



Healing Through Rituals

A Guide for Sustaining Wellbeing and Activism



**Women's
International
Peace Centre**

Amplifying Women's Voice and Power

Healing Through Rituals

A Guide for Sustaining Wellbeing and Activism



and

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With Support From



What to expect on your journey

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This is for you

Dear Activist,

It is no secret today that the world is undergoing a wave of unprecedented disruption. This wave can either disintegrate your very being or propel you to great heights of immeasurable growth. Either way, we must pay keen attention to its effects.

As the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, how are you taking care of your wellbeing? Do you find yourself over-giving, overdoing, feeling frequently depleted by a myriad of demands upon you despite your best efforts to create a balanced life? Do you long for deeper, more authentic connection with others? Do you sometimes feel depleted, alone, unsupported, and unable to bring forth the fullness of the contributions you know you must make, despite having great colleagues in your life? Do you feel excited when you break old patterns that no longer serve you but confused in the same breath when you get knocked back into the same patterns? Are you deeply disturbed by the state of the world, but feel powerless to tackle such huge problems and pain when you have not entirely unravelled your own?

Given the current context, you may constantly be drifting from one thing to another. It is important, now more than ever to remain alert to your wellbeing and that of your organisations. Hence the importance of some nuggets, tips and 'tricks' to guide you through these unprecedented times. Wellbeing is particularly important, when one lives and works in a fragmented world, where the professional is severed from the heart, mind, and body. You deeply need some practices (rituals) to enable you reclaim and retain your wholeness.

There is no definite definition of wellbeing. It is a broad subject that happens at different levels. This guide focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational or intimate wellbeing both at the individual

and organisational levels. Wellbeing does not happen in a vacuum; it is influenced by the larger social context. This includes work, family, community, society, environment, and socialisation. Organisational wellbeing is influenced by different social movements, society, environment, socialisation, funding modalities, leadership, organisational culture and many more.

Imagine you were a well, when outflows exceed inflows, the well eventually dries up. Your sense of personal and collective agency diminishes. You begin to experience the world as something that is happening to you, forgetting that you are capable of being intentional, taking breaks and choosing to care for yourself, your organisation and the communities that you serve. In order to sustain yourself and your activism to build cultures of collective care, there are many cautions that you need to be aware of such as; burnout, unhealthy self-sacrifice, secondary trauma, different kinds of distress, hostility towards colleagues, and structural violence.

Wellbeing is a protracted journey. It could take months, years, even a lifetime. You have already chosen to take this journey; you began long ago and are still going, therefore, make yourself comfortable. You have been gifted a distinctive vehicle in which to take this journey. That Vehicle is your body: your foundation, the home of your dance. It is not something you have but rather what you are. Your vehicle is your body living a life in this physical world, equipped with most things you need. One of your challenges on this journey is to keep it nourished, happy, in good repair, challenging and being challenged.

The planet is a vehicle too. Taking you through time and space, supporting and nourishing you. Feel the earth as a central unified entity- a living body just like you, with boundless cells working together as a whole. You are a cell in this great body, part of mother earth, one of her children. Use her (the earth) to support you.

Wellbeing demands deliberate effort; it takes time, fierce commitment, and resources to galvanize your systems, nurture joy, stability, and a great sense of humour.

This guide provides selected nuggets, which encompass both personal and organisational healing rituals and practices, aimed at supporting you to connect with yourself in a loving and accepting fashion.

It will only work if you are willing and ready to invest in your wellbeing, using your vehicle (body) as a vital site of change. However, if you are not grounded, you will continue to see power as outside yourself and not use your inner power to nourish you, to light the fire of vibrancy, joy, vitality, and solidity. It is only by strengthening your power and will, that you will take actions that are difficult or challenging and move towards transformation.

May the force be with You as you embark on this journey!

The Guide Campus



The guide leads with an introduction, highlights 10 practical wellbeing nuggets, and climaxes into a power quote to sustain you. Every nugget explains the rationale for each practice at individual and organisational levels, shadowed by practical exercises. These exercises do not have to be done all at once. They are not organised in order of

prominence. Either of them can be picked and used according to need. The author does not assume you do not have your own practical exercises and rituals that already guide you but wishes that you will add to and expand your collection. They are far from being exhaustive but if done regularly, they can support your day to day wellbeing.

Nugget 1 Emphasises the importance of individual and organisational grounding and rooting using different practices and rituals. Grounding allows you to become solidly real-present in the here, now, and dynamically alive. Through grounding, you gain nourishment, power, stability, and growth. Without grounding you are unstable, and insecure. You feel powerless. Grounding protects the body from becoming 'overloaded' and it happens in many unique ways; for some it is through prayer, others meditation, journaling, song, or dance. Key to note is that practices and rituals are important but might not hold unless one is grounded.

Nugget 2 Highlights how connection with nature at individual and organisational levels is energising. Nature understands grief. Earth is where everyone belongs, and it is one of the things that all humans share. Consequently, dynamic, and deliberate contact with the earth is important, because that which has roots will endure. Rootedness births growth.

Nugget 3 Predicts the post lockdown season and going back to offices; the different possibilities of working that will not endanger team members. The new work life will be different from what organisations and their teams are used to.

Nugget 4 Presents tips on maintaining a beautiful and neat 'workstation' both at the virtual and physical office as a way of enhancing wellbeing alongside productivity. If you keep your desk tidy and beautiful, you will be able to find what you need more quickly, and this will lead to less frustration. Often a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind. Allowing your space to breath gives you a surge of energy to deliver efficiently.

Nugget 5 Summarizes the importance of managing digital connections both at individual and organisational levels. While many people are finding themselves exhausted, after endless online engagements, which have become the norm, organisations need to get creative about ways of increasing the authenticity and spontaneity of digital encounters. Individuals too need to use digital connections in a way that nurtures them. The nugget points out that being intentional in the way you communicate individually and as an organisation is crucial at this moment in time.

Nugget 6 Addresses issues related to the home, children and others who might be living in the same household. Working from home can be overwhelming. In most cases, it means that one is available to whoever is at home. Creating boundaries at home for oneself to do organisational work efficiently and have peace of mind must be deliberately planned for. At the emotional level, boundaries are also needed.

Nugget 7 Discusses self-nurturance at individual and organisational levels. Self-nurturance is key to taking care of the heart, mind, and body, under all circumstances. It is about gently raising your vibrations so high, that you no longer experience the world as a hostile place and instead as a call to open yourself up to the possibility of love. It is necessary to develop some capacity to nurture oneself as well as contain some bothersome feelings and memories.

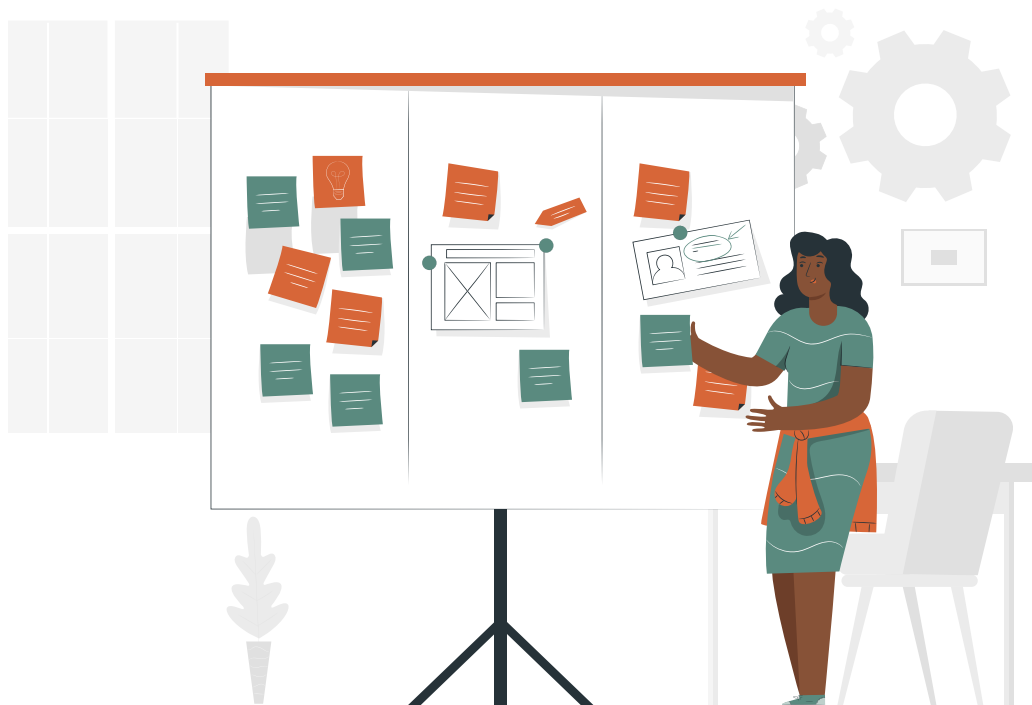
Nugget 8 Presents the importance of using art as therapy. Art is a universal language and what better medicine for a global pandemic than the global language of art. The section emphasises that Africans have always put art at the centre of healing and building communities. Art is the language of hope and we must use it to heal ourselves.

