation includes attention to physical wellbeing, emotional experience,

relationships, meaning, development, family responsibilities, rest, work, and the ordinary rhythms through which people sustain their lives.

A system that requires people to repeatedly sacrifice essential dimensions of themselves in order to participate may achieve short-term performance while undermining longer-term capacity (Benedict et al., 2024; Disney et al., 2025; Pyles et al., 2025).

Whole Community

People develop through relationships and communities. Support is therefore relational and networked rather than located in a single intervention or service. Family, colleagues, mentors, peers, professional relationships, community networks, and other forms of intersubjective connection can provide contexts in which people receive support, contribute to others, develop capacity, and experience belonging (Duncan et al., 2023; Disney et al., 2025; Esaki & Larkin, 2013; Gerlach, LaBrenz, et al., 2021; Gerlach, Morris, et al., 2021; Larkin et al., 2018; Larkin & Records, 2007).

This perspective is particularly important for resilience. People do not develop resilience only through individual effort. Capacity can emerge through relationships in which people are seen, supported, challenged, accompanied, and able to contribute (Bender, 2025; Hübl, 2026; Records, 2018). The relational dimension complements the structural perspective of whole systems (see Benedict et al., 2026). RISE attends both to the relationships through which people experience support and to the organizational and institutional conditions that enable or constrain those relationships.

Whole Systems

Individuals and communities participate within organizational and institutional structures that condition what is possible (Larkin & Records, 2007; Larkin, 2005; Larkin, 2010). Policies, governance, workload, communication, resource allocation, role definitions, accountability, decision-making, and participation practices all influence relationships and behavior (Benedict et al., 2024).

Integral Theory provides a useful map for understanding human experience across individual and collective dimensions, including both interior experience and exterior behavior and structures (Wilber, 2006). Within this perspective, individuals and organizations can be understood as distinct but interrelated forms of holons rather than simply as different levels of the same hierarchy (Larkin, 2005).

Individual holons participate in social holons, but social holons are not simply aggregates of the individual holons who participate in them. Social holons develop their own relational, cultural, and structural patterns (Wilber, 2006). The organization itself can therefore be understood as a social holon whose interior and exterior dimensions develop through interaction (Larkin, 2005; Wilber, 2006). Policies, procedures, governance structures, and roles are exterior expressions of the social system (Larkin & Records, 2007; Robertson, 2015).

These dimensions are not separate domains (Larkin, 2005; Wilber, 2006; Wilber, 2024). They interact continuously in organizational life. Strong policies may coexist with weak relational culture; compassionate relationships may be constrained by disempowering structures; developed leaders may operate within ineffective governance; and sophisticated procedures may exist without meaningful reflection or repair. RISE attends to these interactions and to the degree of alignment among individual experience, collective relationships, and organizational structures.

Trauma Integration

Trauma integration concerns what a system is able to do when difficulty occurs: recognize what is happening, respond appropriately, support those affected, repair harm, learn from experience, make space for and integrate emotional responses, and develop in ways that reduce the likelihood of reproducing the same conditions (Hübl, 2026; Records, 2018).

This does not replace prevention or intervention. It brings them into a broader developmental process in which systems continually learn from what occurs and strengthen their capacity to respond. A healthy system is not a disruption-free system. It is a system capable of meeting disruption without unnecessarily reproducing harm—and capable of learning afterward.

Trauma integration therefore includes both immediate response and longer-term development. It asks:

What happened?

Who was affected?

What conditions contributed?

What support is needed?

What relationships were disrupted?

What needs repair?

What can be learned?

What structures need to change?

What capacities need to develop?

How can the system respond differently next time?

Recognition can operate across several interconnected dimensions: recognizing that something happened; recognizing the experience, contribution, or impact for the people involved; and recognizing the conditions and patterns that produced or sustained the experience. Each matters. A system may acknowledge an event without understanding its impact, or acknowledge an individual's experience without examining the conditions that contributed to it. Recognition becomes meaningful when an organization allows what it learns

about an event, its impact, and the conditions surrounding it to inform its response and subsequent decisions.

The RISE framework brings together the central orientations, dimensions, and processes described in this paper. It offers an integrated view of how the whole person, whole community, and whole systems orientations inform the ongoing processes of recognition, restoration, integration, and emergence:



Restoration as Increased Capacity

Restoration does not necessarily mean returning to a previous state (Hübl, 2026; Larkin & Records, 2007). For an individual, restoration may involve developing greater capacity to feel without becoming overwhelmed, rest without experiencing rest as failure, communicate honestly, ask for and receive support, remain connected while experiencing difference, discern what is healthy, leave unhealthy participation when necessary, and imagine possibilities beyond an assigned role (Records, 2018).

For an organization, restoration may involve developing greater capacity to encounter difficult information, acknowledge mistakes, repair relationships, distribute leadership, adapt policies, learn from experience, tolerate uncertainty, support re-entry, and maintain meaningful participation through change (Benedict et al., 2024; Benedict et al., 2026; Esaki & Larkin, 2013; Laloux, 2024; Robertson, 2015).

Restoration is therefore better understood as capacity development than as the achievement of a particular emotional state. Difficulty can coexist with restoration. The question is not whether difficulty disappears, but what becomes possible in relationship to it (Hübl, 2026; Records, 2018).

