

Organicity

Imagine a big fat caterpillar, slowly crawling along and munching its way through a huge pile of leaves. What happens next? In a magical process, the caterpillar sheds its final layer of skin to form a cocoon. From the outside, it looks as if nothing is happening, but the inside is where all the action is. Within the cocoon, the caterpillar is undergoing a remarkable transformation – a metamorphosis. And just when it is ready, what emerges is a beautiful butterfly.



This is how I see the Hakomi principle of Organicity. No one directs the caterpillar to curl up and become a cocoon. No therapist tells it what to do inside there either. It all happens naturally – organically – and the result is a beautiful, delicate and perfect creature.

In defining the Organicity principle, Ron Kurtz says:

The organicity principle places the locus of healing and control within the client and the client-therapist relationship. The client's growth and unfolding, his or her answers and resolutions, completions and new directions, are all within (Kurtz, 1990, p.25).

What does this actually mean, as we sit in a therapy room with a client?

Firstly, Organicity means holding the idea that humans are self-organising systems, with natural impulses towards growth and change. Just as the caterpillar has a natural impulse to grow and become a butterfly, we each have natural impulses that will take us in the direction of healing and transformation. This happens if we are able to be present to these impulses, slow and mindful. It's not something we have to force, or make happen, but rather something to open up to, as it's already there.

Secondly, Organicity means that we trust the process. We honour the client's inner knowledge and inherent wisdom, as well as the intelligence of the body. We are respectful and trusting of this inner wisdom. We also look for and follow natural processes – including spontaneous body movements or patterns. Organicity means that we don't impose a structure or agenda on the client's process. Of course, this is easier said than done! Compared to a machine that can be fixed from the outside, a living organism can only be healed from within through enrolling its own creative intelligence. The butterfly is a living system that fully trusts the process. By working within the Organicity principle, we are effectively reminding people of who they have always been and who they truly are. Just like the butterfly.

Thirdly, Organicity means that we go at the client's pace. We follow the client's lead, and work at a pace that's appropriate to the client's present state and needs. It means leaving the client time, after every interaction, to make the next move. Slow and spacious – that's what allows an organic process to unfold.

Organicity doesn't mean that we just follow the client and have no direction as a therapist. There's a delicate balance between following and leading. It's also important to be mindful of mistaking limiting or habitual behaviours for organicity and spontaneity – so that you don't end up in a system going nowhere.

What does Organicity in action look like? A client of mine, who I will call Tom, provided me with a lovely example. Tom is in his mid-40s and has struggled with depression at varying levels of intensity for some time. On this day, he arrived feeling especially isolated and down. As he described his week, he said "I feel like I'm walking on a cliff edge. If I go left I'm on solid ground and all is okay, if I go right I succumb to it all". He explained that succumbing to it all sometimes felt tempting, to just give in, even to admit himself into hospital, as it felt so effortful on the edge. He said "I just want someone to look after me sometimes, instead of doing it all alone". Given that his unconscious had already given us a wonderful organic image to work with, I invited Tom to stay with the image of the cliff edge in mindfulness. After some deepening into the body, I asked "What's needed? What's missing?" Tom's response was surprising to both of us – a good marker of organicity in action. It was to have someone on the cliff edge with him, but on his right hand side rather than the left side, walking on air over the cliff. As he sat with that image, he said "It makes me realise I'm not alone, I *know* that I'm actually not going to fall". His shoulders dropped, and stomach became less knotted. When he felt that strong sense of knowing he wasn't going to fall, he said "It's easier to step away from the edge, and it's less scary". After some more time deepening into this knowledge, I asked Tom what impulse he had, what wanted to happen next. He said "I should go and explore more to get further from the edge". To me, the word "should" didn't sound very organic. So I checked if that was the real impulse, and he said "No, actually I just want to keep moving but stay close to the edge, that's what's right for me. It doesn't feel so wrong to be here". This was a very powerful revelation for Tom and particularly relevant in his therapeutic journey. By trusting the process, going slowly, and following an organic lead from the unconscious, Tom's natural impulse towards self-organisation could show up.

Inside every one of us there is a beautiful butterfly. Living within the organicity principle will enable it to emerge organically.

Dr Karen Baikie

Consultant Clinical Psychologist in Private Practice, Sydney.
Certified Hakomi Therapist and Hakomi Teacher with the Hakomi Pacifica Team.
Organiser and co-facilitator of the (H.E.A.R.T) training in Australia.