Nugget 9 Demonstrates the power of reigniting the fire at individual and organisational levels. Psychologically and emotionally, fire relates to the spark of enthusiasm that ignites power and will in ones behaviour. The purpose of fire is transformation. This section underlines the fact that if you are to rise upward to meet everyday challenges, it is the fire of your will that propels that movement. It is through your will that you liberate yourself from fixed patterns and create new behaviour.

Nugget 10 Talks about creating healing communities. Communities are important because there is an understanding that human beings are collectively oriented. The general health and wellbeing of individuals is connected to a community and is not something that can be maintained alone or in a vacuum. Healing, rituals, and community; these three elements are vitally linked.

The guide climaxes into emphasizing the importance of building healing communities because it is difficult to heal alone. A community creates a container for natural abilities that can find no place in the world defined by economics or consumerism. A community must look inside itself and its members for powerful spiritual and

other connections. This not only guarantees on going attention to one another and diminishes vulnerability to anonymity, but also softens the pains associated with loneliness.



Introduction



COVID-19¹ is a powerful virus with profound social and economic disruption for many. It is removing all the masks, subjugating presidents, and royalties, poor and rich to travel on the same journey albeit in different vehicles. The virus is unmasking the power structures built for profit, shaking the earth, our homes, and our organisations. It reminds us that entrenched power, class, patriarchy, and hierarchy cannot protect us all the time.

The virus has forced many to go on a journey of self-discovery; to change the usual ways of doing,

knowing, being and to appreciate that at the end of the day, the body is the vehicle and it should be nurtured and loved. The rich have 'discovered' food items that strengthen the immune system, items that poor African women living with HIV/AIDS 'discovered' a long time ago.

The office premises that different organisations occupy and pay lots of money for in rent and utilities, have been latent since many people have been working from home. Many have consistently followed news of alarming deaths of people they

1. It is important to have a national rapid gender-responsive assessment of the needs and priorities of disadvantaged groups because there is no clear information and data from a gender perspective on the impact of COVID-19

know and of total strangers, fearing they could be next. The virus has made many people work digitally while following the COVID-19 guidelines to keep a six feet distance from each other, an unachievable objective for those whose very survival depends on being near others. Families have been forced to stay in the same house day and night. Some of the children are beginning to realise that the man who normally comes home after they have slept is related to them, he is their father. Some companies are closing, and people are not sure if they will have jobs after COVID-19.

Homes, which are set up for relaxation and unwinding at the end of the day, as people prepare to head out for various reasons in the mornings and anticipate weekend activities have now become prisons. Like any place that one occupies without a break or interruption, staying at home can become tedious or confining. In addition, spending that much time together in the same space might also magnify existing inequalities that were easier to ignore when most working hours were spent elsewhere. It is no wonder that COVID-19 and its consequences are hard on families. Some people are wondering whom they married and if they want to stay with these people after the pandemic. This does not take away from some relationships that are learning on the job and becoming stronger.

In many households the division of labour is uneven, and women tend to do the bulk of the housework and child rearing in heterosexual relationships. Prior to the corona virus, some of the labour could be outsourced from day care centres, babysitters, house cleaners, eating out, among others. Now, all the responsibilities fall squarely on the adults in the home. The more glaring the inequality in the division of chores, the more the person taking on the bulk of them may start to chafe. The things that were not being said and not being handled are coming to light. The escape valves that were used to get away from household stress such as gymnasiums, beauty parlours, movie theatres, casual family and friend visits are unavailable. All this points to the great need for support for women at risk of violence within their homes, service providers and adolescents, women living in different resettlement camps, and the activists who experience high levels of burn-out, exhaustion and trauma.

Evidently, COVID-19 has introduced different ways of working, connecting, relating and being. Which raises the questions;

- How do you adjust to this new world order and still enjoy the work that you do?
- How do you avoid burning out due to isolation and social media overload?
- Remaining grateful to the incredible ways in which your multiple screens have supported you, how do you avoid exhaustion from the never-ending audio/video calls, and virtual experiences?
- How do you stay connected to digital spaces without being energetically and emotionally tired?
- Does working from home without an established strict routine and infrastructure to guide you deplete your energy?
- How do you deal with the assumption that working from home requires you to say yes to everything because you are physically present?

There is no Justifiable excuse for saying no to various online activities since everyone knows you are home and assumes you are available. There is also a tendency to say yes to as many offerings as possible to distract yourself from the realities of the present situations. Despite all the challenges, wellbeing and flourishing are important. Being well is not the same as negating reality or suppressing difficult emotions. By all accounts, you will have a long, bumpy road ahead of you. Many are already dealing with loss and grief; some are overworked and exhausted. Navigating life right now will most likely be fraught with unforeseen difficulties. Nevertheless, it is now more important than ever, to bolster your wellbeing; to care for yourselves and those who cannot care for themselves, and to infect each other with joy and laughter. To flourish!

The following nuggets, rituals and 'tricks' offer different ways in which you can strengthen your intentionality in how you relate to self and others in this time of lockdown and after.

Grounding and Rooting



Rationale

COVID-19 has set everyone on a slippery journey. You cannot run away from the journey; it is not in your hands. And if you are not grounded, you are likely to get overloaded with fear, anger, and apprehension.

Make yourself comfortable, for the journey you are undertaking is going to be long and unpredictable. It involves deep reflection, grounding, transformation, improvisation, and re-setting. The journey requires patience, commitment to self-care and well-being, reading materials, technological gadgets, innovation, love, and extreme leadership of self and love of whatever you oversee. One of your challenges on this journey is to keep yourself and your “vehicle²” (i.e. your body) nourished,

grounded, vibrant, open to being challenged, happy and in good repair. It is also to ensure that no part of your vehicle is neglected. The journey requires you to develop faculties that will enable you to read your context and respond creatively, to embrace wholeness, and to be whole. The journey starts with grounding your body because it is your connection to the physical world, your foundation, the home of your dance. It is also your connection to your organisation. You are the resting ground

2. The body is like a vehicle which takes us on life's journey. The vehicle has to be kept serviced, nourished, happy and in good repair. As in real life, one should always take time exploring one's vehicle to identify what needs to be paid attention to. Unlike the usual vehicles that can be bought and discarded, this vehicle is the only one we are given.

of truth. You are the ground from which all things rest. You are here, you are solid, and you are alive.

Grounding is a process of dynamic contact with the earth, with its edges, boundaries, and limitations. It allows you to become solid, present here, now, and dynamically alive even when working alone. Through grounding you gain nourishment, power, stability, and growth. Without grounding, you are unstable, you lose your centre and spend your days dreaming or recycling your dreams when, you are supposed to be working. Lack of grounding can lead to paralysis and depression.

When you are grounded, you enjoy your work. Even when left to work from home unsupervised, you can embrace stillness, solidity, inner security, and clarity. You can also ground out stresses of everyday life and increase your vitality. When grounded, you are rooted and that which has roots will endure.

Grounding is not dull and lifeless; it is dynamic and vibrant. It provides a foundation on which everything you do rests. The work you do and the foundation you build, are of utmost importance to the success of whatever follows. For example, a

person desiring to study medicine, grounds herself in the physical sciences as an undergraduate. For some people, working in a regular office, with a schedule is a grounding activity. Routine, which may be drudgery at times, can be beneficial in its limitations. It builds a foundation.

Your body is your vehicle and is equipped with most things that you might need. It is where you begin. Your Vehicle is the connection to the physical world, your foundation, the home of your dance. You are the place from which all actions and understanding will arise and to whom it will return. Knowing that one of the challenges during this difficult time is to keep the body nourished, happy and in good spirit, how do you ground it especially when you wake up? How do you start your day rooted, grounded, disciplined, and motivated? How do you sustain working routines?

Individuals have their own ways of grounding; some pray, others meditate, sing, dance, walk, go to the gymnasium, sleep, among others. Below are some suggestions that could build on what you already know or start you off on an exciting day.