The System Must Mirror the Healing Process

A central RISE insight is that systems cannot reliably sustain healing practices when their structures contradict the qualities those practices require. Healing and development involve integration, relationship, agency, flexibility, reflection, meaning, reconnection, and participation (Hübl, 2026; Larkin & Records, 2007; Records, 2018).

These capacities also have systemic expressions. Organizations and systems need to create conditions that support them, rather than relying on individuals to develop or exercise these capacities within structures that may undermine them.

Safety — Structures that reduce unnecessary threat and retaliation.

Voice — Meaningful participation and accessible communication.

Agency — Authority appropriate to responsibility.

Relationship — Opportunities for connection and collaboration.

Reflection — Protected space for inquiry and learning.

Repair — Mechanisms for addressing rupture and harm.

Flexibility — Adaptive policy and practice.

Integration — Alignment among roles, relationships, culture, and structure.

Development — Opportunities for learning and growth.

Belonging — Participation without unnecessary exclusion.

Trust — Transparency, consistency, and relational accountability.

Training can introduce these capacities. Ongoing practice can help develop and strengthen them. Infrastructure determines whether people can actually exercise them.

Wellness Is Infrastructure

Wellness is often framed either as an individual responsibility or as something organizations support because healthy employees perform better. RISE approaches it differently: the conditions that support physical, emotional, relational, and developmental capacity are part of the infrastructure through which an organization functions.

This can include:

- realistic workload;
- adequate staffing;
- flexible participation;
- rest;
- family-responsive structures;
- accessible support;
- healthy physical environments;
- time for reflection;
- accessible communication;
- meaningful participation;
- appropriate role authority;
- opportunities for development;
- pathways for re-entry following disruption.

A system that requires extraordinary individual effort simply to maintain ordinary functioning is carrying a structural problem through individual capacity. Healthy systems are sustained through ordinary rhythms of care, participation, reflection, maintenance, and repair.

Stewardship Rather Than Performance

RISE does not reject performance. Organizations have purposes, responsibilities, commitments, and outcomes that matter. The question is whether performance is treated as the whole measure of organizational health. Stewardship asks a broader question: *Did we advance our purpose while caring for the people, relationships, resources, and responsibilities entrusted to us?*

This is not a lowering of standards. It is an expansion of what responsible functioning means. People occupy multiple roles. Family needs change. Bodies have limits. Circumstances shift. Disruption occurs. Plans become outdated. Wise systems therefore require the capacity to respond to changing conditions without losing sight of purpose. This is where Flexible Fidelity becomes important.

Flexible Fidelity means remaining faithful to purpose and principle without assuming that a single form, procedure, or plan must remain unchanged regardless of circumstances. A

healthy system can distinguish between what needs to remain stable and what needs to adapt.

Success may sometimes mean completing a task. At other times it may mean taking responsibility, creating space for another person, asking for help, listening, stepping back, resting, or changing course. Stewardship asks what the situation requires rather than assuming that the same form of performance is always the wisest response.

Structure and Emergence

Structure can create safety, clarity, accountability, and continuity. It can also become controlling, rigid, or disconnected from the people and purposes it is intended to serve. Too little structure can produce unclear expectations, workarounds, inconsistency, avoidance, and dependence on highly committed individuals. Healthy systems therefore need: *Enough structure to support participation; enough openness to allow emergence.*

This creates an ongoing design tension: Some conditions need to be intentionally established, while other aspects of a healthy system need to emerge through participation, learning, and experience. RISE therefore treats structure and emergence not as competing alternatives, but as complementary dimensions of system development. This has particular implications for leadership (Benedict, et al., 2024; Larkin, 2005; Robertson, 2015).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is not simply the distribution of tasks or the assumption that everyone has the same leadership capacity. People can exercise leadership within their own roles and areas of responsibility, while individuals with greater developmental, relational, and systems capacity may appropriately emerge as leaders of broader or more complex work (Kegan, 1998; Larkin, 2005; Robertson, 2015; Wilber, 2006). This is consistent with RISE's attention to role clarity and with approaches such as Holacracy, in which people can exercise leadership within the roles they hold rather than waiting for authority to flow only from a formal hierarchy.

At the same time, distributed leadership does not eliminate the importance of leadership development or the recognition of differences in capacity. Healthy systems need both: meaningful agency within roles and the ability for appropriate leadership capacity to emerge where it is needed. Leadership development therefore remains important at every scale. As responsibility becomes more distributed, more people need opportunities to develop the capacity to lead their roles, relationships, teams, communities, and systems responsibly (Robertson, 2015).

Leadership selection also becomes a system-design function. A system that distributes responsibility while paying little attention to how people are selected for roles of greater influence may reproduce many of the same problems through a different structure. RISE

therefore attends to both leadership selection and leadership development, while recognizing that neither can substitute for healthy system design.

Repair, Accountability, and Learning

Organizations commonly have formal accountability systems involving policies, allegations, investigations, procedures, findings, sanctions, grievances, or compliance requirements. While these functions matter, they are not identical to relational repair.

RISE distinguishes among several forms of accountability:

1. Legal accountability
2. Procedural accountability
3. Ethical accountability
4. Relational accountability
5. Organizational accountability
6. Restorative accountability

These forms of accountability address related but distinct questions. Legal accountability concerns obligations under law; procedural accountability concerns whether established processes were followed appropriately; ethical accountability concerns the values and responsibilities that guide decisions and conduct; relational accountability concerns acknowledging impact and responding to damaged trust; organizational accountability concerns the roles, decisions, policies, resources, and conditions through which a system operates; and restorative accountability concerns acknowledging harm, attending to those affected, addressing responsibilities, and pursuing repair where possible. Although these forms may overlap, a system may satisfy a legal or procedural requirement while failing to repair a relationship, learn from organizational conditions, or restore meaningful participation.

