

Hello - please read this before you go on.

There's a very brief doc on how to run Deep Decolonisation circles [here](#)

This is a collaborative work in progress: it is nowhere near finished. On that understanding, please feel free to use it for decolonising practice as you wish.

We are very grateful for any comments or suggestions you have. Please be free with them - they will help this resource become more useful. This is a living document and we hope it will be built on by the experience and wisdom of many people over time.

We are working to heal the wound of ownership: we don't claim to be the authors of this resource. It belongs to anyone who wants to use it. While it's in development, we are taking care of it. You're welcome to get in touch: evaschonveld@gmail.com and justinkenrick@yahoo.co.uk

Please note: although we don't want to decide for others whether or not this resource is for you, it has been compiled largely by people in the second half of life, who would easily be described as white and middle class (though there are nuances within that). Even though we are on our own journeys of healing, our thinking will undoubtedly contain many as yet unquestioned preconceptions and blind spots. We would very much like to be of service to folk from other strata of this system of domination, but unless and until it has had significant input from them, It's likely that this resource will be most useful to white, middle class people.

Decolonising is healing - healing is decolonising

Welcome

The short welcome

This is a practical resource. There's a bunch of thinking first, but you don't need to read it to use this resource. There's a summary in bold at the beginning of each section - or you can [click here to go straight to the contents](#) and from there skip to whichever section you want to look at and get to work - on your own or [with a group](#). If you spot places where you think we've missed something crucial - or if you have different ideas - please do comment.

The longer welcome

This is a collation of resources drawn from many different people's work (see the [acknowledgements](#) below) to support our work towards decolonising ourselves on the personal, interpersonal, organisational and cultural level. Its form is based on articles by [Tema Okun](#) and [Deepa Iyer](#) which look at the impacts of colonising cultures as they arise in groups and organisations, and make suggestions for their antidotes. We have included and built on their articles to cover other aspects of the colonising/dominator culture and have also developed another section on attributes of what we see as a connecting/healing culture.

Our suggestion is to use this as an ongoing resource, taking small bites at a time and working on them as part of a [supportive group](#), through reflection, feeling, embodiment and creativity - sharing with one another over a series of sessions and creating personalised, manageable, meaningful interventions into the wider world which support growth and change over time. We tend to think of colonisation as something that happened in the past, something that white skinned nations have done to those with other skin tones. The truth is that the colonial project continues in the ongoing forceful extraction of resources from the majority to the minority world and the racism still deeply embedded in our social fabric. In order to become colonising nations, European countries first were colonised, the indigenous people and their cultures within their own territories were subjugated, creating the conditions for them eventually to leave to conquer others. That process is ongoing in all dominating cultures. The fingerprints of this system of domination can be seen in our cultures in the class structures, sexism, racism and deep inequalities and injustice common in colonising countries.

For colonisation to truly stick, it also needs to happen *within* each individual: 'deep colonisation'.

It can be seen in the way we feel embarrassment or shame for those parts of us that we deem weak, vulnerable or too much, the way we give away our power to those in authority, or force others to do what we want, the way we hide ourselves away from the natural world and think of ourselves as separate from it, the way we would rather assert we are right than learn where we are mistaken, in the social front most of us feel the need to live behind.

If we are going to change the dominator system, our personal and collective healing is a key part of that. **Decolonising is healing - healing is decolonising.** If we can bring these together from the personal to the cultural levels we can change the world (this is explored in more depth [below](#)).

This resource is intended as a support to explore how that relationship between the personal and the cultural works, and can be healed, in each of us. In service to wholeness, within and between us, and to mother earth and all her children.

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- Separation
- Appearance - seeming, niceness, neatness, smartness, strength,
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- Professionalism
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Connection Culture Qualities and ways to cultivate them

- [Play - creativity, lack of judgement, useful work, imagination](#)
- [Process - holding tensions, standing ground, making a mess and clearing it up](#)
- [Connection - inclusivity, listening, appreciation and feedback](#)
- Family, community, collaboration, agreement, treaty
- Embodiment - sensitivity, rest, hedonism, sensuality
- Community of place - collectivity, sharing,
- Ritual - spirituality, sacredness, reverence, role in regulation
- Non-ordinary consciousness, plant teachers, prayer, meditation
- Love - appreciation, acceptance, tenderness, generosity
- Listening - managing reactivity, silence, making space for the other
- Rest - sleep, dream
- Mother Earth - nature connection, all the peoples (hint: aside from the humans), humbleness, 'weeds'
- Nonviolence - vulnerability, responsibility
- Emotion - grief, anger, fear, joy, building tolerance and skill in sharing our feelings with others
- Healing and health, self love and care
- Death
- Celebration
- Meaning - depth, wonder,
- Voice - speaking up, swearing, singing
- Conflict - aggression, anger and shouting, transformation
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- [Trauma care](#)
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Questions/checklist for inclusive process design

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Introduction: Trauma and the Dominator culture

A note on the words we use

People realise the need for deep systemic change in different ways. We don't always use the same terms. And some of the words we use to describe the toxic system we have inherited can be challenging to others of us.