Individual Exercise

- Before going to bed, generate a handwritten list of the things you desire to do the following day. Prioritise and set your routine.
- Do some 'self-check-ins' so that you do not go to bed on an emotionally overloaded body. If possible, stretch, breath and ensure that your heart, mind, and body are free from poisonous thoughts.
- In the morning, when you wake up, browse your list as a reminder of what you intend to do. With intention, set the tone for the day by reflecting on the things you are grateful for and express that gratitude so that you start the day from a place of strength, optimism, and possibility. Repeat an affirmation or say a prayer. Whichever works for you.
- Take a moment to scan and feel your body. Feel it breathing in and out. Feel your heart beating inside, the moisture in your mouth, the food in your belly, the sensation of cloth on your skin. Explore the place your body occupies: height, width, and weight. Begin a dialogue with your body so that you learn its language. Ask your body how it is feeling. See if it is tired or tense. Listen to the answer. Ask how does it feels about starting the day?
- Imagine your body going through the daily routines: interchange of hands, touching doors, papers, dishes, children, food, your lover, relatives, and many others, is your body ready to engage? Think about the number of interactions you are going to have in the day, think about the work. How are you feeling? What are you excited about? What are you worried about?
- Write down the things that are bothering you for which you have no solution; acknowledge them and then take a deep breath and as you breath out, tear them in small pieces and

bury or burn them. Breathe in again. As you do so, think about the things you are excited about, those that give you pleasure and those you are grateful for. Put them in a beautiful jar for inspiration especially during the times

when the mood is low. Redirect your thoughts to things that give you energy.

- Continue fuelling your body with exercise of your choice throughout the day



Organisational Exercise

- Whether you are experiencing lockdown now or it is post lock down, sit in 'a circle' (could be imagined) and scan your organisation. Is the organisation grounded, stable and solid? Does it have the stability needed for health and true growth? What anchors the organisation especially during difficult times such as the unpredictable ones? Engage with these questions thoughtfully. Encourage discussions without intimidation.
- Is your organisation a nourishing place to work? How is the culture? Allow individuals to name some of the things you think should change. The things you do not want carried into the future. What is the collective vision of a nurturing space? Basic examples include:
 - i. The physical things, for example the office is a safe space, everyone has a space to fix a chair.

ii. Emotional: Support for one another; everyone is listened to. There is a stockpile of mental reserves /emotional reinforcement you can always fall back on in challenging circumstances.

iii. Mental or intellectual: Diversity of views or opinions is welcome, there is learning to support growth.

iv. Spiritual: Openness to wellbeing and mindfulness, there is an encouraged sense of hope amongst individuals.

v. Relational: All identities are accepted, sexism/homophobia are not tolerated, among others. One's power and success are expanded to others.

- In what ways is your organization supporting feminist wellbeing? What steps will you take to build on your strengths? Does the organisation have rituals for bonding and connecting? If not, what rituals do you think could strengthen the organisation?
- Think deeply about how the internalization and socialization of your identities as women (and men) and as feminist activists contributes to your sense of self and your beliefs about self-care, both positively and negatively. Brainstorm the roles, beliefs,

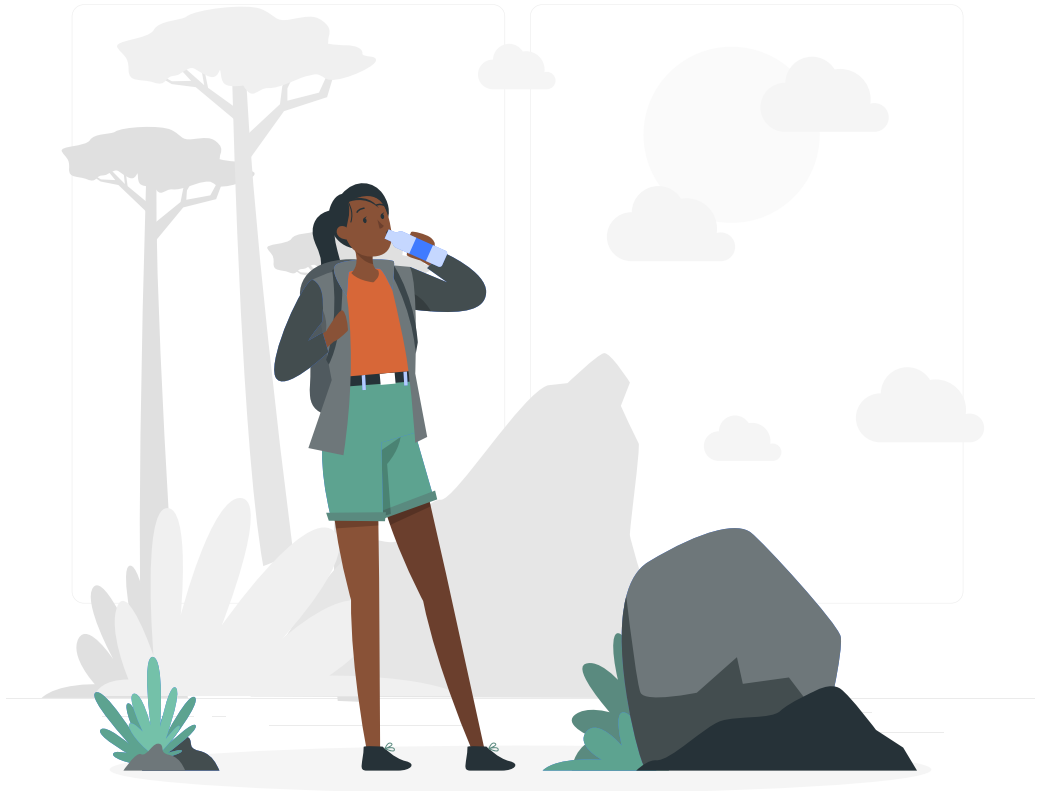
images, and expectations of women/men. How do these influence your wellbeing and self-care as women/men and as activists? Which of these have you internalized and how may they impact the ways you prioritize your own wellbeing? Share the information, engage with it. What picture is emerging? What would you like to change? To improve your wellness, what do you have to let go of and what can you not afford to let go of?

- Brainstorm roles, beliefs about, images of, expectations of yourselves within feminist activist culture (i.e. work all the time, feeling that you are not dedicated to the cause if you take a break, work without pay, fighting external oppressions being more important than thinking about yourselves, judging one another as less committed) Which of these have you internalized? How do they influence your relationship with yourself and others?
- Engage with the above questions and identify gaps and the resources you need to make the organisation nourishing. Develop a wellbeing plan for the organization. While at it, consider your systems, policies, strategies, structures, and how they can be developed to support wellbeing. It might help to ask two volunteers to oversee whatever needs to change and ensure there is a plan of action with a clear implementation plan.

Reflection

1. Do you consider yourself grounded?
2. Do you have a personal vision that guides you in life?
3. How often do you exercise consciously? (Work out, dance, do yoga etc.)
4. How do you rate your physical health?
5. Do you feel you have a right to be here on planet earth?