RISE therefore asks: *How can systems develop the capacity to recognize harm, respond appropriately, learn from what occurred, repair what was damaged, and evolve the conditions that contributed to it?*

RISE also distinguishes among role, responsibility, authority, and accountability. Clear roles help establish what a person or group is responsible for, while appropriate authority provides the capacity to act on that responsibility. Accountability then asks whether responsibilities associated with a role have been carried out appropriately and what happens when they have not. These elements need to be considered together: people require sufficient role clarity, appropriate authority, resources, and support to carry their responsibilities, while accountability needs to reflect both what they could reasonably influence and the conditions for which the system itself is responsible (Larkin, 2010, 2015; Robertson, 2015).

Responsibility may be individual, shared, or distributed across organizational structures and relationships. A person may have meaningful responsibility for an action while the

organization also has responsibility for the conditions in which that action occurred. The purpose is not to eliminate individual responsibility by locating everything in the system. It is to avoid treating individual accountability as a substitute for examining structural responsibility. This alignment is central to RISE: *People need sufficient clarity about their roles, appropriate authority to fulfill their responsibilities, meaningful support for developing the required capacities, and accountability that corresponds to what they can reasonably be expected to influence*.

Repair Must Become Infrastructure

Repair has a relational dimension, but relational repair cannot depend entirely on informal goodwill or exceptional individuals. It requires organizational infrastructure that makes repair possible. That infrastructure may include:

- clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- policies and procedures for surfacing concerns;
- accessible pathways for dialogue and facilitated repair;
- designated responsibility for responding to conflict and harm;
- appropriate authority to act;
- protections against retaliation;
- documentation and communication practices;
- mechanisms for systems inquiry;
- governance processes through which learning can inform policy, resource allocation, role design, and future decision-making (e.g., Robertson, 2015).

Within that infrastructure, repair may involve:

- Conflict surfacing
- Reflective dialogue
- Peer or facilitated repair
- Systems inquiry
- Governance learning

A system that depends on exceptional individuals to repair its own recurring dysfunction is fragile. RISE therefore connects the relational work of repair with the structural conditions that make repair accessible, legitimate, and sustainable.

Learning Without Fear

Organizations teach through their functioning, not only through formal statements or curricula (CSWE, 2022; NASW, 2021). This is particularly visible in educational institutions and professions such as social work, where people may formally learn about relationship, justice, trauma, reflection, inclusion, accountability, learning, advocacy, and change while experiencing organizational practices that communicate very different lessons.

Culture is curriculum. People need enough safety to say:

“I don't understand.”
“I made a mistake.”
“I see something differently.”
“I am concerned.”
“I don't think this is working.”
“What can we learn from this?”

A system unable to tolerate these statements will struggle to learn. Learning requires more than collecting information. It requires conditions in which information can move.

Re-entry After Disruption

Organizations often have mechanisms for responding to disruption but fewer mechanisms for integrating what happens afterward. Disruption can include illness, caregiving, grief, conflict, harassment or discrimination, restructuring, layoffs, moral injury, institutional betrayal, personal trauma, and significant changes in people's lives. A common organizational response is to resume normal functioning as quickly as possible. But people may not return in the same internal, relational, or practical circumstances in which they left.

RISE therefore asks: ***What conditions support healthy participation after disruption?***

For individuals, this may involve movement, rest, reflection, relationships, work, family, and ordinary rhythms. For organizations, it may involve rebuilding trust, clarifying roles and expectations, acknowledging what happened, repairing relationships, and creating conditions for renewed participation.

Re-entry After Disruption can be understood as: Processes through which individuals, groups, and systems restore participation, trust, wellbeing, and shared purpose following disruption, loss, conflict, trauma, transition, or change. Re-entry is not simply a return to productivity. It is the restoration of participation and the creation of conditions for what comes next.

Voice, Agency, and the Possibility of Leaving

Empowerment includes the possibility of leaving. Sometimes agency involves changing a system from within. Sometimes it involves establishing boundaries. Sometimes it involves seeking support or building collective action. And sometimes leaving an unhealthy system is itself an expression of agency. But the ability to leave is not equally distributed.

RISE therefore asks: ***Who has the ability to leave, and who does not?***

This question matters because agency is constrained by context. When leaving is not realistically available, people need other forms of agency: the ability to speak, seek support, build relationships, participate collectively, establish boundaries, influence decisions, access accountability processes, and contribute to structural change without carrying the