The system of domination - that we are describing as the 'colonial' or 'dominator' system - shapes much of our lives. It categorises and values people very unequally. Some people can seem to thrive within it, where others' lives are deeply impacted by the violence inherent in a power-over system. This can mean that, although we may share the sense of needing deep change, we may not easily fully understand one another's experience.

This is crucial to understand - the dominator system separates us out. Some people - or some aspects of them - are given privilege, others are denigrated. This leads us into complex tangles of power-play so that it can be very hard just to meet, human to human without a lot of personal trust being built. There are flows of violence, implicit and explicit, within and between everyone in a dominator system - and some of them are experienced entirely unconsciously.

So we invite you to be tolerant of your own discomfort and welcome the way different people speak about their experience of the system we are needing to transform. Discomfort is a clue that you're needing to listen and understand more deeply. It is also a clue (if you need one) that this system is damaging. It is up to us, together, to end it and co-create a new one based on connection, fairness and kindness.

We hope that we can all find a way to hold the tensions that diverse experiences bring, and hold them long enough to deeply meet one another as human beings, in all our brokenness and hurt, wholeness and wonderfulness, so that we can continue as essential allies - who possibly also currently use different terms.

We most often use terms like 'dominator system' and 'colonisation' to talk about the fundamental wrongs of our system. We find these to be clear ways of talking about what we see as the most encompassing ways of speaking about the deepest roots of our predicament.

Terms like patriarchy and white supremacy highlight aspects of this system, and their insights and detailed analysis of the harm they do is essential to our understanding of the different ways this system plays out. Clearly certain groups tend to benefit more from this system - and many men, white people, heterosexual people, middle and upper class people and able bodied people are, sometimes willfully, blind to the ways in which they benefit from and contribute to perpetuating these patterns of oppression - and they/we often need to have the realities of the experience of those in other groups pointed out to us in no uncertain terms.

But while these different analyses are essential, they can also be polarising.

They can seem to be - and are sometimes used to - name one group as being the 'cause' of the problem. Focusing the way the system privileges certain groups misses the accompanying truth that this comes at a huge hidden (and often unconscious) cost to those in that group (as well as to everyone else). Words like 'patriarchy' and 'white supremacy' can usefully highlight toxic

aspects of the system, but equally they can act to fragment what needs to be a shared agenda to rid all of us of this toxic, traumatised and traumatising system, A system which at a deep level does nothing but harm to all involved¹.

The system is deeper and broader than any of these categories.

It lives deep within and between each of us as well as being the water we swim in out in the world. Using the word 'dominating' to describe it points to a quality that *any* of us can inhabit and that *all* of us suffer under. It's important to see not just how white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism etc impact on our lives - but to see how these attitudes are connected, how they are all part of the same internal and cultural process.

We can only change this system if we fully understand that all of our deeper needs are the same: it is trauma - personal and cultural - that causes racism, domestic violence, people trafficking, Trump, Bolsonaro and Putin, climate change and mass extinctions. It happens in many different ways, but every action of the system of domination is both trauma-driven and traumatising. The inability within mainstream culture to name trauma, see it and work with it is an indication of how deeply threatening such an analysis is to the status quo of domination we have lived with for centuries. That status quo is within us and between us. It is the system of domination we have learnt to live within. If we were to heal our trauma, we would no longer be willing or able to live with domination, separation, social stratification and scarcity.

Deep Decolonisation Circles - one way to use this document

One way to work with this, would be to gather in a small (5–10 people) group on a regular ongoing basis to develop a shared learning and practice of personal and cultural decolonisation. While requiring dedication and commitment, these groups would build a nurturing group culture so that they are supportive to participants' wider lives, as well as to the decolonising project.

This could begin by building relationships, trust and a shared toolkit of games, techniques and processes which support safety, trust and nourishment within the group. Safety is needed to support group members to be able to share, explore and begin to heal their experience of the deep, emotional levels of colonisation — and also to develop the emotional tenacity, skills and practices to address and transform the conflicts that will inevitably arise within the group.

Aside from this work of inner decolonisation, members could support one another to take this experience outside of the group. To bring vulnerability, emotion, honesty, challenge and a decolonising analysis into contexts which are not so safe and which don't yet have the same (or potentially any) agreements around the need for deep change. Contexts such as our families of origin, our friendship groups, our communities and our workplaces.

¹ While the actions of those traumatised by this system into becoming dominators themselves (whether in moments or whole careers) stem from deep wounds, doesn't mean that those actions are in any way less damaging and that those implicated shouldn't be held accountable for their actions.

This is clearly challenging work, but with the support of the circles it's worth working towards, because bringing this challenge in person, in our real life relationships, is what will catalyse a much broader social shift. Witnessing another person bravely risking ridicule, scorn and shaming to speak their truth is deeply affecting. For many it may also at first be deeply uncomfortable, but because it speaks to the deeper truth of who we are, sooner or later it will be a catalyst for the inner drive towards wholeness that eventually becomes undeniable.