Communion with Nature



Rationale

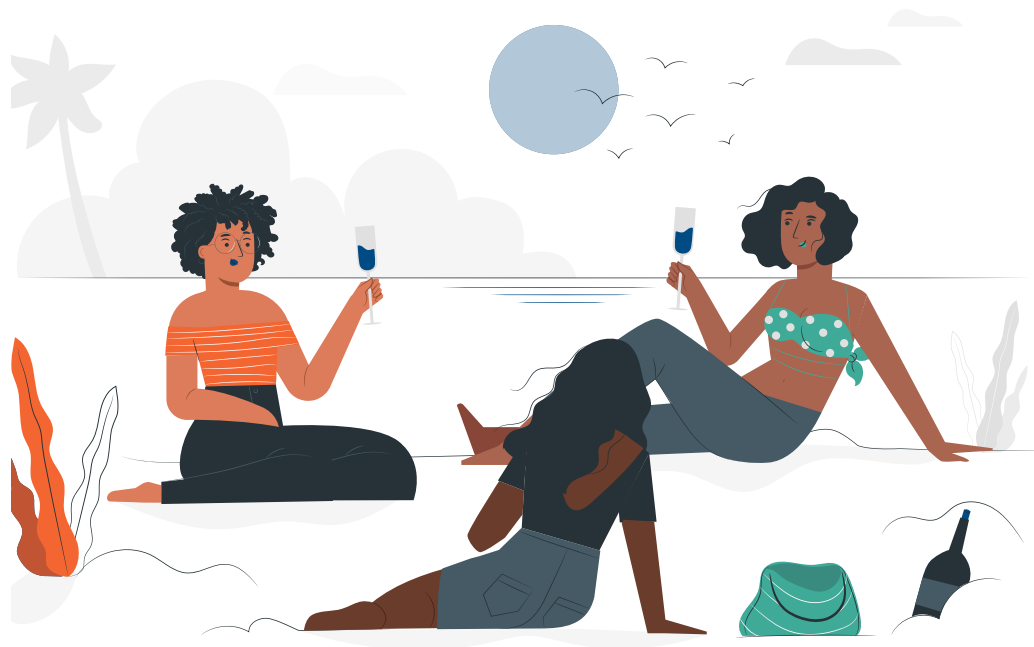
Every tree, plant, hill, mountain, rock, and each thing that was here before you emanate or vibrates at a subtle energy that has healing power whether you know it or not. So, if something in you must change, spending time in nature provides a good beginning. This means that within nature, within the natural world, are all the materials and tenets needed for healing human beings. Nature is the real place where healing happens albeit gradually. This is because nature cannot ignore the wounds that humans inflict on one another and on her. As part of the healing that is deserved and needed, the natural world calls you to allow grieving and to commune with what exists in nature. Grieving should take place among the trees because grief is exactly the sort of thing that the trees will echo, and the earth will absorb most naturally. The expression of grief in the presence of nature brings not only healing, but in the end a much stronger connection with nature and the 'spirits' that witness us. Grieving can be done in a variety of ways; shouting, silence, talking and sharing. People grieve differently. It is important to also shed tears of grief for the violence done to nature. It is the home of all human beings and the foundation of our communities.

Earth is where all people belong, and it is one of the things that you and your colleagues share. She is your home. She gives you sustenance unconditionally and makes it possible for you to feel connected. Earth is where you go to and where most likely you will depart from. This means she sees you in a way no one can. The nourishment and support of mother earth grants you the feeling

of belonging that allows you to expand and grow because you feel strong. Earth emphasises the feeling of collective belonging, self-worth and community including all forms of relationships. The feelings serve as an opportunity for a group of people to demonstrate their ability to give attention to love, appreciation and caring to an individual as well an organisation that needs it badly.

Individual Exercise

- Walk into nature with your emotional self (being mindful), not with your intellectual self. Try to walk bare foot so that you root your feet in the ground. Feel the richness of this world with its infinite forms. Feel its immensity, solidity, and how it interacts with you in supportive ways. Feel its texture, smells, colours, and sounds. What is the world that you are interacting with like? What is it that you want to grieve about? Grieve in whatever form you choose. For example, you could growl. GRRRR!
- Express gratitude for being alive today, able to enjoy this world. Ask nature to support you today.
- Open your heart so that you can become moist and drink deeply from the emotional echoes that you receive from the plants and branches.



Organisational Exercise

- Every other month go out as a collective and spend time in nature. Walk, sing, and dance. You could also write poetry, chant, rhyme, and share stories. Note that poetry and rituals evoke the world beyond words, the world of meaning that resides in its fullness, in nature. Feel the energy that comes from being together as a community and the sense of being intimately connected in nature. The intimate connection one has in a community cloaks the individual with love and acceptance, making her/him feel at home.
- While in nature, take the time to shout as much as you want, yell, kick, to collectively release the pain stuck in the body and the organisation.
- Collectively, reflect, using the analogy of a 'tree of life'. Draw and show the parts of life that contribute to wellbeing: your foundation (roots), support system (trunk), skills/knowledge that contribute to wellbeing (leaves), hopes or dreams (flowers), things you feel gratitude for (fruits). You can do this in groups. After drawing, sit in a circle and share. Where do you need to put more focus? What is in your possession that you need to enhance?

Reflection

1. How often do you go for a walk in the woods, park, and connect with nature?
2. Do you ever walk barefoot?

After Lockdown

Rationale

Since it might take a while for workplaces to become safe to occupy, it is necessary to take precautions and remain safe. As the pandemic stretches on and companies get used to their new “normal,” many are thinking about how their plans will evolve for the long term. What will start, stop, or continue after the crisis eases?

With plenty of uncertainty ahead, it might make sense to take a step back and re-assess goals and timelines in some areas. However, the speed at which information Technology has had to adapt

during the pandemic, and the need for laser focus, provides exactly the boost many leaders need to fast-track certain digital transformation objectives that their organisations urgently need.

Organisational Exercise

- Amid COVID-19, reduce the number of people in the office at any given time and the few in the office should spread out, so that you reduce the risk of people infecting each other. If this is done successfully you are going to be re-orienting from paying people for time to paying people for results.
- Another model involves moving schedules to a four-day week in which half the staff works Monday to Tuesday and the other half from Wednesday to Thursday. Keep rotating staff schedules so that staff can physically see the colleagues they need to see.
- Another alternative is to ask staff that find it easier to work from home to do so. There might be people who cannot work from home either because of the nature of the work or because of lack of space. Do not make assumptions.
- Assess the digital transformations needed in the organisation and make the required adjustments. Managing digital transformation includes a total re-examination of the organization’s business model, from how it is designed to how it operates and implements.

Reflection

1. Are you able to comfortably work from home, without the office infrastructure?
2. Have you discussed the kind of support you need to be able to work from home?

Maintaining a Beautiful Workstation



Rationale

A cluttered workstation is usually a sign of a cluttered mind. One way of de-cluttering the mind and gaining clarity is to ensure that the workstation is tidy, beautiful and energy giving. This is particularly so when you work from home and you are between domestic chores and office work.

Working from home without a structure can be confusing. It is easy to forget dates and the things you need to do. Therefore, order and discipline are important. Discipline leads to freedom, and there is meaning in freedom. If you do not have the tools that enable you to be grounded, on a difficult day, you will be thrown off balance. But when you can sit for a while at your table, reach for your coffee, look out the window at the sky or some branches, then back down at a paper, computer screen or a book, everything feels right for the moment, which is maybe all you have.

Human beings are by nature emotional beings. Every thought you have creates an emotion and you are constantly thinking. Some of these thoughts lead to positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, or enthusiasm. Unfortunately, there are always negative thoughts lingering too. Pay close attention to your thoughts for a day and you will be surprised how negative thoughts go through your head recycling themselves. Scary, is it not? Your negative thoughts can lead to emotions such as fear, anger, envy, resentment, and uneasiness, to name but a few. Individual and collective negative thoughts create a working

place that de-energises and is stagnant. However, these emotions are not expressed freely. When emotions are blocked, organisational movement is restricted. An organisation where people are not free to express their emotions remains in a state of chronic tension and can wreak havoc on the lives of individuals. Anger, envy, lack of affirmation of those who do well, undermining and lack of teamwork characterise a fragmented organisation.

Note that even one person who is out of balance, can throw your entire organisation out of balance. An organisation is healthy when everybody is. Emotions are energy and they should be allowed to be expressed in a healthy way so that they can move out of the organisation. It takes energy to release emotions and tension. Absence of tension creates harmonic flow within the organisation. This creates pleasure at a deeper level, allowing deeper connection with others and a stronger organisation. A happy place to be and to work.

Individual Exercise

- Look at your working space. Is it inspiring, happy, and beautiful? Try and make it as attractive as you can. Ensure you have everything that feeds your soul including water. Work in an environment surrounded by beauty. Create a space that is comfortable and energy giving and is reflective of who you are. If possible, create your inspiring “alter”.
- Free your space of unneeded stuff and free your life of unnecessary obligations.

Emotions and Different Ways of Destressing & De-cluttering

Mindfulness

- When your thoughts take you where you do not want to go, pause for a moment, and see what your thoughts are and what is stressing you out. Then decide which thoughts are functional and which ones are not. Functional thoughts serve a purpose, like planning an agenda. Non-functional thoughts serve no purpose other than to create stress by replaying past conversations repeatedly in your head. Once you have taken a moment to acknowledge and categorize your thoughts, consciously choose what to do with them. If the thought has no value, choose to think about something else.
- Stay informed but try to limit your media intake to a couple of times a day and use trusted news sources. If you catch yourself turning to social media because you are feeling isolated, take a break and spend time on another activity such as learning a new skill.
- Allow yourself to be distracted. Watch something that you find uplifting and allow yourself to zone out from what is going on in the world. If reading is more your thing, go to your bookshelf and choose an old favourite or something you have been meaning to get to for a while, or if you don't have physical books then e-books are a great option.
- Write a list of things you would like to do one day, even if they seem absurd or unattainable and keep the list for reference. Allow yourself to dream.
- Write a letter about your feelings. You must allow yourself complete freedom to write whatever you want. No-one else but you will ever see it, so swear and curse if you feel the need and write down everything that you feel about this person and your relationship with them or the situation. You can write to COVID-19 or to your organisation if that is the cause of stress. Write about why you feel the way you do.
- Do your best not to feel any shame or guilt about what you write, you can express your emotions in this way. Do not suppress or deny the way you feel, get it all down on paper. No-one will be judging you. Be sure that you are writing to the person or situation directly, as if



you were talking to their or its face. Consider spending a couple of days writing this letter, going back, and adding to it as content comes to you. Once you start writing, you will be surprised how much more you want to express. Once the writing process is done, read your write up out loud. Read it with as much emotion as though the person were right there in front of you. Yell if you want to. And read it as many times as you like, until it

feels complete. Burn it. As the letter begins to burn, say something like, “I now release, burn and clear all of the negativity within this letter.”