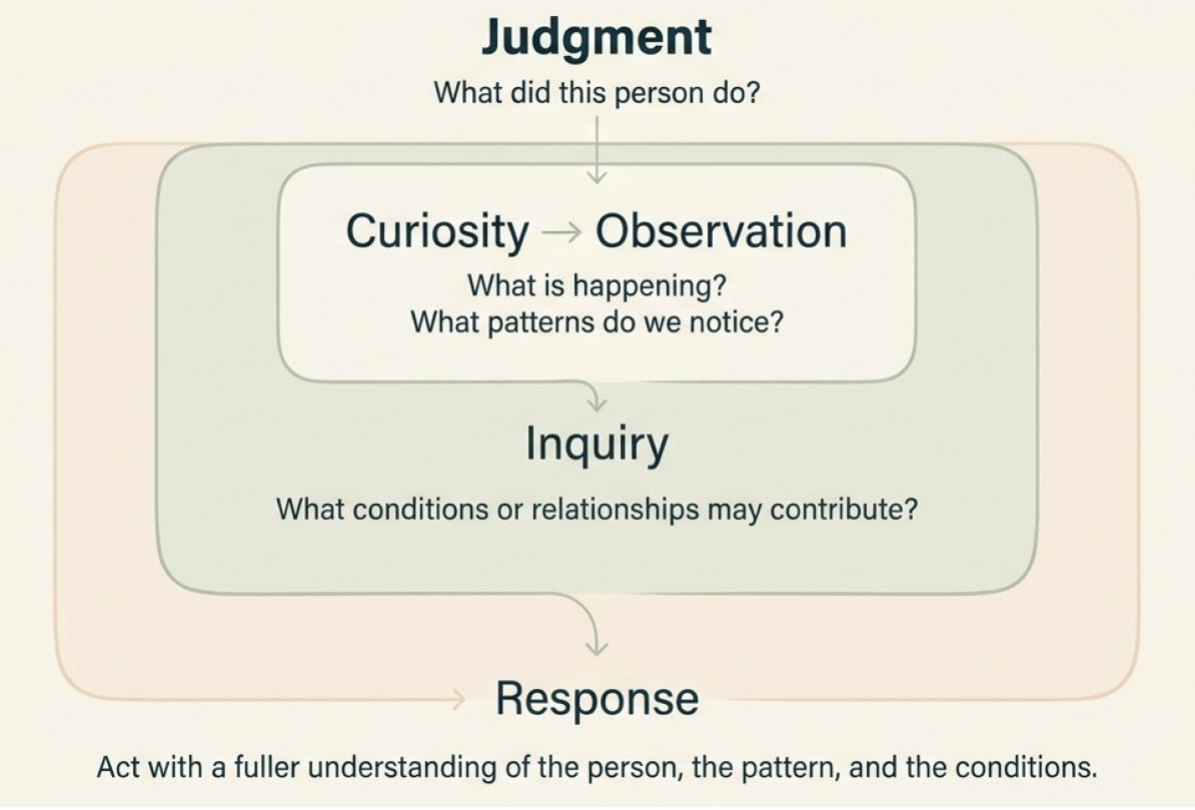
entire burden individually (Benedict et al., 2024; Benedict et al., 2026; Disney et al., 2025; Esaki & Larkin, 2013; Pyles et al., 2025).

RISE therefore recognizes a range of possibilities, from self-regulation and voice through relationship, participation, collective action, and structural change, while also recognizing that leaving may sometimes be necessary or may itself be an expression of agency. A healthy system also has responsibility for making meaningful participation possible for people who cannot simply opt out. This includes reducing unnecessary conditions of threat, creating accessible pathways for voice and repair, aligning responsibility and authority, and developing structures through which concerns can lead to learning and change. A trauma-integrating approach therefore does not assume that every person must remain inside a system long enough to transform it, nor does it treat departure as the only available form of agency.

From Judgment to Inquiry

RISE encourages a shift from immediate judgment toward deeper inquiry. Unwanted behavior does not necessarily reveal a defective person. It may reveal a condition. An employee's behavior may provide information about the environment. Recurring conflict may reveal a structural problem. Avoidance may reflect an incentive system. Difficulty participating may reflect the conditions under which participation is being requested. This does not eliminate responsibility — it expands the field of observation.

The movement is:



A central RISE question is: ***What pattern is occurring, what conditions sustain it, and what would make another pattern possible?***

This question can help distinguish an individual problem from a relational pattern, a relational pattern from a structural condition, and a structural condition from a broader systems dynamic.

The Role of Embodiment

RISE includes embodiment because transformation is not only intellectual. A person may understand a concept long before it becomes possible to live differently. Gaps between understanding and action can therefore become information rather than evidence of failure.

An embodied orientation asks: ***What is happening here, and what might I learn by paying attention?***

The body can provide information about how a person is experiencing a relationship, role, environment, or system. Organizations also communicate through embodied and relational experience. People often sense whether it is safe to speak before anyone explicitly tells them whether it is safe to speak. They learn whether mistakes become opportunities for learning or evidence of inadequacy. They learn whether rest is genuinely supported or merely endorsed rhetorically. Formal structures and lived experience therefore need to be considered together.

A Living Framework: Stable Principles, Adaptive Practice

RISE is not intended to function as a rigid implementation model. Its guiding principle is: *RISE should be stable in principles and adaptive in practice.* The stable elements include:

- whole person;
- whole community;
- whole systems;
- restoration and repair;
- empowerment;
- relational connection;
- meaningful participation;
- stewardship;
- developmental support;
- adaptive capacity;
- accountability;
- ongoing learning.