Many of us are aware of wishing to become our full selves rather than the truncated version allowed in so much of society. There's a large constituency of people who will feel strongly called to be connected to those they see as choosing to be real, honest and vulnerable. When they're ready, they may wish to also join or form new circles and continue with the same process themselves.

Based on their collective exploration, circles could also develop new ideas and initiatives for building solidarity and making culture changing interventions, while learning and developing a new practice of change. Learning and insight from all participating circles could be shared, so that the collective wisdom of the wider group can grow and develop.

While it might initially seem that this group would largely be drawn from those who have benefited enough from the system to have the time to 'work on themselves' - there are many other groups who have developed similar, different or far greater awareness and skills in this area. Those who have the most to share may include those in recovery from addiction, those who have spent time in the psychiatric system, those who have been through the prison system, those who have considered or attempted suicide, those who have been caring for others in a great variety of crucial but often undervalued roles...

How trauma works to re/create domination

Trauma and the range of defence mechanisms we use to protect our traumatised parts are tricky to work with because, on the whole, they are unconscious. This section attempts to outline the [personal](#) and the [cultural](#) elements of this aspect of our experience.

Personal trauma

Much of our outlook as human beings is conditioned by our experience in our first few years. This is a period of our lives when we're learning about the world and the main way we do that is through patterning: observing the way things are and making sense of them through patterns. In this stage of life we don't make sense of these patterns intellectually - we literally embed them into our neurobiology: we don't need to think about how to walk, or how to speak - those things are in with the bricks. Which is why the difficulties we encounter as tiny children are so significant.

We have all but forgotten this phase of life by adulthood, but it continues to powerfully affect our resilience, attitudes, behaviour, and our ability to make healthy decisions for the rest of our lives. The quality of our early experience is highly dependent on our relationships with our primary caregivers and their ability to support us (or not) in these early years.

The ability to parent effectively is affected by a massive range of factors including our parents' own experience of being parented, their deep personal, social and cultural patterning and backgrounds, the state of their relationships, their access to food and water, their work situation, their social status, whether they or their parents experienced disability, racism, slavery, war, famine, addiction, serious disease, or a cutting off from the impact of their privilege on others. So this very early conditioning is not only flavoured by our personal experience but is tightly enmeshed in our social, political and historic contexts.

We also all share a few core needs including the obvious air, water, food and shelter, but extending to less tangible but equally vital things like a feeling of safety, emotional connection and a sense of purpose or meaning in life. If these basic needs are not met (at *any* time in our lives) we generally feel vulnerable, anxious, angry or depressed. However, the extent to which they are met, or not, in our early years sets up many of our lifetime strengths and weaknesses. When our early experiences are positive and our needs are met, this stays with us, contributing to our strength and resilience, our ability to be empathic, authentic and confident as adults. Negative experiences and unmet needs also stay with us, echoing through the rest of our lives in things like difficulty with anger management, lack of self-worth or insecurity. Meanwhile, when negative experiences are understood and integrated they can enable us to be far more resilient.

Babies and young children who are habitually left to cry on their own, ignored or punished, told off or humiliated for not behaving the way their parents think they should, who are dealt with harshly if they stand up for themselves, or who were abused by the adults in their lives in one way or another (in the wide range of ways this can and does happen), internalise the resulting pain they feel. This pain doesn't go away. It is made sense of - and patterned into our understanding of 'how the world is' in a range of childish ways ("it's all my fault, I'm bad, life is scary, I will only be loved if I'm strong/ don't cry/ do as I'm told/ take care of others/ control others"). These patterns are incorporated and become part of the unconscious beliefs and behaviour strategies we come back to again and again for the rest of our lives², regardless of whether they continue to make sense or even work to get us what we really want.

If our core needs were acutely or chronically unmet in our early years, we may experience an undercurrent of one or more of these states running in the background our whole lives, colouring much of our ability to form relationships and act positively in the world. These early experiences haunt our lives, impacting us in a range of ways, from this kind of background tone, through a range of levels of reactivity to full blown PTSD symptoms.

² We are not helpless within this - there are many ways to consciously re-visit and change these scripts in our adult lives

Trauma is a catch all term for these responses. It's the process our body-mind uses to deal with events which we experience as overwhelming, either physically or emotionally. Something of such states remains frozen in rigid patterns of physical and emotional reaction. These are stored, not as memory, but patterned into the nervous system: the unconscious. These patterns can be 'triggered' when we are reminded of the initial experience. Because this triggering happens instantaneously and unconsciously, we rarely even notice that we have been plunged into an emotional state which now has little to do with what's going on in the present.

We all accumulate some level of trauma during our childhood. We are all aware of parts of life, for example public speaking, standing up for ourselves, managing our anger or coping with rejection, where we know we tend to act differently to how we'd like. Dig a little into these uncomfortable feelings and the roots always lead back to childhood within a dominating system. Every single one of us experiences our own versions of this, but the underlying reasons are rarely acknowledged. The socially condoned view is that because we largely forget them, these early experiences are over. In fact, unaddressed, they continue to shape our lives.

