Catalyst Initiative
Memo #3: Communities of Practice
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The purpose of this memo is to provide practical information related to launching and sustaining a Community of Practice.   It addresses the following questions:

1. What is a Community of Practice? What are its distinguishing features?
2. What are the major models and characteristics of effective Communities of Practice?
3. What is the role of the funder in setting the conditions for a Community of Practice?
4. What are the key ingredients in a Community of Practice, including the major steps in launching one?
5. What are the biggest challenges in launching and supporting a Community of Practice?
6. What are the distinguishing features of CoPs involving culturally specific communities?

We also include information regarding two related processes, Sangha and Peer Learning Networks, to illuminate how they are similar and different than a Community of Practice.

Definitions (See Appendix A for a comparison of the distinguishing features of each approach.)

Sangha: A community of people who are walking together on a spiritual path, connected by the practices of mindfulness, concentration, and insight. It provides a group of people a place to benefit from each other's strengthens and learn from each other's weaknesses. Sangha methods are described as being applicable to communities of practice.

Community of Practice: A group of people, typically from a single disciplinary profession, who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. It provides practitioners a place to share tips/best practices, ask questions of their colleagues, and provide support for each other. [1]

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[1] Other processes :

Communities of purpose relate to communities of practice but form over a particular issue or common cause. Typically, this is an interdisciplinary group with a specific goal for interaction. For example, a network of researchers in a specialized but professionally diverse field who collaborate and share their findings or formal learning experience.

Communities of circumstance are communities in which members share a position, circumstance or life experience rather than profession. This could include people who share a common geographic location, a particular illness or condition or an experience that binds them together (i.e., loss of a loved one, military service in a particular war, shared illness or disability, gender, age, etc.).

Communities of interest are communities centered on a common personal interest or hobby. While people may share their experiences around an interest there is no particular common goal to the interaction. Experience and knowledge may contribute to individual rather than collective goals. These networks are more informal in nature than a community of purpose. Many of the chat rooms that have proliferated tend to fall into this category, although some may also constitute communities of circumstance.

Peer Learning Network: A group of people interested in learning, sharing information, and supporting each other around a common theme, usually for a defined period of time. Participants are committed to supporting each other through honest and helpful responses to the questions that get raised.

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Characteristics of Effective Communities of Practice

What makes a Community of Practice(CoP) succeed depends on the purpose and objective of the community as well as the interests and resources of its members. Etienne Wenger has identified seven actions that could be taken to cultivate effective communities of practice:

- **Design the community to evolve naturally** - Because the nature of a Community of Practice is dynamic, in that the interests, goals, and members are subject to change, CoP forums should be designed to identify and support shifts in focus.

- **Create opportunities for open dialog within and with outside perspectives** - While the members and their knowledge are the CoP's most valuable resource, it is also beneficial to look outside of the CoP to understand the different possibilities for achieving their learning goals.

- **Welcome and allow different levels of participation** - Wenger identifies 3 main levels of participation:
  1. The core group who participate intensely in the community through discussions and projects; this group typically takes on leadership roles in guiding the group;
  2. The active group who attend and participate regularly, but not to the level of the leaders; and
  3. The peripheral group who, while they are passive participants in the community, still learn from their level of involvement. Wenger notes the third group typically represents the majority of the community.

- **Develop both public and private community spaces** - While CoPs typically operate in public spaces where all members share, discuss and explore ideas, they should also offer private exchanges. Different members of the CoP could coordinate relationships among members and resources in an individualized approach based on specific needs.

- **Focus on the value of the community** - Value is vital to sustaining a CoP, because participation in most communities is voluntary. But the full value of a community is often not apparent when it is first formed. Moreover, the source of value often changes over the life of the community. Frequently, early value mostly comes from focusing on the current problems and needs of community members. As the community grows, developing a systematic body of knowledge that can be easily accessed becomes more important. Rather than attempting to determine their expected value in advance, communities need to create events, activities, and relationships that help their potential value emerge and enable them to discover new ways to harvest it. A key element of designing for value is to encourage community members to be explicit about the value of the community throughout its lifetime. Initially, the purpose of such discussion is more to raise awareness than collect data, since the impact of the community typically takes some time to be felt. Later, assessments of value can become more rigorous.