- Since everything and everyone in the Universe is energetically connected, every time you do an exercise like this, you are not only healing yourself but influencing others as well.

Organisational Exercise

- Start every day by checking in with each other. The checking in could be on a visible notice board or could be electronic. Everyone checks in and informs the collective of how s(he) is feeling and the support s(he) needs to be able to flourish for that day. The request should not overwhelm others, if you want them to do your work, then that is not fair unless you are sick.
- Try as much as possible to meet as a collective once a day, may be have lunch together if that works for all. In a safer group, your organisation might have an on-going list where people can post “Things I have to offer” and “Things I need” to provide mutual support.
- Have an organisational collective gratitude jug where you deposit pieces of paper that

indicate what you are grateful for. Every Friday, review and have fun celebrating. This exercise will strengthen your organisational culture.

- As you return to work after the lockdown, spend a day cleaning office, even if they are not obviously physically dirty, as a way of removing stuck emotional energy, bringing in new energy and getting rid of the past. This is also a great exercise for connection and for releasing stuck energy and emotions. Use the

exercise as a way of releasing any negative feelings you hold in your heart or body, such as shame, guilt, anger, anxiety, or fear to create space for joy. You could choose to do this periodically. It is an exercise that should be done by all staff members.

- Spend an hour or so thanking yourselves for the collective work and end the day by sharing how you felt working together and invoking enabling energy.

Reflection

1. How would you rate your ability to feel and express emotions?
2. How much time do you create for simple pleasures in your life?



Enhancing Your Digital Connections



Rationale

The lockdown days have been difficult, and many people are finding themselves exhausted from the never-ending video calls and virtual experiences. It is not that they do not want the option of connecting in digital spaces, but that they are finding them emotionally and energetically costly. It is difficult to name why, but they seem to take more energy than the face-to-face encounters that most people are used to. Oddly, in many cases, they leave many people tired. It is crucial for you to pace yourself in this time of physical distancing. To be healthy in your relationships with yourselves and with others, consider what is working and what is not in this new world and economy. Remember everything you do drives your culture. Virtual meetings are no exception. Humans are sensual beings. When we encounter each other, we take in information with many senses. Certain people and their places have specific scents. Often, physical touch in one form or another is invitation to an encounter. The mere physical presence of another has the power of stirring feelings and awakening all our senses. Now that we are mostly connected via screens, much of this is lost. Limited to only audio and visual sensory data, the narrative has shifted to “alone together.” Whether this is related to the limited context that each party sees of the other, or the simple lack of full sensory data, is not clear.

The odd new way in which time moves is a likely contributor to the feelings of exhaustion and devastation regarding interpersonal interaction. When people were moving about freely in the world, every request for a get together was made with the awareness that peoples' calendars were full. Highly likely, it felt as though there was greater agency and options in responding to people's requests from others. Now that the connections are done from home, people tend to respond in primarily two or three ways to interpersonal offerings. Some of the responses include fear, guilt, exhaustion, or resentment which comes from feeling as though there is no "excuse" for saying no to a gathering or event since everyone knows you are merely home and "available." The second is an automatic "yes" to as many offerings as possible to distract yourself from the realities of the present situation and the third one is, 'how do I say no to friends who want to check in with me?'

The current COVID-19 situation is very uncertain and changing so fast. There is perhaps nothing more important than the way an organisation communicates. Strong communication can result in more productive staff, shorter meetings, and an overall better understanding of company goals. Now more than ever, it is important for teams to be highly intentional and not make assumptions. This means not only asking the right questions,

but also utilizing multiple channels and methods for team members to signal if they need any additional professional and personal support; from practical things like having the correct technology and ergonomic setup at home to mental health support.

If you are leading a team, make sure all the people in your care, no matter their technological expertise can participate fully. Try to always provide alternative options for participation. If someone cannot be on video, make sure there is a way to call in and give dedicated space for them to participate during activities and read the chat messages out loud. Consider, that not all questions can be asked and responded to via video conferencing. You also need to use chat tools, team channels, and email for regular and consistent updates. You need to make sure you set time aside for stand-up team check-ins and all-hands meetings with 'AMA' (Ask Me Anything) as a key part of the agenda. The goal is to provide as many ways as possible to keep your finger on the pulse of your organization and its people while all are working remotely. Your meetings reflect the culture you want in the organisation. The following suggestions offer ways to enhance your digital connections and strengthen your intentionality in how you relate to yourself and others in this time of physical isolation.

Individual Exercise

- Make intentional choices about what platforms you choose to communicate and who you use them to engage. The choice is not cast in stone, be flexible.
- Once the technical side of working from home is handled, identify the issues that make remote work efficient and enjoyable, and implement whatever is needed.
- It does not always have to be video connections, consider the phone sometimes. While on the phone, resist the urge to multi-task, bring yourself fully to the call. Notice how you feel.
- Get creative about ways of increasing the authenticity and spontaneity of digital encounters. Give voice to your feelings.
- Privilege experiences where you are sharing space with others but possibly not just sitting statically and looking at each other. You can participate in a weekly movement experience with other people where you all move in your own physical spaces, however you like, listening to the same music. During this exercise, while you can see the grid containing all the images of others, no one is focused there. It can be surprisingly connecting and powerful.
- Keep connecting as best as you can, tending to the ways in which you do so. Remember we are in this together and we will get through this together. Do it with care.

Communication

- Scan your wellbeing. Are you ready to engage in an online conversation?
- Ask yourself if you are an attentive and present listener. Listening is an essential tool and too often an overlooked component of communication.
- Make a recording of your voice during ordinary conversations. See how much you will talk and how much you will listen, whether you interrupt or falter on your speech. Notice your tone of voice. If you did not recognise this person you hear, what would you intuit about them from the voice?
- Do neck rolls. The neck is the narrowest part of the torso. Much of the time it acts as a filter for the abundant flow of energy between the mind and the body. This causes it to be extremely subject to tension and stiffness. Loosening the neck is an essential beginning for any work related to communication. It adds a lot of value to loosen the neck every day. Lift your head up away from your shoulders and then slowly roll your head in a circular motion, stretching your neck. Stop at any point that feels tense or uncomfortable, and massage with our fingers. Pause in the right places until it relaxes, repeat this process, going both clockwise and anticlockwise.
- If you are the one facilitating, mix up your participation formats so that both facilitators and participants do not get exhausted by the same communication style. A special trick is to include self-led activities like journaling, drawing on paper, embodiment activities, or reflection activities. Those give you time to take a breath and regroup or adjust your plan



Organisational Exercise

- When communicating, be clear and focus on the facts rather than conjecture. Times are uncertain, and emotions are high. When people are upset, they may be less competent to grasp nuance.
- Be relevant about what you share and when you share it. Be intentional on the digital platform that you use to share information. Important information that can be conveyed via voice should be done instead of written messages. In addition, check in regularly. Just because you have said something once, does not mean people saw it or heard it, especially since there is so much communication everywhere.
- Be consistent in your communication, it will be a beacon in times of distress. Different people will hear messages differently and they will only be able to attend to them based on where they are in their own process.
- Check in regularly to discuss the work being done, but also to remind each other that you are a team and together you will get through this. Maintaining open, on-going communication during times like these is critical to not only keep the organisation going, but also from a teambuilding standpoint.
- Be understanding and empathetic. Let people know you are listening and remember that different team members have different needs. Give them space to cope, to question, to think, or just be, but at the same time let them remain accountable in terms of commitments made.
- Every participant is going to bring their emotional state into the sessions. Extend all internal meetings by 15 minutes to allow for extra check-in time, this is for the purpose of genuine, human-to-human interaction. This need not be business related, but rather to stay connected. Colleagues are likely to appreciate the time to share how they are doing and what is going on in their lives. Now is the time for empathy and understanding. Even if one is not affected by COVID-19, there is widespread concern and anxiety. It is important to support one another and listen.
- Have a centralized monitoring system. When so many systems are under so much extra stress, having one place to go for monitoring is incredibly important. Having people share their views and be able to look across all the systems is important.