For those who have had 'good enough' parenting, these immature but powerful presences within our psyches are generally quiet when our needs are being met, but they come rushing in to run the show when we're under stress or when we're exposed to a scenario that triggers them. Every one of us can remember times when we have overreacted or shut down (or a host of other 'inappropriate' responses) when things didn't go our way. We are probably also aware of parts of life (for instance public speaking, standing up to bullies, managing our anger or coping with rejection) where we know we tend to act differently to how we'd like. Dig a little into these uncomfortable feelings and the roots always lead back to the fears, griefs and disappointments of childhood³.

When our early patterning is triggered, our adult selves are no longer in charge. As part of a healthy maturing process over the course of our lives, we start to notice, understand, change our relationship with, and ideally begin to heal, our hurt inner aspects. But if left unexamined, and allowed to run rampant and call the shots, they can make our (and others') lives a misery.

While some aspects of our personalities genuinely mature into functioning, flexible, compassionate adult selves, we also build adult-style facades of appearing and behaving on top of our traumatised parts, allowing us a defended, adult-seeming presence in the world. We feel that we are keeping ourselves safe, when we are actually perpetuating the unconscious conditions that keep our early wounds intact and active.

Imperialism, colonisation, class, patriarchy, racism and capitalism are culture level traumas: legacies of past damage that continue to re-inflict it. Similarly to personal trauma, the root causes are obscured, making what is essentially a break with reality seem absolutely normal, at least to those experiencing it. At whatever level it occurs, when we're operating from trauma,

³ While we undoubtedly also experience traumatising events as adults, it is our inner resilience, or the lack of it - largely based on our early patterning - that determines whether or not we are able to process, integrate and bounce back from such events..

we're not able to feel empathy for others. The implications of this collective blind spot for our capacity to create collaborative, rather than dominating, cultures and social infrastructure is monumental: if we can't name it, we can't change it.

All this can look like a personal issue - something to deal with in therapy or in our close relationships. And in part it is. But the trauma we experience is way more than just personal - and it will take deep cultural shifts as well as personal growth to deal with it. To see why, we need to look back at the roots of our dysfunctional relationship with power.

Cultural Trauma

The most recent colonial project began with what is known as the [European colonial period](#), perpetrated by the European ruling class, dispossessing their own populations and mobilising them to colonise much of the rest of the world. Prior to this, the trauma of internal dispossession and enslavement - and of invading and enslaving others - had been repeatedly embedded in the European psyche, impacting on culture and [interpersonal relations](#) so that this most recent wave (begun in the 16th century and continuing to this day under the guise of corporate activity, economic policy and sanctions, politically motivated assassination and overt and covert 'regime change' wars) became, if not inevitable, then certainly no great surprise.

The process of colonisation traumatises both the object and the subject in different ways. The surviving colonised peoples are forced to comply with their new 'masters' in ways that are inherently offensive to their sense of personhood, and which severely limit their agency and ability to resist. Colonisers have to sever from their own innate empathy, sensitivity and sense of their own decency in order to be able to brutally control the supposedly 'inferior' colonised.

In almost all people there is a psychological line. On one side is behaviour that sits anywhere from the fully altruistic awareness that our own well-being depends entirely on ensuring the well-being of others, to that which can be rationalised as 'understandable given the circumstances'. On the other side of that line lies behaviour that negates our fundamental sense of our own decency and which when consciously, deliberately or repeatedly enacted, traumatises the enactor to the extent that they can no longer face the implications of what they have done. Each crossing of that line makes us more likely to become caught in an increasingly self-reinforcing cycle, which validates the unbearable by repeating it, each repetition 'proving' through this internal logic that the previous acts were necessary, normal and acceptable⁴.

The upshot of this is that:

1. as part of the process of colonisation there was (and is) a severely traumatised, colonising ruling class (many of whom lived on the wrong side of the 'decency' line and

⁴ We're told it is very hard to get soldiers to kill, but once their own comrades have been killed, that becomes justification enough, and killing can intensify. [maybe insert an example e.g. of police brutality in Minneapolis?] There is something parallel happening when some politicians get their followers to repeat what others see as obvious lies. Each retelling making the teller more vulnerable to having to repeat the next and bigger lie they are told, or face the alternative.

who, in justification of this spent a vast amount of time and money perpetuating a cultural mythology that they were good, deserving, mighty and just etc) and

2. their actions created (and create) a severely traumatised, colonised population, most of whom tried most of the time to stay on the right side of the line, but who could be pushed over it by punitive measures such as corporal punishment, [empresment](#), threat of death etc or by desperation due to poverty or starvation, which was part of how
3. European countries managed to visit an astonishing quantity of appalling atrocities on populations across much of the rest of the world, often disguising such oppression by describing it as the 'civilising mission', or 'the white man's burden', or more recently as 'development' or 'aid', as if these are gifts rather than mechanisms through which we normalise the theft of resources from those we 'aid'.