- **Combine familiarity and excitement** - Successful, lively, communities combine both familiar and exciting events so

community members can develop the relationships they need to be well connected as well as generate the excitement they need to be fully engaged. CoPs should offer the expected learning opportunities as part of their structure (e.g., a pattern of regular meetings, teleconferences, projects, Web site use, and other ongoing activities), and opportunities for members to shape their learning experience together by brainstorming and examining the conventional and radical wisdom related to their topic (e.g., as part of conferences, fairs, and workshops).

- **Find and nurture a regular rhythm for the community** - CoPs should coordinate a thriving cycle of activities and events that allow for the members to regularly meet, reflect, and evolve. The rhythm, or pace, should maintain an anticipated level of engagement to sustain the vibrancy of the community, yet not be so fast-paced that it becomes unwieldy and overwhelming in its intensity.

Descriptions of well-established models are summarized in Appendix B.

Funder Roles

Communities of Practice (CoP) are dynamic social structures that require "cultivation" so they can emerge and grow. Organizations can sponsor CoPs, and through a series of steps, individuals can design a community environment, foster the formulation of the community, and plan activities to help grow and sustain the community. Ultimately the members of the community will define and sustain it over time.

A sponsor can legitimize and support the community by:

- Championing the CoP internally and externally,
- Providing support in developing initial membership—alerting others to the opportunity to join and the importance of participating,
- Providing perspective on particular initiatives or issues of concern,
- Periodically reviewing progress, and
- Providing support where needed for gaining resources (leadership, space, logistical resources, funding).

Start-up

Communities of Practice aren't something that can be "built" directly, but are something that must be "cultivated" over time. Much like any form of growing, there is a distinct life-cycle that takes place over time and must be sustained for a healthy community to thrive.

Key steps in this life-cycle include:

- Identify the goals and purpose of the community, as well as potential members that will make it up,

- Design and develop the community, using a small group of key stakeholders to begin the process of developing the community and its communication and knowledge transfer methods,

- Launch and grow the community by steadily bringing in a broader group of members using the methods first pioneered with the key stakeholders and participants in the development portion of the lifecycle,

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- Sustain the community by keeping in tune with the needs of the community (new communication tools, etc.) and developing new strategies and roles over time and as needed. A healthy community requires continual maintenance or it risks dying out.

Two additional points:

Communities of Practice which are not growing are likely dying, and it's imperative to maintain a balance of expert members along with newcomers. The process of identifying and introducing new members should not be left to chance, as the health of the community depends on the addition of quality members.

Members of the community are far more likely to participate and improve the community if they understand what their own personal benefits are. Identifying key participants and experts and rewarding them appropriately can help, but it's also important that every member of the CoP can see direct benefits (additional knowledge, etc.) from participation.

Challenges

Traditionally, a defining feature of Communities of Practice has been that they emerge more or less spontaneously from informal networking among groups of individuals who share similar interests or passions.

In recent years, however, CoPs have been increasingly initiated top-down by a sponsor, instead of emerging spontaneously from the "bottom up."   Common challenges described in the management literature include:

- Making a case for CoPs,
- Recruiting the right members (e.g., knowledgeable members who have enough time for social interaction),
- Finding common interesting topics for members,
- Securing trust of shared information,
- Lowering barriers among members to get involved in knowledge-sharing activities,
- Sustaining members' participation, since participation is central to the evolution of the community and to the creation of relationships that help develop the sense of trust and identity that defines the community, and
- Accessing or creating communication processes that assure effective exchange of information, retention and capture in a reusable form and to reflect upon and stimulate complicated human thinking.

Facilitators can help to address some of these challenges and thus help the community and its members to navigate through existing obstacles.

CoPs and Members of Culturally Specific Communities

The Catalyst Initiative is committed to helping communities realize their capacity to support health and wellbeing using mind-body approaches that are culturally meaningful. In doing so, the project is identifying and supporting the development of IHH practitioners with diverse backgrounds (for example, African, American Indian, Asian, African-American, Hispanic). It should not be surprising that the creation and transfer of knowledge across cultural boundaries creates additional challenges that must be considered in orchestrating a CoP. Practitioners may vary in a number of ways:

- People's willingness to ask questions that reveal their "ignorance," disagree with others in a group, contradict known experts, discuss their problems, or follow others in the thread of conversation;
- Preferred modes of communication and information sharing (i.e., face-to-face, online, email, etc.); and
- Willingness to share knowledge with someone from outside their own racial/ethnic group.