Reflection

1. What does digital transformation mean for your organization?
2. Do you have a digital transformation strategy?

Managing Home and Family



Rationale

The closure of schools, recreation facilities and day care facilities, has led to additional responsibilities related to care of children and support to their schooling needs. Working from home means that children and other vulnerable groups cannot be ignored. Most likely children are excited that you are home and are determined to claim their right to be with you all the time. Many people are troubled by the current situation. They can decide to dump their emotional pain on you.

Individual Exercise

- Create emotional boundaries with the significant people in your life. Whether it be someone who; is sad, angry, toxic, negative, grieving, or any other emotion on the human spectrum, do not let it get into your 'bubble'. When you are grounded, secure in yourself, you can be present for that person. Journaling, intention setting, prayer, or conversing with healthy friends can all be helpful tools. If you do not have boundaries in place, your relationships will undoubtedly become enmeshed and unhealthy.
- You may have to share a house, but you do not have to be together all the time otherwise, you might end up stressing each other. All family members should have a place they can retreat to, where they do not want to be bothered. That place might be in the house or outdoor.

- Be intentional about doing things together, not always telling them (your people) what to do.
- Be intentional about getting your own alone time and allowing others to have their own too. It might feel like a strange policy if previously you lived by an open and no knocking on the door policy in your household, but it is worth making the extra effort to be more conscientious housemates right now. Your retreat area might be the same one you use to catch up on your reading. Try and make sure that all those who live in the same house with you understand that working from home does not mean that you are at their beck and call.
- Set boundaries. Let the children know that you need your time. When it is work time, it is work time. When it is not, it is not, they can have your full attention. Set boundaries for adults in the house as well.
- Go to your working room, close it. If you do not have a working room, find a nice place outside the house. This could be under a tree. It also could be in your car. Organise a timer for when you will be free. Let the children or any other person wait until you are free. Setting one's boundaries is not a bad idea, but it is an uphill task and you will be in it for the long haul. Expect chaos as transition will be difficult. Keep working at it, remember you can only pour out to others from a full cup and filling your emotional reserves takes intentional effort.
- Let the children know that they too can create their own spaces and boundaries.
- Do not make your space a dumping ground, respect it by making it look beautiful and the rest of your household respect it.
- Continue to implement the boundaries, be consistent. Magic is in the consistency, actions, and patience. Trust yourself. Tell yourself you are doing this for a reason. Remember children have a right to be unhappy and upset provided this is not their permanent state.
- Do inner work to get rid of guilt and pressure. Do not feel guilty if you miss dinner. Do not tell strange stories to yourself. Claim serenity and alignment.
- Relax about children. They are entitled to their home. If you are on zoom call and a child just pops in from nowhere, do not be embarrassed and carry the burden of shame throughout the day. Let go of the idea of perfection.

Reflection

1. Where are you lacking emotional boundaries? Is it with a specific friend, your child, family member, colleague, or all the above?
2. Do you tend to become more invested in people who are struggling with a specific issue that you have had experience with? What is the goal? What is the emotional trigger underneath the behaviour? Identify what is stopping you from detaching.

Self-Nurturance



Rationale

Self-nurturance is not the same thing as self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is about striving for happiness at any cost, be it shifting a negative mood or distressing emotion, or just treating yourself with more love. The net effect of self-indulgence is that happiness is never quite achieved. Not to mention the fact that self-indulgent behaviours are often in the long-term quite unhealthy. Self-nurturance on the other hand, is about treating yourself with compassion by prioritising your mental and physical health. After all, when your health suffers, so does your ability to function at your best. By learning to self-nurture, you can get so much more out of life. Nurturance also means caring for, feeding the body with energy, love, and touch. Anyone can nurture, everyone needs it. Like watering a thirsty plant, human beings respond to flow, to movement, to the dance of life in its infinite mysteries. Through nurturing, life is renewed and preserved.

As you address self-nurturance, these are some of the questions to ask yourself.

- What do you say to yourself, about yourself in the privacy of your own mind?
- How much are you even aware of your self-talk?
- If you examine your internal cognitive behaviour, how often do you praise yourself and how often to you criticise yourself?
- What do you typically criticize yourself for?
- How often do you do so?

- How nasty or ruthless are you in your self-criticism?
- How accurate are your self-critical thoughts?

A person who is out of balance threatens to throw an entire organisation out of balance. Any organisation is healthy when everybody is balanced. The fire of a person who is in emotional crisis can easily expand out to other people and before the problem is resolved the entire organisation could be ablaze.

Individual Exercise

- The first step is to turn your attention inwards for at least 5 to 10 minutes a day. Call it meditation if you like (it cancels out all the negative chatter in your brain). What you are really doing is paying attention to your mind and body. This is not as easy as it sounds, especially if you have never thought about what it is that you (and your body) really need. Think of it like tuning a radio. You need to learn to “tune in” to your body, and the way to do this is to listen. Once you hit the right channel, the rest is easy.
- Throughout the day pay attention to self-nurturance. It is key to taking care of the body. Resting when you need to, eating food that is ‘alive and full of life force’, massages, hot baths, reiki, yoga, and pleasant exercises are all ways of nurturing yourself and healing your mind and body. Even if you are not able to afford a professional massage, you can massage yourself using your own essential oils or any other oil. As you massage, thank your body, every part and especially reconnect with the neglected parts of yourself. Appreciate your body, even the parts you always quarrel with. Love every part, for without it, you would not be who you are.
- Give yourself permission to rest. It is a crucial part of whatever [political] work must happen or will happen. Rest and remember, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” Black, feminist, lesbian civil rights activist Audre Lorde. Being effective takes energy, and that is precisely why rest is so important even while resisting.
- Journal five things that expand your power. Once you have penned down what expands you, amplify and reinforce it.
- Celebrate messes for that is where the goods are. Put something on the calendar that you know you will be terrible at, like dance lessons, or a meditation retreat, or a boot camp. Find a writing partner who, will help you with your work by reading it for you and telling you the truth about it with respect to help you improve it and for whom you will do the same thing.
- Find someone who wants to steal his or her life back too. Now, today, explore one wild and crazy thing; wear shorts out in public if it is hot, even if your legs are crooked or heavy. Go to a poetry slam. Go to an open mic session, and read the story you wrote about the hilariously god-awful family reunion with a trusted friend, even though it could be better, and would kill your mother if she read it but make sure she does not.
- Give yourself time and space to implement your routine. When things get busy, usually your self-care routine gets squeezed. Prioritise even if you spend a shorter time than what you planned

Organisational Exercise

- Once a week, organise to indulge in self-nurturing collectively. This could include letters of affirmation to each other, dropping them in a basket, knowing that if you are loved and accepted by others and feel you have something to give, you are more likely to love and accept yourself. You could also write letters to the organisation, thanking it for being your home and expressing the kind of culture you want to build. (Note that if you are going to write letters to each other, you have systems that ensure that everyone gets a letter and not just the leaders or those who are popular)
- Choose an exercise that you can do together irrespective of organisational hierarchies. It could be aerobics, yoga, or dance. You could even choose to walk together at lunchtime or at any other suitable time, depending on everyone's traffic situation.
- Ensure that you have a support system that knows exactly what you need in the now. This may seem difficult at first but being direct will help everyone. You can say, 'A lot has been going on and I don't know about you, but I have been feeling out of sorts. Does any of you want to talk about what has been happening?' Then let that people opt in. They might say yes, or they might say, 'No, I'm burnt out but right in this moment, let us just be.'
- Let colleagues know how you are feeling. Offering tiny bits of transparency can show that you are open to receiving compassion and encourage empathy from co-workers. You do not have to say, 'I cried for 2 hours this morning,' but letting people know that you are having a hard day is extremely helpful.



- Do an organisational detox. Detox that which is not working including pointless meetings. Have a detox period where you break most organisational routines and objectively assess the value of some of the activities including meetings. This will give you time to decide what you should keep on your workday 'diet'.
- Have an organisational therapist. Therapy is a viable source of support right now. It can help you to just talk through things and come to terms with what you are feeling. Reach out to therapists. Talking to someone is a good idea.

