Center for Health, Work & Environment

colorado school of **public health**

Lee S. Newman, MD, MA
FACOEM FCCP F. Collegium Ramazzini

Distinguished University Professor
University of Colorado

Lee.newman@cuanschutz.edu

National Summit on Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Focus on the Graduate Academic Environment

- Me & mental health in higher education

- Framing:
  - Wicked Problems and Total Worker Health

- Message:

Organizational Behavior Can Buffer Stress

Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*

HORST W. J. RITTEL

Professor of the Science of Design, University of California, Berkeley

MELVIN M. WEBBER

*Professor of City Planning, University of California, Berkeley*

ABSTRACT

The search for scientific bases for confronting problems of social policy is bound to fail, because of the nature of these problems. They are "wicked" problems, whereas science has developed to deal with "tame" problems. Policy problems cannot be definitively described. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about "optimal solutions" to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no "solutions" in the sense of definitive and objective answers.

Mental health is a wicked problem.

In the higher education (like other businesses), it is a problem of social policy.
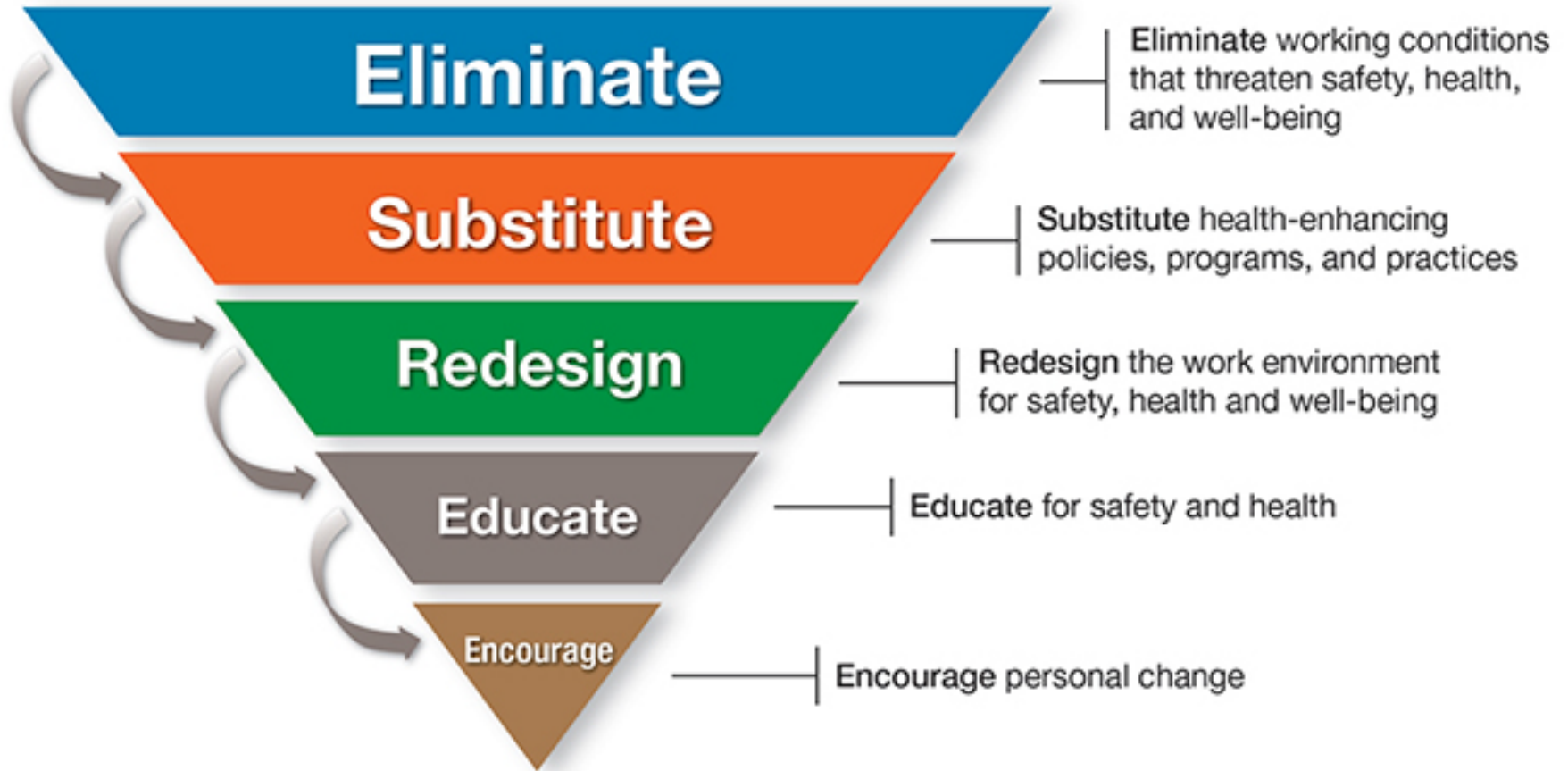
Mortiz and Kawa, *American Scientist* (2022) 110:212