Their expression will vary. A school, hospital, nonprofit, government agency, community organization, or professional practice setting will not require exactly the same structures. The question is therefore not: "How do we make this organization look like RISE?" It is: *"How does the model help us perceive what is happening and respond wisely to what is emerging?"*

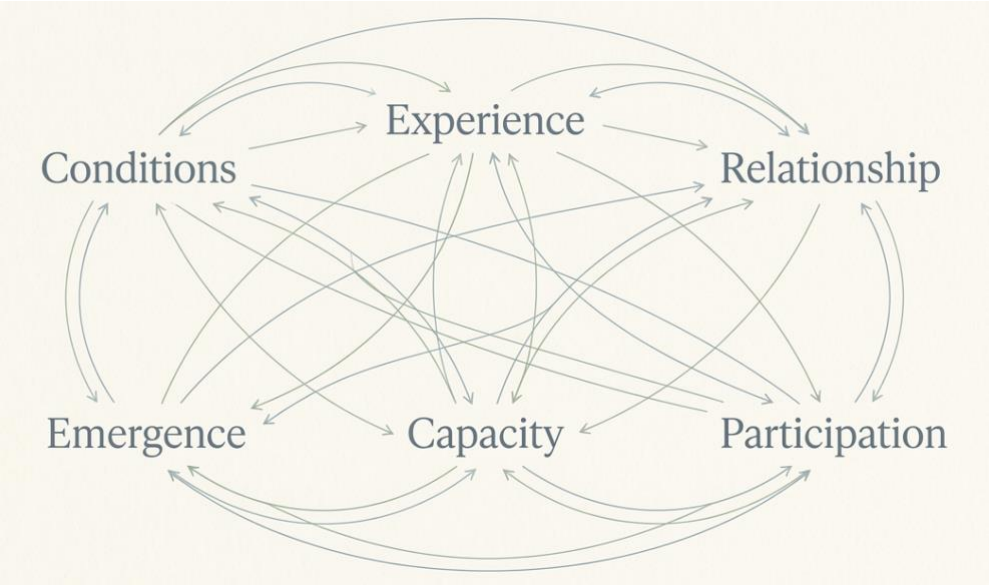
The purpose of a framework is not to force reality into predetermined categories. It is to improve our capacity to perceive and respond. This is where Flexible Fidelity becomes important: fidelity to principles without rigid adherence to a single form.

RISE as a Developmental Systems Approach

RISE may best be understood as a developmental systems approach. Human beings develop through conditions. Relationships develop through interaction. Organizations develop through participation. Systems develop through learning.

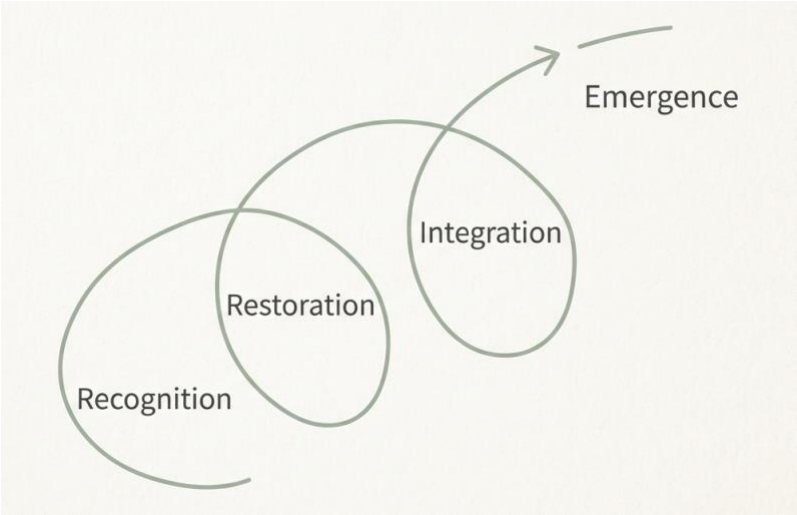
Trauma and adversity can constrain development (Larkin, Felitti, et al., 2014). Restoration can create conditions through which capacities re-emerge. Participation can change conditions, relationships can change capacity, and emerging capacities can change systems (Larkin & Records, 2007; Larkin, 2014; Larkin, Beckos, et al., 2014).

One way of representing this recursive process is:



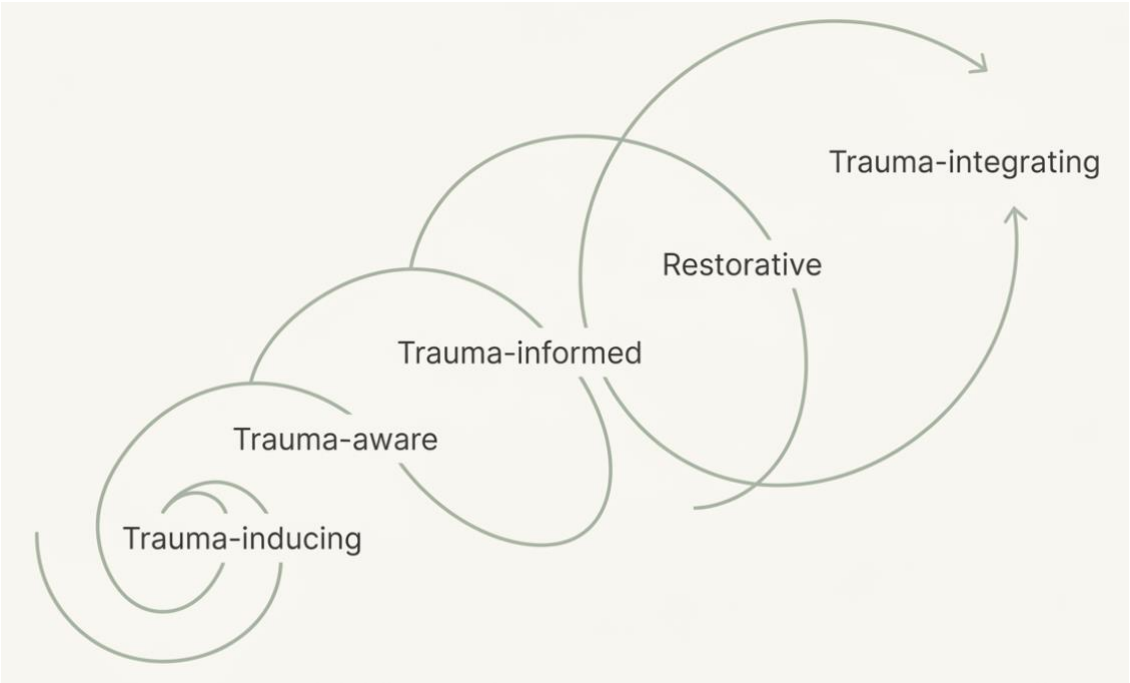
This is not a linear sequence. Participation changes conditions. Relationships change capacity. Emergence changes relationships. Developing capacities change systems.