The core group involved in designing a CoP should be aware of a possibility that assumptions about acceptable "rules" of community behavior could vary significantly across participants. One approach is to discuss preferences with the members and make ongoing adjustments, as needed, in order to maximize participation. Another approach is to form a CoP group in which members are from the same cultural group.

Feature	Sangha	Community of Practice (CoP) [2]	Peer Learning Networks (PLNs)
Origins	Buddhism	Learning theory; Management practice	Social constructivist learning theory; Educational practice
Structure	A communal structure that works in practice, emerging from experimentation free from attachment to the outcome.	• A leader/coordinator and a core group manage the CoP based on an agreed coordination mandate; also provides continuity and direction. • An inner circle (that includes the core group) serves as a steering committee with an informal structure, meeting once or twice a year. • There can be multiple CoPs in different geographies or focused on different passions/concerns.	• Often cross- or multi-disciplinary rather than focused on one primary area, as CoPs are. • May be organized or self-organizing. • A moderator plays an active role in starting discussion topics.
Membership	• Any group of people can practice as a Sangha; members do not have to be Buddhists. • Participants commit to going together in a direction of peace, joy, and freedom.	• People who are active practitioners—not appropriate for non-practitioners. • Participants should have some recent experience performing in the role or subject area of the CoP.	• People who agree to be active regular contributors. • Peers interested in the same topic.
Size	Varies; some guide books suggest that if there are more than 12 people, split into 2 groups for Dharma sharing.	Varies; there may be multiple groups because of different concerns/interests.	50-100 people; can be smaller groups
Functions	• Mutual support • Remind one what he/she already knows • Support for resisting unwholesome ways of living	• Hub for information • Catalyst for cooperation • Magnet to attract/leverage funding • Scouting to identify opportunities	• Support formal and informal learning • Sharing experiences • Collaborative learning
Typical activities	Recurring face-to-face or virtual meetings (about 1 hour) that follow an agenda: -Opening -Introductions -Sitting meditation -Offering of teaching -Dharma sharing: Speaking from experience and deep listening -Closing	• Recurring meetings (suggestion is quarterly) • Webinars • Events with invited speakers, thought leaders • Monthly blogs; weekly microblogs • Wiki posts of information • Regular between-meeting communication via Listservs, newsletters, websites, phone conversations	• Online discussion forums featuring guest experts and recommended readings. • Webinar presentations. • Participation of outside experts in meetings. • Peer exchange conferences. • Storytelling exercises.

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[2] According to Etienne Wenger, "It is important to remember that people belong to communities of practice at the same time as they belong to other organizational structures. In their business units, they shape the organization. In their teams, they take care of projects. In their networks, they form relationships. And in their communities of practice, they develop the knowledge that lets them do these other tasks. This informal fabric of communities and shared practices makes the official organization effective and, indeed, possible."

The Prime Movers: Cultivating Social Capital Program
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Prime Movers identifies and supports social movement leaders from across the U.S. who engage masses of people to create a more just society. Since 2005, the program has provided financial support, public policy contacts, advocacy training, networking occasions, opportunities for reflection, and a peer network to strengthen these leaders. Six to 10 fellows, focused on different societal issues, are selected during each selection through an invitation-only nomination process. The program consists of two major components that facilitate the fellows' professional development.

1. Individualized support: Prime Movers each receive a $60,000 grant that is distributed over the first two years of their fellowship that is strictly for individual professional development, not organizational support (i.e., hiring an executive coach, media consultant, writing a handbook or book, convening other leaders in their field). Additional funding is available after fellows complete their initial grant.

2. Community building and peer networking: Fellows convene several times a year to discuss common issues and challenges, identify pathways for change, and hone the skills necessary to engaging mass movements and creating social change. Fellows also often contact one another for advice and assistance.

In 2009, Prime Movers started incorporating aspects of a Community of Practice framework into the fellowship program. They refer to the fellowship community as a community of practice for modern day social movement leaders.

Advice:
- Listen well to those whom you want to engage. What is the value to them? In order for the community to be robust, you need buy-in and participation.
- While the initial carrot for participating in the community was the grant money, members cite having prioritized time to come together to reflect with a community of like-minded peers as being very valuable.
- Some people see the value right away while others do not. The notion of network weaving is so important because it is not just bringing people together—it involves listening to the themes so you can make the introductions after the fact and also informs the curriculum of our peer gatherings.
- If you are in a funding role, you must be careful about the power dynamics.