WICKED Problems
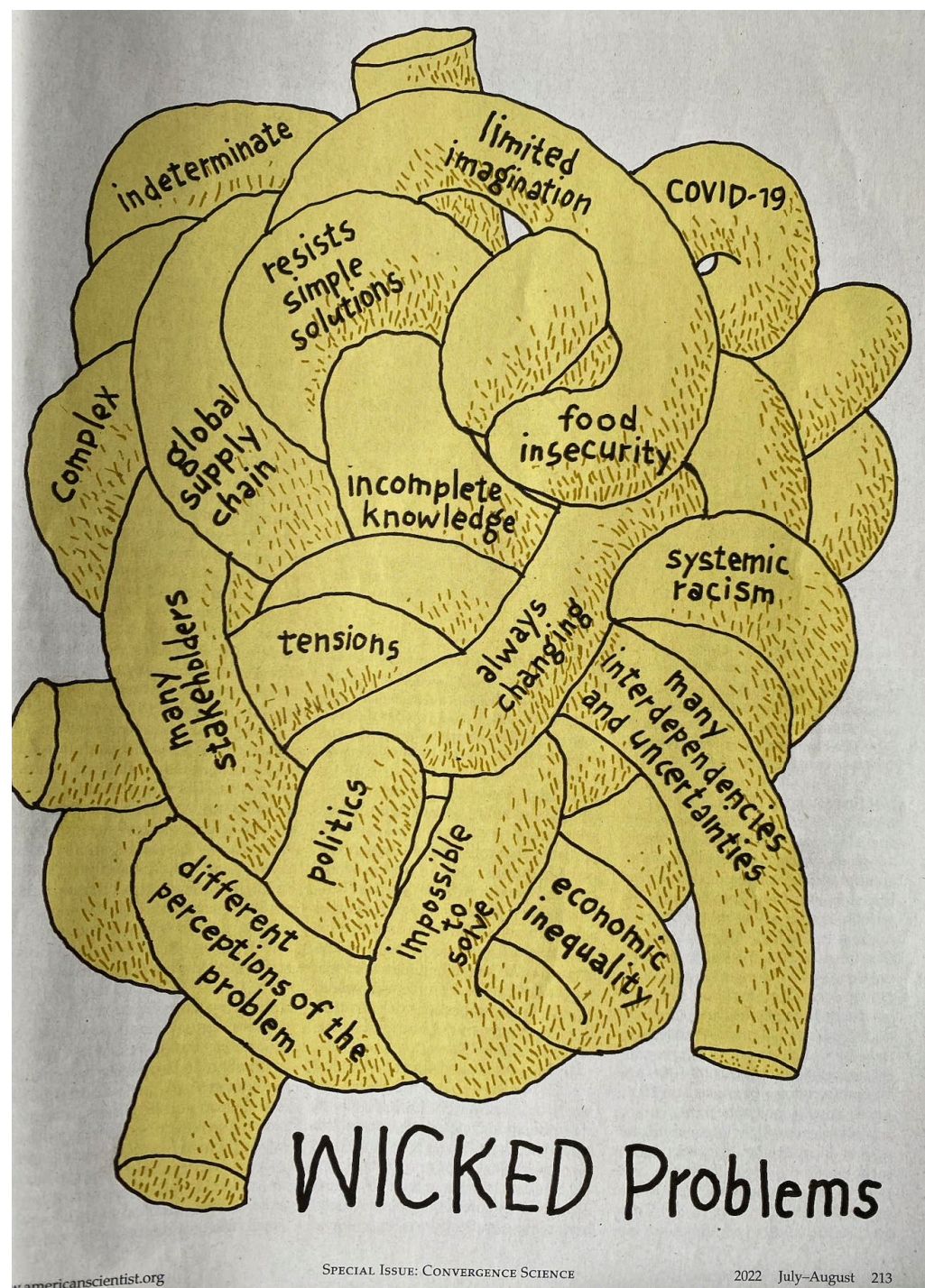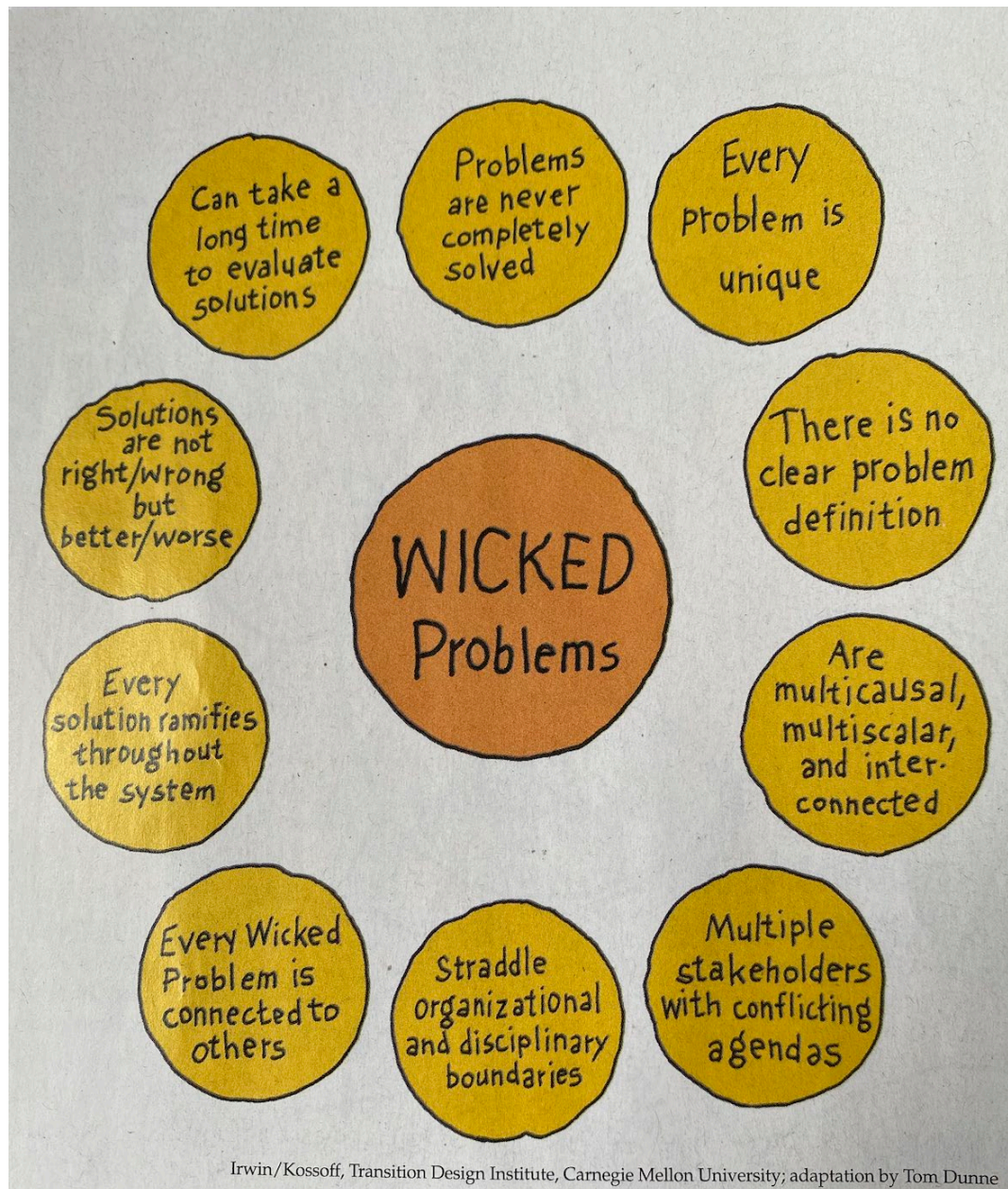
Irwin/Kossoff, Transition Design Institute, Carnegie Mellon University; adaptation by Tom Dunne

