

# The Emotional Demands of Healing Work: Towards A Theory of Psychological Capacity for Healing

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## Abstract

Organizational healing may offer an important response to widespread burnout, stress, and disruption in American workplaces, particularly as employees and leaders navigate unpredictable environments and high levels of emotional labor (Chen, Gao, & Gao, 2025; Sutcliffe, & Vogus, 2023). Although organizations have long faced these pressures, research and practice have yet to fully explain how healing can be sustained in ways that restore both people and performance (World Health Organization, 2019). Prior work suggests that organizations heal after disruption through collective practices that repair social connections, restore functioning, and reinforce the broader organizational system (Powley, 2013). At the same time, practitioner-oriented research highlights a critical challenge: healing work is itself psychologically taxing, exposing those who lead and sustain it to trauma, grief, and relational strain (Vivian et al., 2017). Building on these research insights, we introduce psychological capacity for healing, defined as the capacity of employees, leaders, and teams to engage the demands of healing work in a sustained and constructive manner. We propose a four-pronged model in which compassion, forgiveness, humility, and accountability serve as central practices that support this capacity. We argue that psychological capacity for healing enables organizational members to remain sufficiently grounded in the presence of pain and disruption to support repair without becoming overwhelmed themselves. In doing so, this capacity strengthens the relational conditions necessary for collective healing and facilitates recovery, resilience, and performance.

**Keywords:** organizational healing, work disruptions, psychological capacity for healing