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	The Prime Movers: Cultivating Social Capital Program
Structure	• The core facilitators of the network/CoP: 　-Swanee Hunt, a principal funder, is an active supporter and is a member of the community. 　Former staff that implemented the CoP: 　-Caitlin H.W. Fisher, acting director, maintained the program and connections within it. 　-Christina Gray, program manager, served as the facilitator and coordinator of the network. • There is a board of directors for the organization and a subset that help oversee the program strategy. • Movement leaders from the National Council of Elders are "intergenerational partners." • There are usually 5-6 fellows who serve on a seminar planning committee.
Membership	All fellows who have been selected to the program 　• Fellows during their two-year grant period are required to participate 　• Fellows who have completed their initial grant are encouraged and continue to be supported financially to attend in person events
Size	• 12-20 fellows during their two-year grant period; convenings may be larger with the participation of earlier fellows (there are currently 64 fellows in the network) • 15-20 movement leaders from the National Council of Elders • 6 board members • 2 staff
Functions	• Leadership development • Build and hone the skills necessary to engaging mass movements for social change • Network building • Hub for information, problem-solving, learning, and other support from peers
Typical activities	• Formal seminars that may involve theoretical discussions, personal strategic positioning, and conversations involving invited experts (1-3 per year). • Reflection retreats involving two and a half-day gatherings that focus on a mixture of movement-based conversation and relationship building (1-2 per year). • Peer-to-peer calls in which fellows discuss current issues that are "top of the mind." The community selects topics and fellows take turns serving as facilitators. Emerging: • A mentorship program involving fellows and elders. • A "more robust" self-convening for fellows to come together and talk about an issue area without staff having to put forth the effort. • Potential gathering with folks external to the Community of Practice

Communities Collaborating for Impact (CCI)

Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement
Ontario, Canada

Founded in 2001, the Tamarack Institute is a charity that develops and supports learning communities to help people collaborate and to co-generate knowledge that solves complex community challenges. The organization's deep hope is to end poverty in Canada. The organization offers a Learning Centre that disseminates knowledge via a resource library and free e-magazine, learning opportunities (face-to-face events, webinars, and Communities of Practice), and customized consulting services. Currently Tamarack sponsors three learning communities.

Tamarack initiated CCI in 2014, describing the decision to do so as "top-down and bottoms-up." Collaborative leaders from across Canada were contacting Tamarack with questions related to utilizing a multi-sector approach and a collective impact framework in their work. Staff at Tamarack had been thinking about the value of learning peer-to-peer so decided to this was an opportunity to do so.

Initially, the group did not have a set purpose other than it being an opportunity and time to come together as peers. Sessions were more like webinars, involving a speaker from a backbone organization who spoke on a particular topic. In 2015, Tamarack staff administered a survey of group members to find out why they continued to participate and what they wanted. Out of their responses the purpose became clear (see table on next page).

Challenges:
- Building relationships virtually is a lot harder than face-to-face; in the beginning it was challenging to get people to come forward and want to speak.
- As the community of practice grows and becomes established, its size may limit peer sharing; considering "breaking" the membership into multiple groups by topic interest or level of experience.
- Finding workable strategies for members to connect in-between meetings.

Advice:
- Have a clear goal/purpose.
- Know who the community of practice is for and what you are trying to do with it.
- As part of being a network weaver, remember conversations and emails so you can bring up networking connections.
- We created a written terms of reference so that members know what the expectations are and the expected level of engagement. It includes the goal, types of members, frequency of meetings, roles and responsibilities, and an annual evaluation (focus is on number and types of participants, levels of participation, and satisfaction). It originally had a list of member names but by the time it is ready to be shared, it is already out of date.

- Meeting agendas and minutes are keys to keeping members engaged.
- Keep a running list of hot topics and keep track of projects that members want to work on.