Mortiz and Kawa, *American Scientist* (2022) 110:212

Total Worker Health® Hierarchy of Controls

Eliminate — Eliminate working conditions that threaten safety, health, and well-being

Substitute — Substitute health-enhancing policies, programs, and practices

Redesign — Redesign the work environment for safety, health and well-being

Educate — Educate for safety and health

Encourage — Encourage personal change

The Stress Process
Stressors

Stressors

Job Demands Workload	**Lack of control over work**
Economic Stressors	**Physical Environment**
Job insecurity Unemployment	**Technology**
Leadership	**Role Stress**
Work-Family Conflict	**Threat Avoidance**

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The Stress Process

Strains

Substance Use

Mental Health/Suicidality

Sleep problems

Accidents

Fatigue
Difficulty concentrating

Worse chronic health issues

Burnout

Poor Health Behaviors

Absenteeism

Presenteeism
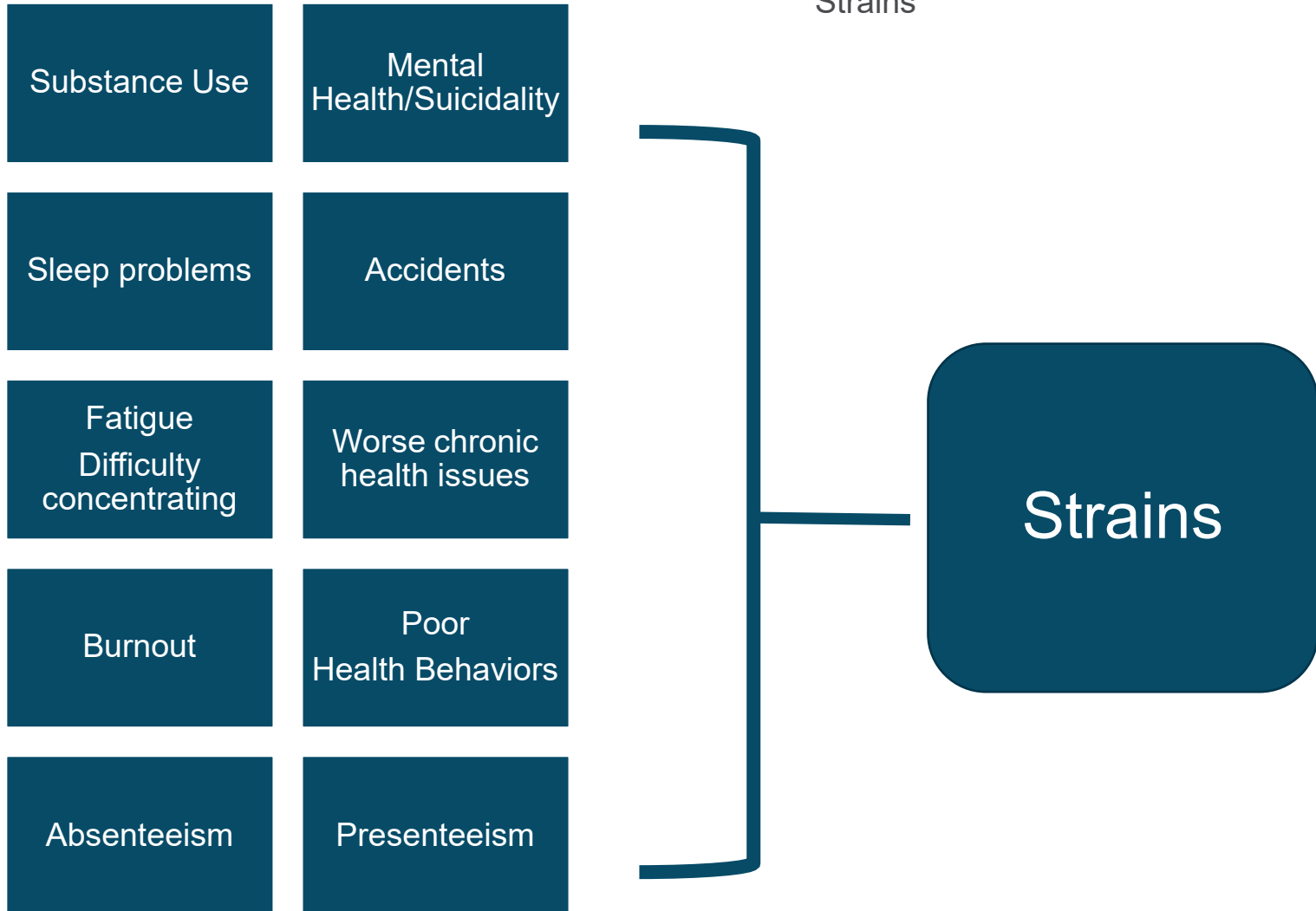
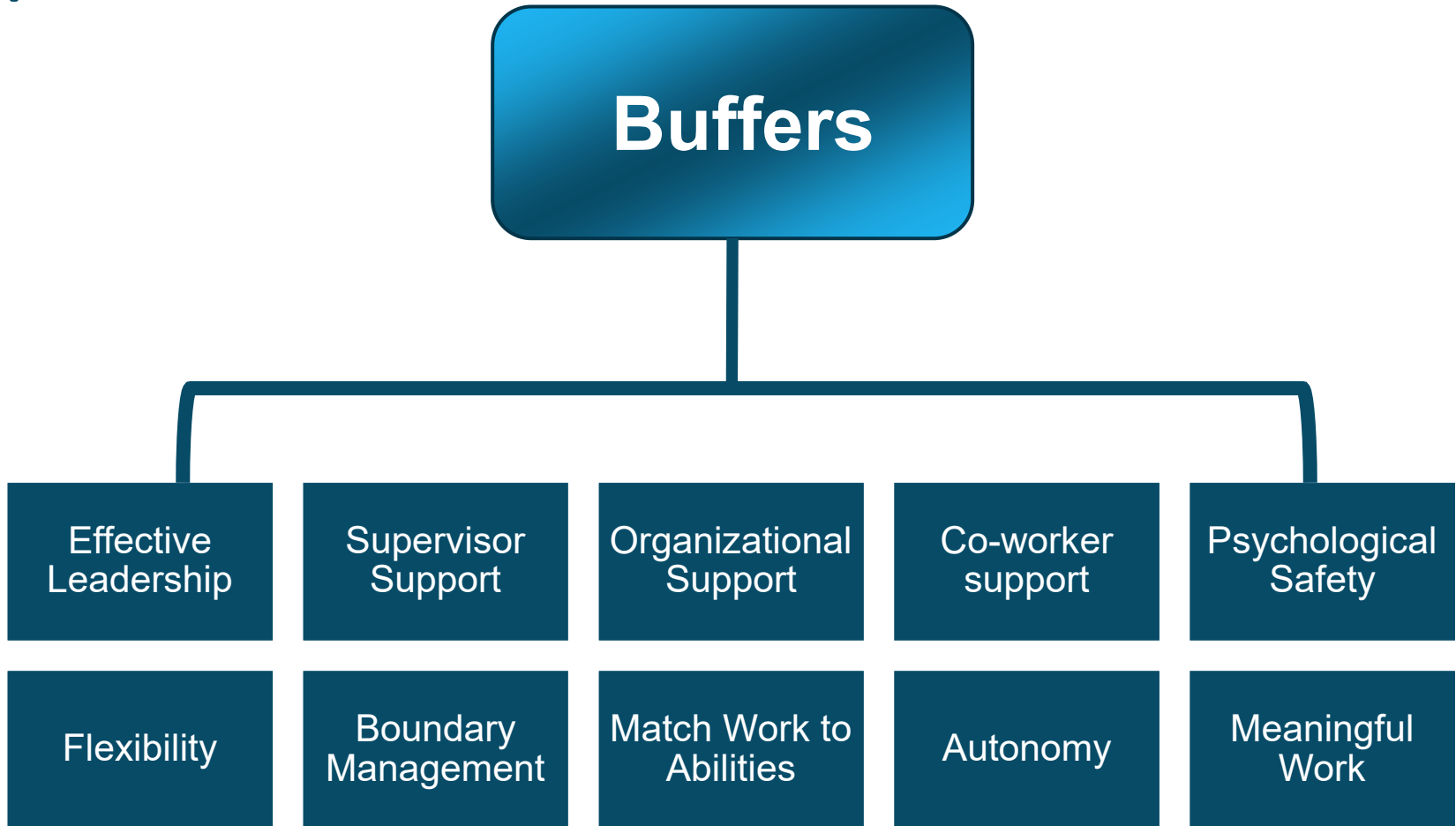Strains

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.