RISE also uses a broader developmental orientation:



Recognition can open the way to restoration, restoration can support integration, and integration can create conditions for emergence. These processes may overlap, and experience may call for renewed recognition or restoration as the system continues to develop. These two maps serve different purposes. The first describes a recursive developmental process. The second provides a broader orientation toward what may unfold through that process.

A third continuum can also be useful:



These are not necessarily sequential stages. An organization may be highly restorative in one area while remaining trauma-inducing in another. The continuum is therefore best understood as a descriptive inquiry tool rather than a maturity ladder or classification system. RISE uses these maps to support perception and inquiry, not to rank organizations.

RISE and the Integral Dimensions of Social Life

Whole Person–Whole Community–Whole Systems offers an accessible bridge from ACEs and trauma-informed work into the Integral lens. Integral Theory provides RISE with a way to attend simultaneously to interior experience, individual behavior, collective relationships, and exterior structures (Larkin & Records, 2007; Wilber, 1995, 2006, 2024). It also helps clarify why individual development and organizational development cannot simply be treated as different levels of the same process (Larkin, 2005; Wilber, 2006).

Individuals and organizations are distinct but interrelated holons. Individual holons participate in social holons, but social holons develop their own relational, cultural, and structural patterns (Wilber, 1995, 2006). This distinction matters for leadership. Changes in leadership can substantially alter the development and functioning of a social holon even when many of the individual participants remain the same (Larkin, 2005).

A system that functions well primarily because an exceptional leader is buffering structural weaknesses is therefore vulnerable to leadership transition. Leadership remains essential, but a healthy social system cannot depend on exceptional leadership alone.

RISE seeks structures that support continuity and development across leadership transitions while also supporting leadership selection and development. The deeper relationship among individual development, collective relational development, leadership development, and organizational structure is therefore central to the framework.

From Compliance to Learning

Compliance asks: Did we follow the rule?

Learning asks: *What is happening, what can we learn, and what needs to change?*

RISE does not eliminate compliance. Rules can protect people, and procedures can create consistency. Standards can establish boundaries and accountability. The concern arises when compliance becomes a substitute for judgment, relationship, or learning.

Healthy systems need ways to surface information, examine uncertainty, identify patterns, receive feedback, repair harm, revise policies, redistribute authority when appropriate, and allow experience to influence future decisions. Accountability can then become a pathway to learning rather than simply a mechanism for determining fault.

RISE as an Ecology of Participation

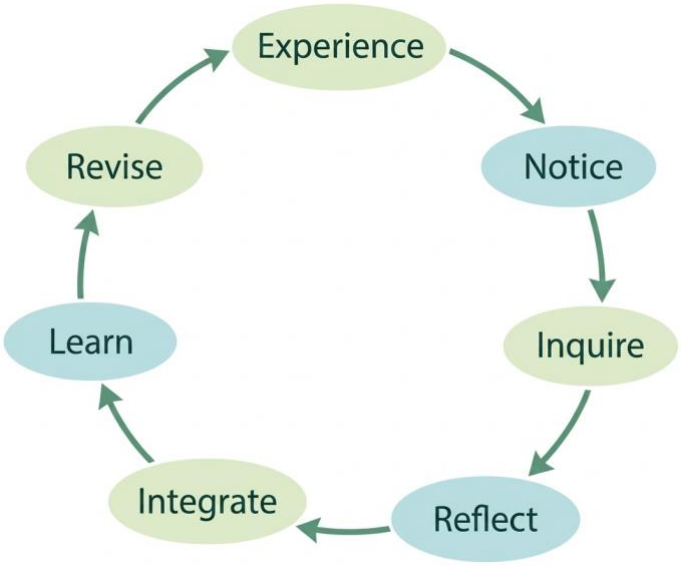
RISE did not emerge from a single discipline or methodology. Its development reflects an ecology of participation involving empirical research, professional practice, teaching, systems theory, Integral Theory, ACE and resilience science, policy and equity work, organizational development, leadership, contemplative practice, relational communities, lived experience, dialogue, reflection, and experimentation in ordinary life.

This creates an important epistemological responsibility. Experience is not automatically evidence. Inherited concepts require attribution, and empirical claims require appropriate research support. Lived experience, empirical research, theory, professional knowledge, and other forms of inquiry provide different kinds of knowledge and can enter into dialogue without being treated as interchangeable. Researchers may speak about evidence while drawing on different forms of inquiry and different understandings of what data can reveal (Larkin, Beckos, et al., 2014; Wilber, 2006).