In spite of repeated attempts at reform and steps towards greater equality over the last 200 years, the task of actually addressing and attempting to repair the harm done through colonisation has - where it has happened at all - never done more than scratch the surface. This is partly because colonisation did not just happen externally, it also penetrated our inner lives, cutting us off from essential parts of our psyches, forcing its way into our shared culture, ensuring that we would pass on this colonised mindset from generation to generation - whether in the now 'independent' colonised countries or in the countries from which the colonisers came.

The British approach to colonialism tended to be to maintain local leaders who would enforce British rule, and replace those who wouldn't. 'Decolonisation' has often continued the same approach but at a greater distance, perpetuating the experience of colonisation⁵.

The lethal combination of, first, feudalism and then capitalism, together with an evangelising Christianity, insisted that those colonised (whether at 'home' or elsewhere) not only cede land, resources and labour, but also accept that their spiritual, social and cultural sense-making was inferior or evil⁶. European colonisation - whether in the Highlands of Scotland or elsewhere in the world - saw the destruction of the cultural and spiritual fabric of the subjugated peoples as part of their mission, and then used those they subdued to subdue others.

This energised a massive negative cultural feedback loop. It traumatised individuals and communities, seeding in them the potential to become dominators, ensuring that the indigenous cultural processes which could have supported healing and recovery were also systematically destroyed. Connections with local spirits were demonised, spirituality privatised, childcare put into the hands of the state, pupils kept indoors and alienated from the wisdom of their bodies, displays of empathic emotions repressed, elders forgotten, lands held in common stolen, and people forced from subsistence livelihoods and a connection with family, place and nature into slavery or wage slavery, whether on plantations in the country or in factories in the cities.

⁵ Similarly, ways of moving beyond gender inequality that prioritise moving women into public realm dominated by men, can mean intensifying the devaluing of the home and the work of emotional care. This contrasts with moves that prioritise men relearning how to value childcare and their emotions. One telling example from a man who had to look after his kids was that he hadn't thought his dad's absence had impacted on him, until he became a dad himself.

⁶ Note also Margaret Thatcher's 'Economics are the method: the object is to change the soul'.

For most of those of white European descent, our true selves are buried under not only the unconscious pain of unprocessed childhood trauma, but also the colonial inheritance of traumatised - and tragically mistaken - assumptions about what it is to be human.

That we believe that we are isolated individuals, that the earth can be owned, that our hearts are not as wise as our heads and our bodies are incapable of thought, that those in power are there because they know best: all this and more is our colonial inheritance and it is *this* that makes it possible for the ruling class to tear up our communities, wreck our lands and poison our air.

Whenever you hear the refrain “There is no alternative”, you are hearing the desperate cry of those who know that if they admit that there is, and always has been, an alternative of real relationships, then they will have to feel the depth of unnecessary pain they have had inflicted on themselves and inflicted on others.

‘Fessing up - the essential move to switch off domination

Of course, there are *many* essential moves, but ‘fessing up - acknowledging our own part - is core. This can be incredibly hard, as we may have absorbed the idea that huge, unconsciously dominating, aspects of our ways of being in the world are good if not necessary. We may well have become deeply identified with them and it can be very painful when the wounds they are trying to protect get uncovered. But owning up to those tendernesses is the way through to reclaiming our full humanity.

We hope that this resource can help find ways into those painful corners - entry points into understanding better what goes on for us and others and why.

Reclaiming our stolen tools

Audre Lorde’s famous quote ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.’ points to a key insight, shared by this resource: if we try to use the tools, structures, processes and systems of domination to try and change the system of domination (or any of its symptoms e.g. poverty, climate change, racism, sexism) we will only succeed in re-creating another system of domination. But as Micah White so neatly puts it in his article [The Master’s Tools: The Wisdom of Audre Lorde](#) ‘the creative, local and artistic forces of culture have been forced into subservience by a global megacapitalism, which holds all the purse strings. Just because we are forced to sell our creativity does not mean that it constitutes the master’s tools’. The system of domination can only use, it cannot create.

There are many, many human, humane tools out there, which can support our journey towards healing and wholeness. Some have been appropriated, most have been ignored or marginalised by mainstream culture. This resource points to many of them (there’s another really good collection [here](#)).

Dominator qualities and their antidotes

The sections below highlighted in pink are directly from Tema Okun's '[White Supremacy Culture](#)' which looks specifically at how these kinds of cultural values show up in organisations. We have integrated them with observations from Deepa Iyer's later article '[Is Your Social Change Organization a Pressure Cooker?](#)'.

They are followed by further areas of exploration that are in development. You are invited to add your experience to these categories or add new ones if they are missing. We are curating this document and reserve the right to respectfully omit writing that seems to be coming from a dominator mindset, but we will always have a conversation with you about that before we do so.