Reflection

1. Do you love yourself?
2. Do you feel a strong connection with any kind of higher or greater power? God, Goddess, spirit, universe, etc.
3. Are you open minded regarding other ways of thinking, doing and being?
4. Do you carry a lot of grief in your heart? Are you able to forgive past hurts from others?
5. Does your organisation take the time to identify that which is not working and detoxify it?



Art as Therapy



Rationale

When you are not creating, you are forsaking an entire part of your brain and your right to express yourself as an individual. Creating gives you purpose, excitement, a sense of ownership and ignites that inner flame. You can create using art. Art is a universal language and what better medicine for a global pandemic than a global language? The connection between the artist as a healer and the community is undeniable. To produce beauty consistently requires a healthy community. To be able to love, live, loosen up and find an outlet for your emotions, you need art. Therefore, the artist is the pulse of the community. His or her creativity says something about the health of the community because another role of the artist consists in acting as the spiritual fountain of the community. The beauty artists produce, quenches the thirst of the community. Hence the basis for the building of humanity, is cultural and artistic life.

The skill and ability to open one's h (ear) t is a reminder for everyone to nurture the ability to listen, both in auditory and sensory or intuitive ways. Art offers the ability to expand that aspect of communities and individuals. Art is therapeutic because it relaxes and inspires the mind. The sound of a woman uttering very moving poetic chants as she grinds millet produces tremendous energy for the child on her back. Many African women's relationships are cemented in the work of art because in some way, the product, and the collective chanting weave a thread among the people, bringing them even closer to one another. The arts have always existed on the turning edge of culture. Be they visual, auditory, dramatic or literary, the arts precisely by their non-regimented, nonconformist character are able to reach into the vast uncharted realm of the future to illustrate ideas and concepts in a way that affects consciousness on the brain level. Art forms are generally more abstract than any other forms of communication. Leaving room for imagination, they invite

participation of the most innovative components of consciousness. In saying less, we can hear more. Space is the stage on which human beings play out their lives. If you want to be creative, you need to build physical habitats that unlock your imagination. Creative spaces should invite conversation and collaboration, increasing such energy is not a frivolous issue. Office design, window views, ambient sound, flexible configurations, and work artefacts can create such stimulating experiences.

There is no 'heART' without art. Art may involve painting, designing clothes, music, poetry, drumming, dancing, writing, making your dining table beautiful, decorating your kitchen and many others. Art is about creativity. Survival and health in the twenty first century require innovation and flexibility. Creativity is the key to unlocking these qualities. At organisational level, it must be honoured. The very future of organisations depends on it.

Individual Exercise

- Take some time to engage with any art of your choice or do the art yourself. Do this as often as you can. For example, you can make flower

mandalas. The process involves collecting flowers and leaves and making time to create the mandala. It can be therapeutic.

Organisational Exercise

- Choose a topic that everyone understands, for example healing, and create room for each staff member to engage in artistic expression as a way of healing. Respect each piece of work produced by an individual even if it does not make sense to you.
- Organise a day when you visit an art centre or invite artists to visit your organisation to perform together or collectively watch a movie.
- Do organisational skits that make you happy or those that depict the work of the organisation.

Reflection

1. Are you creative in your life? (this is not limited to doing art form, it could be creative with anything –setting the table, writing letters to friends etc)
2. Do you engage in art form? (Painting, dancing, singing etc)
3. Do you notice subtle visual details in your surroundings?
4. How would you rate your ability to visualise?

Re-ignite Your Fire



Rationale

No matter who you are or what your story is there will come a time when you will feel depleted and uninspired. You know when nothing is wrong but at the same time, nothing is right? When you are just going through the motions because you have lost that spark, that fire in your belly that makes you feel alive! The increased burden of tasks, often undertaken with reduced access to essential and recreational facilities can be physically, emotionally, and psychologically draining. It can reduce your fire. Fire is the rising force that makes every person do, see, feel, love, and hate. Fire has power both outside of and within each person. On the outside, visible fire drives people to perform their respective duties, to fulfil their life's purpose. If you are going to keep up energy during this difficult time of COVID-19, it is the fire of your will that will propel that movement. It is through your will that you liberate yourself from fixed patterns and create new behaviour. It is your will that steers you from the path of least resistance, addictive habits, or the expectations of others. It is through your will that you take actions that are difficult, or challenging, moving toward something new. As you take these actions, you begin to transform but the first step is breaking old patterns.

Critically important to igniting fire, is having enough air in the body. When there is no room to breathe, metabolism does not work well, and power is limited. Breath is everything. If you are not in touch with your body, passions, and pleasures, you have little fuel for the fire. If you are not loving yourself, giving yourself room to breathe, to explore, to make mistakes, then you have no air for the fire to burn and all the fuel in the world is useless. If not centred within yourself, you see the power as outside yourself rather than feeling it within. To break the

circles of fear that many people are living under, you need to ignite your fire daily by reconnecting with the self in a loving way.

Reigniting Organisational fire must be redefined to become an instrument that offers the possibility of connection and of creating a working space that energises. Fire rituals must be seen within the context where they help to renew and strengthen relationships within the organisation.

Individual Exercise

- Identify the issues that extinguish your fire. Write them down on a piece of paper and destroy it. Identify the issues that ignite your fire. Plan how you are going to continue investing in activities and things that ignite your fire.
- Break inertia. Do something different. If you are sluggish, get moving. If you are hyperactive, be still. Break boring, repetitive patterns, and choose a challenge. Overcoming difficulties increases strength and confidence. Power is rarely developed by clinging to security. Give up being safe, and your fire will be ignited more quickly.
- Avoid invalidation. Criticism from those who do not understand your situation can sometimes be more detrimental than helpful especially if you are a sensitive person who takes things to heart. Often when one is undertaking something new, for example learning to work from home and is uncertain, invalidation can be an instant power crippler, stopping the sensitive person dead in their tracks.
- Pay attention. This focuses and ignites energy. Where the attention goes, the rest of the energy will surely follow.
- Increase information. Knowledge is power and the more you learn, the more you can do, and the fewer mistakes you will make. Learning under any circumstances helps to increase your power.
- Learn to laugh. Taking things too seriously can make you lose touch with your power and fire. If you can laugh at a situation, you have power over it. Whenever things seem at their worst, remember to laugh at yourself.
- Contribute. What can you contribute and give back to society? What can you do that will help humanity? This is not about being Mother Teresa but about being your wonderful, fabulous, quirky self and showing up despite all your insecurities, fears, and limited beliefs to contribute to something larger than yourself. Doing this will give you a sense of community and help raise your self-worth.
- Create a star system. Build a constellation of positive, authentic influencers who support, reinforce, and make each other better. You cannot remain on fire alone. You cannot remain a superstar alone. You just cannot be alone. Surround yourself with people who give you a super bounce rather than knock downs.

Organisational Exercise

- Collectively, brainstorm and identify the things that extinguish fire at the organisational level. Such things might be those that interfere with the organisational purpose, connection to one another and disconnection from the organisational constituency.
- Make fire (remember to do it in a safe space, where it will not spread), stand around it, let one person read the list made by the collective and throw it in the fire. At the end of the fire ritual, introduce a water ritual because the heat of tension and intention must be monitored and constrained by water so that the fire may transform and not simply burn. Wash your hands and if there is enough water, feet as well.
- You are what you read. Surround the organisation with books, magazines, and other forms of written word that uplift and inspire, instead of those that invite negativity into the organisation. The same holds for the artefacts that you put on your wall. The more you surround yourself with positive voices, the easier positive change will be to sustain and even amplify.

Reflection

1. How would you rate your general energy level?
2. Do you accomplish what you set out to do?
3. Do you feel comfortable being different (If need be) from those around you?

Healing Communities



Rationale

COVID-19 has shown us that the future is about communities. Belonging to a genuine, authentic community is healing but, some people fear that a community absorbs the dignity and integrity of the individual and kills the much-cherished sense of self. The truth is that one does not lose themselves because of being part of a community. On the contrary, being in a community leads to a healthy sense of belonging, greater generosity, better distribution of resources, and a greater awareness of the needs of the self, and others. In a community, the needs of one are the needs of many. One does not worry excessively about intimate relationships because s(he) is not left to confront their problems alone. In this, being part of a strong and dependable community strengthens ones individuality by supporting the expression of enjoyment of one's unique gifts and talents. An authentic community wants to see all its members flourish and function at optimum potential. The intimate connection and coherence an individual has in a community cloak, the individual love, and acceptances, making that individual feel extremely at home. Home here does not mean some territorial construction or just a mere roof over one's head. It is rather the place where one has a sense of belonging. When there is a place for

people to listen to the voice of their emotions, it leads to the opening of a wider door that can allow people to start communing. Communion happens when the emotional body is involved, when the kind of energy that is expressed in emotional intensity is enlisted.