Protection from Harm
- Safety
- Security

Opportunity for Growth
- Learning
- Accomplishment

Connection & Community
- Social Support
- Belonging

Centered on
Worker Voice and Equity

Mattering at Work
- Dignity
- Meaning

Work-Life Harmony
- Autonomy
- Flexibility

Components

Creating a plan with all workers to enact these components can help reimagine workplaces as engines of well-being.

Protection from Harm
- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community
- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work
- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission
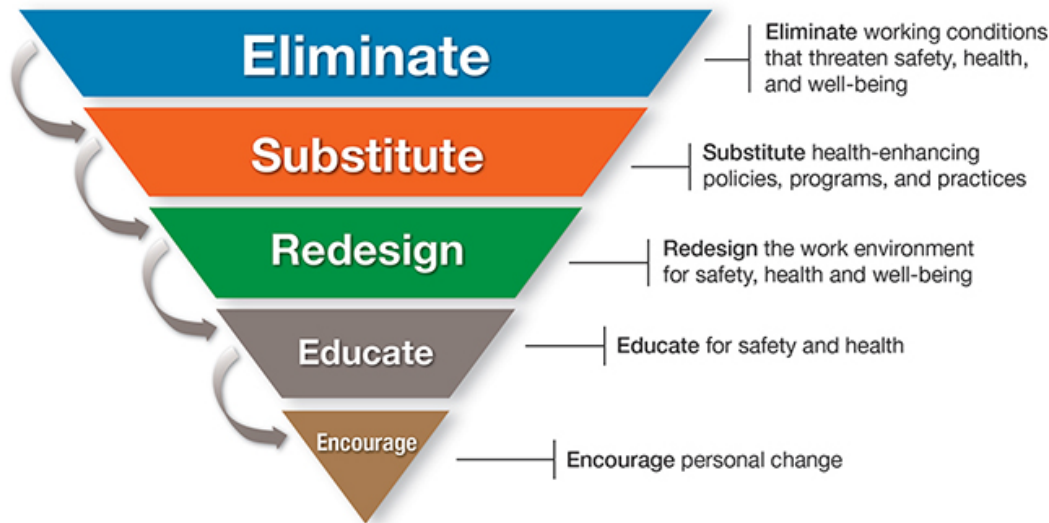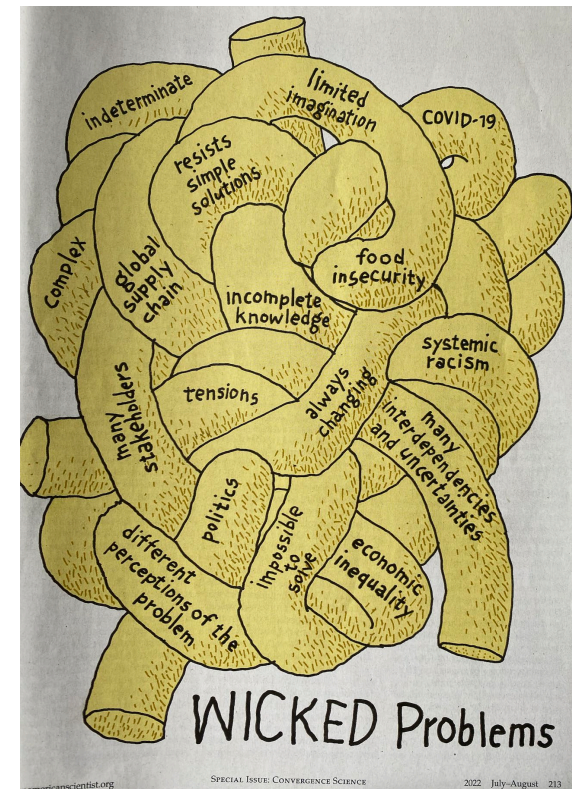
Opportunity for Growth
- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

Office *of the* **U.S. Surgeon General**

Wicked Problem:

To Improve Workplace Mental Health Address Organizational Behavior Change.

A starting place: Buffer Stress

Eliminate working conditions that threaten safety, health, and well-being

Substitute health-enhancing policies, programs, and practices

Redesign the work environment for safety, health and well-being

Educate for safety and health

Encourage personal change

Mission

To collaboratively advance the field of Total Worker Health® (TWH) through sharing knowledge and best practices for the benefit of working people, their families, organizations, and the community.

Vision

To advance worker health, safety, and well-being through TWH.

Visit us at twhsociety.org

SOCIETY *for*

TWH™

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