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Tamarack CCI (Communities Collaborating for Impact)	
Structure	• Heather contacts members to find out the needs and issues in order to craft agendas; she also facilitates the meeting, takes minutes, and captures resources that can be shared. • Individuals fill out a form to become a member (form asks for contact information, where they are located, what they are working on, and current issues); Heather sends out written information regarding expectations for membership. • Members provide topic ideas and to facilitate a meeting at some point. Emerging: As members become more comfortable working together, they may break into smaller groups, each with a facilitator and a checklist to follow.
Membership	• Members must be active practitioners using a collective impact framework in their work. • Membership is voluntary.
Size	51 members from across Canada; a core of 15 take part in every meeting.
Functions	• Provide a platform for exchanging ideas and research/development related to collective impact • Peer discussion and support in exploring issues
Typical activities	Connect virtually bi-monthly for 1 hour; typical agenda items (items covered may vary by meeting): • Introductions (Who is in the room and where are you located?) • 3-4 people who indicated they wanted to speak and talk about whatever issues they are facing followed by trouble-shooting discussion of issues • Presentation of a resource and feedback discussion • Sharing of resources available or request needed resources

Movement Strategy Center (MSC)
Oakland, California

Founded in 2001, MSC is dedicated to transformative movement building—creating a movement ecosystem of deeply connected groups that share values and rely on each other to respond to the needs of impacted communities, advance policy solutions, and transform the lives of people on the frontlines of change. MSC works with over 300 partner grassroots organizations, alliances, and networks that operate at local, regional and national levels. The vast majority of these partners are comprised of and led by people with low-incomes, people of color, immigrants, and youth.

For over 16 years, MSC has supported its movement partners to develop movement-level strategy, transformative leadership, alliances and networks. Partners are concentrated in: Climate and food justice, next economy and economic justice, gender justice, and youth and intergenerational organizing and engagement, as well as communications, media justice and education justice.

In 2014 MSC launched the Transitions Initiative to bring transformative leaders together across issues, sectors and roles. The Transitions Community, as a community of practice, is dedicated to transforming our world from one rooted in domination and extraction to one rooted in interdependence and regeneration. Transitions leaders practice cultivating a bold, hopeful vision for the future, their sense of purpose and who they need to be to lead that change, and the art of strategic navigation – taking bold leaps towards their vision with others, even in the face of the unknown. MSC adopted 60-40 Stance practice, as introduced by Norma Wong, to support individuals in this community to "dive deep" in their own personal development. MSC also provides strategy and technical support to specific Transitions projects, teams and campaigns that are generated out of this larger community of practice.

MSC seeds circles of practice around the country as a way to expand their work. This seeding is non-linear, requiring a different kind of leadership. Leaders must be less controlling and focused on working with emergent energy as an opportunity. MSC calls it their learning edge.

MSC's work has been deeply informed by the work of Norma Wong and her practice of 60-40 stance

Staff involved in communities of practice shared advice and the challenges one might encounter.

Advice:
- It is important for members to engage in transformative personal "inside work" and the "outside work" associated with deep social change together.
- Be sure to have sufficient organizational and network capacity to hold the space that members need to be successful.
- Building the organization's internal practice should be the first commitment. A strong core group is needed to expand the reach externally. Be prepared that some folks will be more ready

than others to engage externally. Invest in these people and then coach them to work at the edge.

- Remember that you can only teach what you, yourself, already embody or know. This keeps you in a developmental and practice stance. You must be self-aware, aware of your team, and aware of your group.
- As a CoP leader, it is important to identify your peers, who supports you, and how your relationship to CoPs operating in different contexts.

Challenges:

- Integrating a focus on personal transformation and a focus on collective transformation can be challenging at first, particularly since the typical focus of communities of practice does not stress the personal.
- Being able to integrate these two foci represents a special niche. It is important to find the right people to hold the CoP space and to support individual development and healing –they may not exist in your organization.
- It can be challenging to determine the "right" level of depth with a group—it is based on the experience of the person holding the group as well as the setting.
- Given all the opportunities available, it can be challenging to figure out the most important place to nurture.

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Examples of MSC Communities of Practice