Perfectionism

- little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway
- more common is to point out either how the person or work is inadequate
- or even more common, to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them
- mistakes are seen as personal, i.e. they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are – mistakes
- making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong
- little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice, in other words little or no learning from mistakes
- tendency to identify what's wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what's right
- often internally felt, in other words the perfectionist fails to appreciate her own good work, more often pointing out his faults or 'failures,' inadequacies and mistakes rather than learning from them; the person works with a harsh and constant inner critic

Antidotes

- develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated
- develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning
- create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results
- separate the person from the mistake
- when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism

- ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism
- realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes

Sense of urgency

- continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences
- frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results, for example sacrificing interests of communities of color in order to win victories for white people (seen as default or norm community)
- reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little

Antidotes

- realistic work plans
- leadership which understands that things take longer than anyone expects
- discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time
- learn from past experience how long things take
- write realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames
- be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency
- realize that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run because inevitably people who didn't get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine the decision because they were left unheard

Defensiveness

- the organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power as it exists rather than to facilitate the best out of each person or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it
- because of either/or thinking (see below), criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude)
- people respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise these ideas
- a lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people's feelings aren't getting hurt or working around defensive people
- white people spend energy defending against charges of racism instead of examining how racism might actually be happening
- the defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture

Antidotes

- understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse
- understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege)
- work on your own defensiveness
- name defensiveness as a problem when it is one
- give people credit for being able to handle more than you think
- discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission

Quantity over quality, productivity

- the feeling that we must keep producing reports, events, and actions because of the crises in our communities or expectations of stakeholders.
- all resources of organization are directed toward producing measurable goals
- things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot, for example numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict
- little or no value attached to process; if it can't be measured, it has no value
- discomfort with emotion and feelings
- no understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people's need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you haven't paid attention to people's need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)
- Performance: the over-emphasis on outcomes, deliverables, numbers, and quantitative evaluations to assess our work.

Effects:

- Burnout
- inability to perform because of unsustainable and unrealistic goals
- Paralysis
- culture of prizing over-work
- burnout, staff turnover

Antidotes

- include process or quality goals in your planning
- make sure your organization has a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work
- make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day to day work; look for ways to measure process goals (for example if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal)

- learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address people's underlying concerns

Worship of the written word

- if it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist
- the organization does not take into account or value other ways in which information gets shared
- those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission
antidotes: take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information; figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization (for example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission); make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, 'buzz' words.)
- only one right way
- the belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it
- when they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them (the other, those not changing), not with us (those who 'know' the right way)
- similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees only value in their beliefs about what is good

Antidotes

- accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal
- once the group has made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the organization will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen
- work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach
- look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it
- when working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization's, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing
- never assume that you or your organization know what's best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

Paternalism

- decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it

- those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
- those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions
- those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does
- those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them

Antidotes:

- make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization
- make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization
- include people who are affected by decisions in the decision-making

Either/or thinking

- things are either/or — good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us
- closely linked to perfectionism in making it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict
- no sense that things can be both/and
- results in trying to simplify complex things, for example believing that poverty is simply a result of lack of education
- creates conflict and increases sense of urgency, as people feel they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources
- often used by those with a clear agenda or goal to push those who are still thinking or reflecting to make a choice between 'a' or 'b' without acknowledging a need for time and creativity to come up with more options

Antidotes

- notice when people use 'either/or' language and push to come up with more than two alternatives
- notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made
- slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis
- when people are faced with an urgent decision, take a break and give people some breathing room to think creatively
- avoid making decisions under extreme pressure

Power hoarding

- little, if any, value around sharing power
- power seen as limited, only so much to go around
- those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the organization, feel suggestions for change are a reflection on their leadership
- those with power don't see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened
- those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced

Antidotes

- include power sharing in your organization's values statement
- discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others
- understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive
- make sure the organization is focused on the mission fear of open conflict
- people in power are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore it or run from it
- when someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue which is actually causing the problem
- emphasis on being polite
- equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line
- role play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens
- distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues
- don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in 'acceptable' ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address those issues
- once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently

Individualism

- little experience or comfort working as part of a team • people in organization believe they are responsible for solving problems alone
- accountability, if any, goes up and down, not sideways to peers or to those the organization is set up to serve
- desire for individual recognition and credit
- leads to isolation
- competition more highly valued than cooperation and where cooperation is valued, little time or resources devoted to developing skills in how to cooperate

- creates a lack of accountability, as the organization values those who can get things done on their own without needing supervision or guidance

Antidotes

- include teamwork as an important value in your values statement
- make sure the organization is working towards shared goals and people understand how working together will improve performance
- evaluate people's ability to work in a team as well as their ability to get the job done; make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person
- make people accountable as a group rather than as individuals
- create a culture where people bring problems to the group
- use staff meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities

I'm the only one

- connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, 'I' have to do it
- little or no ability to delegate work to others antidotes: evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others; evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals progress is bigger, more*
- observed in how we define success (success is always bigger, more)
- progress is an organization which expands (adds staff, adds projects) or develops the ability to serve more people (regardless of how well they are serving them)
- gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost, for example, increased accountability to funders as the budget grows, ways in which those we serve may be exploited, excluded, or underserved as we focus on how many we are serving instead of quality of service or values created by the ways in which we serve