RISE therefore draws on lived experience, scientific and empirical inquiry, theory, professional knowledge, and practice as complementary sources of understanding, recognizing that each contributes different insights and that understanding remains open to revision. A mature framework makes its boundaries visible.

A Living Epistemology: Map and Territory

RISE is both a model and a way of learning. Its knowledge process can be represented as:



When experience reveals something the existing theory does not adequately explain, the response can be to investigate what the experience is showing and consider whether the theoretical framework itself needs to be refined or extended.

Integral Theory provides a valuable map for this inquiry, helping to orient attention toward relationships and dimensions that might otherwise remain unseen (Wilber, 2006, 2024). But the map is not the territory. As inquiry proceeds, new evidence and experience may reveal details the map does not yet capture, or even dimensions that are missing from it.

The task is therefore not to abandon the map or force the territory to conform to it, but to allow what is discovered in the territory to inform the map. Unexpected results become information. A system behaving differently from its stated values becomes an invitation to

investigate. A recurring tension may reveal a pattern that existing categories do not adequately explain.

Reality often announces itself first through subtle misfit rather than obvious contradiction. RISE is not designed to replace judgment. It is designed to cultivate wiser judgment. Its success, therefore, is measured not by fidelity to the model alone, but by whether people become more capable of perceiving reality together.

Emerging RISE Architecture

The architecture of RISE is intentionally emergent. It identifies conditions and functions that support healthy system development without prescribing a single organizational structure or implementation formula. The RISE Recipe offers a practical companion to the framework. It identifies six interconnected conditions of system design:

1. Selecting and developing people for the responsibilities they carry.
2. Aligning responsibility, authority, accountability, resources, and support so people can reasonably fulfill their roles.
3. Creating conditions for meaningful participation, including opportunities to contribute, influence decisions, and raise concerns.
4. Building health and wellbeing into the operating system, rather than treating them solely as individual responsibilities.
5. Supporting relationships, belonging, trust, and shared purpose.
6. Developing capacity for recognition, restoration, learning, and adaptation when experience reveals a problem or a need for change.

These conditions are interconnected. They are not independent interventions or a prescribed implementation sequence. Their expression will vary according to an organization's purpose, history, resources, culture, and wider operating environment. The Recipe conditions describe features of system design. RISE also identifies functions that a healthy system needs to support:

- Personal and Collective Capacity
- Reflective Dialogue
- Relational Support
- Repair
- System Learning
- Adaptive Governance
- Participation
- Re-entry

The distinction matters. A system condition is not the same as a function. For example, aligning responsibility, authority, and support is a design condition; the ability to respond to a

concern, learn from it, and adapt a policy is a system function. A particular structure may support several functions, while any one function may depend on several design conditions.

The wider environment also matters. External resources, policies, incentives, expectations, norms, and flows of information can influence what an organization can sustain or change (Larkin, 2010, 2014). RISE therefore considers both internal design and the conditions beyond an organization's immediate control, including where the organization may have opportunities for collective action or advocacy.

The RISE Recipe Testing Worksheet supports reflection on how these conditions operate in a particular setting. Rather than asking whether an organization has adopted a prescribed structure, it invites inquiry:

- Is the relevant function present?
- Is it accessible and effective?
- Is it adequately supported?
- Is responsibility clear?
- Is sufficient authority available?
- Does the function connect with other parts of the system?
- Can the system learn when something is not working?

These questions are starting points for inquiry, not a validated scoring system or a checklist for declaring that an organization is trauma-integrating.

RISE focuses on designing supportive conditions and sustaining necessary functions, while remaining open to what people discover through application. The goal is not to make every organization look alike. It is to help each system become more capable of recognizing reality, responding wisely, learning, and adapting in relationship with the people it serves.

From Trauma-Inducing to Trauma-Integrating Systems

Building on the developmental continuum described above, this section considers what the movement toward trauma-integrating systems means for organizational conditions and practice. RISE envisions organizational development as an ongoing process of learning, adaptation, and development rather than movement toward a fixed endpoint. Operating systems may develop greater capacity for trauma integration, participation, repair, and adaptation over time while also encountering new challenges that require further learning and change.

From this perspective, the goal is not to reach a final state in which an organization can be declared “trauma-integrating,” but to develop the capacities and structures that allow the organization to continue learning and evolving in relationship with the people and communities it serves.

Organizations may contain different patterns simultaneously. One department may have strong restorative capacity while another reproduces unnecessary harm. A policy may be well designed while its implementation remains inconsistent. A leader may be highly relational while operating within structures that constrain meaningful change. The purpose of the continuum is therefore not classification, but inquiry.

RISE in Practice: Nodes and Emergence Zones

RISE is intended to develop through participation rather than centralized implementation. A RISE Node may be a person, team, organization, community, or other setting that is actively practicing RISE principles. A RISing Emergence Zone may provide an intentional setting for experimentation, reflection, relationship, and learning while advocating for structural transformation aligned with RISE principles.

They are places where people can explore questions such as:

- What would meaningful participation look like here?
- How can responsibility and authority be better aligned?
- What supports repair?
- What conditions support wellbeing?
- How can disruption be integrated rather than simply managed?
- How can roles be clearer without becoming rigid?
- How can people exercise leadership within their roles?
- How can systems learn from experience?
- What needs to change structurally?
- What is emerging that we did not anticipate?