Communities have always been important in most African cultures. In my culture, (among the Bakiga of western Uganda), when women wanted to make pots, they would sit together in a circle and sing until they were in some sort of ecstatic place. It is from that place that they would begin moulding the clay. It seems that the knowledge of making their pots is not in their brains but in their collective energy. The product became an extension of the collective energy of their circle, it was the product of their work. The pots embodied the intimacy and wholeness experienced by the women over the course of the day. They understood that it was important to reach that place of wholeness before they could bring something out of it. Farming worked the same way in many cultures. The point was not just to get the work done but to feel nourished by it.

The balance that a ritual maintains is health, and the work of a ritual is healing. During COVID-19, many people have survived because of rituals. As much as our bodies require food for nourishment, our souls and spirits require rituals to stay whole. Without the spirit being nourished in us, the

body pays for the consequences. Rituals are also necessary because there are certain problems that cannot be resolved with words alone. For example, the pain of abuse that someone carries within, the trauma of unfulfilled dreams and the sorrow of loss are not the kind of feelings that go away easily or over time. Whether we deny traumatic experiences or not, they remain as part of the weight that keeps human bodies tense and spirits constricted. When they are addressed in rituals, we get the chance to heal them. Rituals also keep communities together. Smart leaders recognise that rituals are levers for improving the organisation's performance and they take the creation and nurturing of rituals very seriously. Rituals can be a meaningful practice that connects employees to an organisation's core beliefs. Organisations practice rituals of all kinds for example eating rituals, story-telling, celebration and more. They engage people around things that matter most to an organisation, instilling a sense of shared purpose and experience. What works in one organisation might be totally foreign somewhere else. Rituals are not rigid; they can change depending on need and organisational changes.

Individual Exercise

- Seek out positive people who inspire you and teach you how to be better. Have a star system, a constellation of positive, authentic, influencers who support, reinforce, and make each other better. The more reciprocal the relationship, the more the impact it has on your happiness, engagement, creativity, and psychological safety.
- Identify a community that speaks to your needs and values and if you cannot find one, create it. Make it clear that it is a support and healing community.
- Agree on ethics, values, commitment, and how often you should meet. The rituals could include walking and exercising together, writing, supporting each other in various ways.
- Ritualistically, check in on colleagues or work mates, family, partners and show care to others. Express love because through it, individuals find their centre, core, power, and reasons for living. Increase praise but do not praise one person at the expense of others (comparison praise).
- Make a personal action plan. What are you going to action in your workspace or spaces because of the tool?

Organisational Exercise

- Start every day with getting together as staff and discussing at least one organisational value and how it manifests in the work of the organisation. Then think about the day's activities together. Share a cup of tea or water and get into the business of the day. The ritual of internalising values collectively has proven to be an incredibly effective way to build strong interpersonal bonds and transmit key organisational values throughout the entire organisation. It is a ritual that creates a shared identity and builds a strong culture.
- Organise or host 'open door days' that bring relevant stakeholders into the organisation's "house". Such rituals can create goodwill in people outside the organisation who can affect the performance of people in the organisation. Good managers know that team performance can be strongly affected by external parties, especially the family.
- Have a culture day where all staff members share pieces of their culture (depending on how they define culture). This expresses the team's pride in their heritage and triggers feelings of connectivity and meaning which stimulate mental flow states. These, in turn reduce anxiety, increase energy, stimulate the emotions and focus.
- Celebrate wins, however small, celebrate strengths. Write one meaningful thing about someone you work with and one about yourself. This will force you to have something to celebrate about your colleagues and about yourself. Remember if you are not well, you cannot celebrate others. Whatever seat you occupy, you have the power to create change worth celebrating.

Reflection

1. Do you belong to a community?
2. Do you have rituals that hold you together?

Conclusion

Currently in history, there is an outcry for healing from both women's human rights defenders (WHRD)³ and those they defend. Paying attention to individuals who ask for support from WHRDs can be overwhelming and is not sustainable. After all, WHRDs themselves need healing. It should also be noted that even if WHRDs are trying to respond to the current needs, not all are trained or funded to respond to the pandemic, especially to individual needs.

In any case, individual approaches help but are not sustainable because a virus such as COVID-19 affects the whole community. What most people want, whether they are activists or not is to satisfy their hunger for community, to fulfil their desire for belonging, to find rituals for their healing, and to understand and work with healing themselves. The hunger for community is the most difficult subject to address because participation in a community is a precondition for true ritual healing, for a sense of belonging that satisfies, for a rewarding understanding of heart, mind, and body connection.

When people go into healing retreats, at the end of the retreat, there is something like panic. They ask, 'How do we keep the intensity we have experienced here while out there?' They fear that the deep sense of community and connection, which they experience in the protected quiet of a retreat, will evaporate shortly after they reintegrate into the world.

The solution perhaps lies elsewhere than in one person showing everyone else the way out. The better answer comes from within. For the answer to emerge from within people, they will need a model that fuels their imagination and creativity. There are several models but the one that easily comes to mind is that of people living with HIV. They created support systems that served them well. The groups they created had the adaptability and interest to

absorb fears, stigma, denial about sex and sexuality, and other challenges. They protected individuals within groups, effectively, holding them with love and respect.

There is also something to be learned from indigenous cultures; people relate to one another in terms of what each brings to the community, not in terms of how each one appears. A chief is only a keeper of a particular power that people respect deeply. So, in a sense, a chief is not just a chief but a person who happens to bring a set of gifts to the community.

Regarding healing as well as providing support in different ways, it is important to create healing circles; as spaces where one can move, cry, and feel true compassion for other people and for self. The value that one has in a healing community comes from her personal gifts, and from the knowledge that she must depend on personal gifts of others for her own needs to be met. This profound sense of recognition creates a powerful and lasting bond among people in the healing circle because they feel heard and seen.

As Africans we thrive as a community, with rituals (many of which were named barbaric or as witchcraft) and deep natural healing processes. Rituals that surface peoples' gifts are important. However, doing a ritual once is not sufficient to awaken gifts that have lain dormant in a person for a lifetime; it is only by inserting the self in the repeated practice of rituals that one gives the gifts the room to emerge. Until this dormancy is addressed and the gift awakened, the person remains incomplete, unavailable, and incapable of fully blossoming. For the inner self to show off itself in the individual, it must be invoked over and over until it does. A healthy community not only supports diversity, but it also requires diversity.

3. WHRD defined broadly to include women's informal groups, women's funds, and all kind of activists who defend the rights of other women.

Alan Watts once said, *“We thought of life by analogy with a journey, a pilgrimage which had a serious purpose at the end. Success, or maybe heaven after you are dead. But we missed the point the whole way along. It was a musical thing and we were supposed to sing or dance while*

*the music was being played.”*⁴ As you take this beautiful Journey either by yourself or with your team, may you listen intently for the music along the journey, may you learn to dance and sing, may you find purpose!



4. Alan Watts, *Life is a Hoax*: <https://youtu.be/gWNZNcsB9Y8>

Annex

Imagine a Woman ⁵

Imagine a woman who believes it is right and good she is a woman.
A woman who honors her experience and tells her stories.
Who refuses to carry the sins of others within her body and life.

*“Imagine a woman who trusts and respects herself.
A woman who listens to her needs and desires.
Who meets them with tenderness and grace.*

*Imagine a woman who acknowledges the past’s influence on the present.
A woman who has walked through her past.
Who has healed into the present.*

*Imagine a woman who authors her own life.
A woman who exerts, initiates, and moves on her own behalf.
Who refuses to surrender except to her truest self and wisest voice.*

*Imagine a woman who names her own gods.
A woman who imagines the divine in her image and likeness.
Who designs a personal spirituality to inform her daily life.*

*Imagine a woman in love with her own body.
A woman who believes her body is enough, just as it is.
Who celebrates its rhythms and cycles as an exquisite resource.*

*Imagine a woman who honors the body of the Goddess in her changing body.
A woman who celebrates the accumulation of her years and her wisdom.
Who refuses to use her life-energy disguising the changes in her body and life.*

*Imagine a woman who values the women in her life.
A woman who sits in circles of women.
Who is reminded of the truth about herself when she forgets.*

Imagine yourself as this woman.”

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www.imagineAwoman.com

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5. “Imagine a Woman” © Patricia Lynn Reilly, 1995 www.imagineAwoman.com