Antidotes

- create Seventh Generation thinking by asking how the actions of the group now will affect people seven generations from now
- make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example the cost in morale, the cost in credibility, the cost in the use of resources
- include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do
- ask those you work with and for to evaluate your performance

Objectivity

- the belief that there is such a thing as being objective or 'neutral'

- the belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process
- invalidating people who show emotion
- requiring people to think in a linear (logical) fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways
- impatience with any thinking that does not appear 'logical'

Antidotes

- realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's world view affects the way they understand things
- realize this means you too
- push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you
- assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is

Right to comfort

- the belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing 'logic' over emotion)
- scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color

Antidotes

- understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; welcome it as much as you can
- deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture
- don't take everything personally

Purity

- The belief that if you aren't fully "woke" and don't have fully-formed theories of change and on-point political analyses, that you can't be trusted or included in movement spaces.

Effects: call-out culture, dismissal, unwillingness to teach or mentor, fear of messing up, no room for learning or change

Process

- the belief that we have to be engaged in the actions of strategic planning, evaluations, and systems design to the point that we have no energy or capacity to innovate, dream, and envision.

Effects

- doubts about transformative change capacity of organization
- staff turnover
- incrementalism

Personality

- the belief that we have to brand and market ourselves as charismatic thought leaders and woke activists on social media.

Effects

- Distrust
- Competition
- Martyrdom
- the individual is a stand-in for the cause/movement

Separation

Atomisation

Alienation

Infancy

Education

Ownership

Mind over body

Stratification/knowning your place - gender, class, race, sexuality, dis/ability, mental health, education/learning styles

Professionalism

Scientism vs science

Connection Culture Qualities and ways to cultivate them

Play - creativity, lack of judgement, useful work, imagination

We are taught that play is for children and that as we grow up this is a way of being that we should leave behind. In fact play is a creative flow state, where we release the fetters on our imaginations, release our judgements and enable a more equal relationship with our right brain.

Ignoring the state of play is useful to those who are served only by our work, but in opening up this altered relationship with reality, through imagination, through following the thread of our interest and enjoyment, we can bring fresh energy and insight into our lives.

Nourishment

Bring more play into your life by:

- Dedicating - and not judging - time to follow your creative energy, interest and enjoyment.
- Practicing non-judgement of others (which will also mean you feel less judged)
- Spending time with children or playing (like children) with other adults
- Working with your 'inner child'

Process - holding tensions, standing ground, making a mess and clearing it up

- Attending to how we do things as much as to what we do
- Bringing awareness to the deeper levels of what is happening, rather than just the spoken, visible, or socially condoned
- Sticking with an emerging feeling or aspect of what's happening and making space for it to play out, rather than cutting it off because it's different from what was planned.
- Digging deep to search for our own responsibility, learning and development in difficult interactions

Nourishment

- Look out for and create ways for people to meet that encourage them to show up as themselves as well as or instead of their roles/jobs
- Engage with your inner world - your creativity, imagination, spirituality, as well as your trauma, hurt and shadow - get braver about sharing this with others and encouraging them to do the same.

Connection - inclusivity, listening, appreciation and feedback

Dominator culture is not interested in connection, so although it is innate to us: indeed we need it and being deprived of it (unless we choose this) will soon impact on our health, we are not always very good at it.

- **WAIT - Why Am I Talking?** We often talk without thinking, or to justify ourselves, or because we're feeling uncomfortable... become aware of why you are speaking - and who is not speaking as a result
- **Hosting** - holding space for other people with an awareness that they may need a bit of time to get to what they really want to say

Suggestions for building connection in online meetings

- **Really make the effort to join on time:** because online meetings work best if they're quite structured, getting everyone 'in the room' is important before you start.
- **Land and check in:** always spend even a little time to allow everyone to arrive in the meeting. It can be helpful to do this with a minute or two of silence followed by some time spent on hearing how everyone is feeling. In larger groups you can give more time for this by splitting into smaller groups (it's easy to split into separate chatrooms of different sizes on zoom). If this isn't your usual practice it can feel like a waste of time, but experience shows that people are more focused and productive when they've had a bit of time and space to fully engage with the meeting.
- **Bring attention to the strangeness:** specially for people who're not used to meeting online, it's really useful to dedicate a bit of time in the meeting itself for people to process what they're finding difficult or distracting in an online meeting. This can be done in pairs or in the whole group depending on how many people and how much time you have.
- **Emphasise visual feedback including hand signals:** much of the subtle, connective feedback we get from one another during in person meetings is harder to see or even invisible online. Help others to feel heard by nodding, smiling and using the 'wavy hands' signal liberally. Other hand signals can also be helpful, depending on what kind of meeting you're having - see [here](#) for more info.
- **Invoke connection:** even though we are in separate spaces physically, we are all present in the call. The cues on all levels that bring the richness to our connections when meeting in person are often sent and picked up unconsciously. In remote meetings, all those energies are still present, but to experience the more subtle ones, those which we may not even notice when they're happening face to face, we need to bring more awareness to them and more sensitivity to giving and receiving them. It's useful to assert this verbally in the meeting, and allow a little silence to let people really feel into their sense of their own and others' genuine presence - and commit to really receiving and connecting with one another consciously.
- **Appreciation:** this is a hugely important feature of all of our relationships and one which is very often sorely neglected in real life as well as online. Building a habit of consciously appreciating the people in our lives - and sharing that with them - contributes to our own and others' wellbeing, supports healthier collaboration and even makes the more difficult