The broader RISE Network can support learning across nodes without requiring sameness. This reflects an important principle: *Healing at scale does not begin with scale. It begins with small places that work, followed by learning and transmission*. The network can support relationship, translation, experimentation, research, reflection, and emergence without reproducing a centralized program.

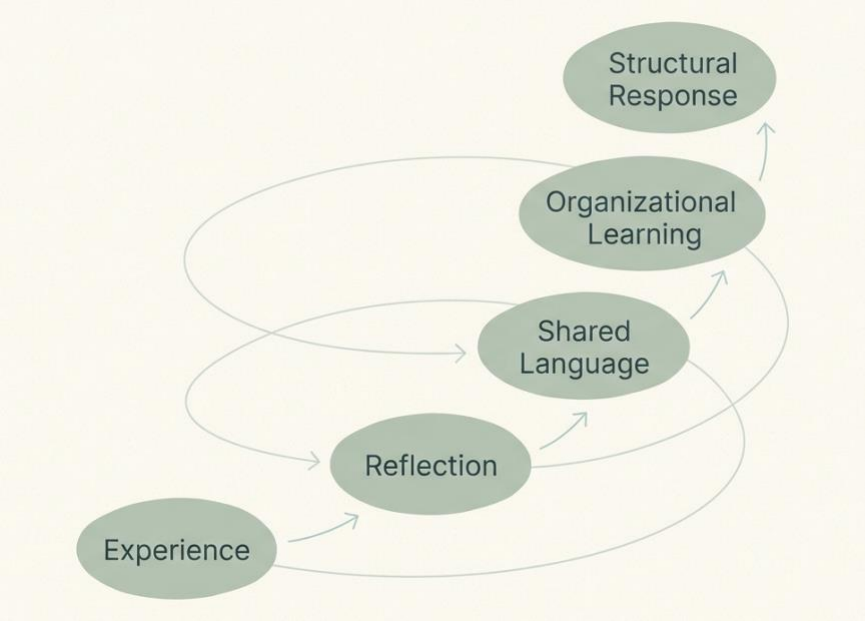
Translation as a Form of Leadership

Systems change can be difficult because participants often speak different languages. Clinicians may speak about trauma. Administrators may speak about risk. Researchers may speak about evidence. Employees may speak about workload. Communities may speak about belonging. Leaders may speak about mission. People experiencing harm may speak about dignity, fear, betrayal, or safety. These are not necessarily competing realities and may be different ways of perceiving the same system. Translation therefore becomes a form of leadership.

RISE asks:

How can relational and experiential insights become understandable and actionable within organizational structures without losing their meaning?

One possible pathway is:



Shared language can itself be restorative when it connects experiences that previously felt isolated or unintelligible. Translation precedes transformation. The goal is not to make everyone think alike. It is to build bridges among different ways of knowing and perceiving.

What RISE Contributes

RISE is an emerging framework, and its contributions need to be tested rather than assumed. It draws on conversations involving adversity and trauma, resilience, restorative and relational practice, whole-person and whole-community approaches, Integral and systems thinking, leadership development, organizational design, governance, policy equity, embodiment, and practice-based learning (Hübl, 2026; Larkin, 2005, 2010, 2014; Larkin & Records, 2007, 2011; Records, 2018; Robertson, 2015; Wilber, 2006, 2024).

RISE's distinctive emphasis is not that these domains have previously been unrelated. Rather, it asks what happens when their implications for system design are taken seriously. The framework brings attention to the conditions through which people and relationships develop capacity: roles, authority, accountability, resources, participation, governance, organizational culture, support, and opportunities for repair and learning. It asks whether these conditions reinforce the capacities an organization seeks to foster or inadvertently undermine them.

RISE extends the integrated foundation of RIS by making system architecture more explicit. It does not prescribe a single structure, assume that every setting needs the same interventions, or treat the framework itself as the measure of success. Its value will depend

on whether it helps people perceive their circumstances more clearly, identify meaningful possibilities for change, and learn from what happens when they act.

A Working RISE Proposition

> *Restoration is not simply a return to prior functioning. It involves creating conditions through which greater capacity for connection, learning, agency, participation, adaptation, and emergence can develop.*

This changes the questions an organization asks.

Rather than asking only: How do we fix the person?

RISE asks: *What conditions would allow a different way of being, relating, learning, and responding to emerge?*

Rather than asking only: How do we make the organization work better?

RISE asks: *What kind of system helps people and relationships become more capable of contributing to what comes next?*

These questions do not remove the need for standards, decisions, accountability, or action. They widen the field of attention so that individual experience, relationships, and system conditions can inform one another.

Conclusion

RISE builds on a long exploration of the conditions that support healing and development among individuals, within relationships and communities, and across organizations—and of the ways systems can undermine these conditions through fragmentation, disconnection, and unnecessary constraint. Its contribution is to make the conditions that support healthy development an explicit concern of system design and stewardship. It asks whether the structures through which an organization operates support the capacities it expects from people, and whether the system can recognize and respond when its practices contradict its purposes. The work remains developmental, calling for continued dialogue, application, and testing across different contexts. Experience may confirm aspects of the framework, reveal limitations, or show where its concepts need to change. The goal is the capacity to notice, respond, repair, learn, adapt, participate, and begin again. A trauma-integrating system is a system capable of remaining in relationship with reality, with the people who participate in it, with the communities it serves, and with possibilities that emerge as people learn and grow together. RISE is an invitation to create the conditions in which that emergence becomes possible. Let Us RISE.

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