aspects of our interactions easier if people also know that they're also deeply appreciated. Sharing appreciation can be done verbally or silently (which can be better for a group who don't know one another so well). Take a few minutes to go round the circle either saying one or two things you appreciate about the others - or silently focusing on sending appreciation to each person. It's helpful for one person to say the name of each person, leaving space for appreciation in between.

- **Create rests, breaks and shared silence:** it's very easy for online meetings to get over focused and static. For meetings over an hour it's essential to build in breaks - they allow people to shift their focus, move their bodies and process what's been happening. Shared silence can be another good way to do this and can feel strongly connecting in itself.
- **Use Way of Council:** this is a simple and lovely way of generating depth and connection in groups. It's based on a few simple principles (http://www.heart-source.com/council/way_of_council_intentions.html): taking turns to speak round the circle, listening attentively from the heart when others are speaking (and consciously *not be* planning what you're going to say when its your turn), speaking spontaneously from the heart when your turn comes round - and respecting confidentiality. Depending on the purpose of the meeting this can be just one brief round or you can take longer and do more than one.

Family, community, collaboration, agreement, treaty

In traditional cultures the family is the basic unit - if you don't live with your parents or your partner, you live with your siblings, cousins or other relatives.

Embodiment - sensitivity, rest, hedonism, sensuality

Community of place - collectivity, sharing,

Ritual - spirituality, sacredness, reverence, role in regulation

Non-ordinary consciousness, plant teachers, prayer, meditation

Love - appreciation, acceptance, tenderness, generosity

Listening - managing reactivity, silence

Rest - sleep, dream

- Domination cultures value the waking state because this is where we are productive, which in dominator cultures is our only value.
- The internet is a great tool for connection, but it has also been used to push us to be more awake, more productive, faster, more reactive.
- We are a culture of 'wakists' tending to value the light, awake, lively, intellectual and forgetting or denigrating the dark, drowsy or sleeping, relaxed, dreaming.

Nourishment

- Value rest, not only sleep, but all the other states between fully awake and deep sleep.

- Take your rest seriously and make time for it - switch off from whatever feels like work and do the things that help you change your state
- [A short course on sleep](#)
- [Radical napping](#)

Mother Earth - nature connection, all the peoples (hint: aside from the humans), humbleness, weeds

Nourishment

Get outside, whatever the weather, whatever the time of day: sunbath, rainbathe, windbathe, moonbathe, starbathe.

Nonviolence - vulnerability, responsibility

Emotion - grief, anger, fear, joy, building tolerance and skill in sharing our feelings with others

Healing and health

Death

Celebration

Meaning - depth, wonder,

Voice - speaking up, swearing, singing

Conflict - aggression, anger and shouting, transformation

Power - power with, power through

Trauma Care

- Acknowledging our own trauma and committing to work towards its healing is a key principle.
- It is also the most challenging, most countercultural, and the most important, because it targets the very deepest fulcrum of the key mechanism that keeps our system in place.
- Working with our own trauma leads us towards becoming more fully and authentically ourselves and gives increasing access to the whole range of human skills of connection.

Nourishment

- Find support and safety to address your personal and cultural trauma - this is not work we can easily do alone. Support groups, councillors and other kinds of therapists, co-counselling, authentic movement, working with plant teachers, mindfulness, meditation, prayer - there are many ways to do this - find the one/s that work for you.
- Accept that this is a long haul

Empathy

Learning to be at home with our own emotions, to understand and be able to work with them, enables us to connect more deeply with others, to understand their struggles and find the ways in which our core needs align with theirs. Compassion arises naturally when we have made a truly empathic connection with another.

Diversity

From centuries of culture dominated first by a monotheistic religion and then a materialist scientism, we tend towards one-size-fits-all solutions. As within the environment, our social models and processes should strive for as much diversity as possible, bringing in voices and experiences from the vast range of human experience and enriching each other.

Acknowledgements and Resources

[White Supremacy Culture](#), Tema Okun

[Is Your Social Change Organization a Pressure Cooker?](#) Deepa Iyer

[Politics, Trauma and Empathy: Breakthrough to a politics of the heart?](#), Eva Schonveld and Justin Kenrick

[On the Master's Tools](#), Micah White

Rest, sleep dream

[A short course on sleep](#)

[Radical napping](#)