	MSC Internal Core Staff Team	MSC Transitions Lab	MSC Los Angeles
Structure	• Kristin Zimmerman provided leadership with assistance from others • Norma Wong served as a teacher/ mentor	• MSC has been calling people into a community of practice that is emerging as a combined community of practice/ purpose, generating a vision and purpose together. • Group viewed as a network with the idea of being a distributed and generative[3] community of practice. • Norma Wong serving as a teacher.	• Partnership involving MSC Oakland & MSC Los Angeles. • MSC Los Angeles established a core team. • Norma Wong is "seeding" the group.
Membership	MSC core staff	People who • Have deep relationships with one another and are active with MSC, • Want to catalyze and lead big transitions in the world, • Are working across different issue areas.	MSC Los Angeles core team + people who are • In the MSC network close to Los Angeles • LA progressive organizing and social change agents; most of them had never worked together.
Size	18 local staff with 16 participating regularly; the "core team" of 5 practicing more intensively together.	This is an evolving community. Currently 40 members with 35 participating regularly	Currently estimate 20-25 members with15 participating regularly. \
Functions	• Learn and practice as a community • Build comfort in leaning into the unknown and uncomfortable edges of MSC's work • Cultivate people who can help and help others tap into their own power • Create a new level of relationships and interdependence		Functions have grown out of experiencing training together based on Norma Wong's work and making a commitment to the CoP: • Experience a kind of relationship quality as a different foundation for working together. • Experience a new and similar orientation to the world and their work.

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[3] Distributed and generative: distributive means that there are different hubs of leadership and action that are all working towards a similar purpose , vision and set of goals; generative means that the actions taken generate more energy, momentum and action than they take to organize.

Typical activities	• Internal MSC practice group met weekly for many years. • Used a 60/40 stance[4] to integrate the personal work with the outer facing work. • Included complimentary practices like storytelling, story exploration, and circle work depending on what resonated with the staff at the time.	Have offered intensive sessions, each session was 3 days at 8 hours/day. The first sessions were 1 time intensives. The second was a two-part series. Labs were spaced about 3 months apart. We are now considering a 1-2 week intensive. Practices have included: • Breathing exercises, • Movement practices that align and connect people to the horizon, and • Movement practices that connect people to their core. Focus has been on members: • Identifying what is getting in their way right now, • Identifying one thing to focus on, • Identifying a practice could help them locally make this next big leap.	• Group meets monthly, focusing on the practices that Normal Wong introduced via training (60/40 work, Forward Stance work). • Art of War study groups that incorporate practices.

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[4] 60/40 stance: is a mind-body practice developed by Norma Wong to help people develop a more open, powerful, proactive stance in the world.

Sistahs' Circle
Joi Unlimited
St. Paul, MN

Joi Unlimited is a coaching and consulting firm focused on promoting transformation and liberation of self and systems. Core values center on radical self-care and radical hospitality.

Radical self-care is an antidote to stress, unhealthy living, rushed decisions, injustice and disconnection from our own humanity.

Radical hospitality is going out of our way to welcome people and create a sense of belonging that not only assists organizations in their efforts to recruit and retain members of historically underrepresented groups, but also helps strengthen relationships among those who are already connected.

Joi Unlimited offers Circles as a healing practice where participants can experience being heard, being seen and reflecting on each other as mirrors. It is a support and judgment free zone, where radical self-care practices are incorporated into circle gatherings and can be used outside of the circle space, with loved ones, at work, and in the world more broadly.

Participants have candid, and courageous conversations. They talk about multiple and intersecting identities in the group and the various levels of privilege and marginalization and how it "shows up." There is a lot of laughing and crying, hugging and signifying. They are witness to what arises in themselves and others, as well as paying close attention to historical and present day points of pride and trauma from systemic oppression as well as family and community or origin.

The groups do not represent a utopia. Rather they are built on a commitment to show up in loving kindness—members give each other the grace to have difficult conversations and heal.

Advice and reflections:
- It is important to remove anything that can be a hindrance to coming. Black women are often, overtaxed, overburdened and overcommitted, removing these barriers make a huge difference. For example:
  - No tasks that have to be done in order to come.
  - No assignments when you leave (outside of encouraging some kind of voluntary radical self-care practice)
  - No RSVPs are needed.
  - No expectations to stop and pick up anything to bring.

  Participants "just show up and be." This invitation and parameters creates a free and open space for people.

- There is wisdom in the room to connect to current and historical realities and traumas. People can connect around those even if they are meeting each other for the first time.

- People may be thinking about larger problems but they are really thinking about how the problems affect us as African Americans or the members of the African Diaspora personally.

- It is intended to be a place where we can heal. So people need to be willing to bring their whole selves and be gentle with themselves and gentle with others.

Challenges:
- The broad challenge is how to connect and reclaim healing spaces; then there are still the immediate and very serious issues.

- Because of the mistrust with health care systems and systems in general, lack of access to healthcare, and funding issues the needs are great and it is hard to maintain the capacity to keep up.

- Most of the people doing this kind of work do it on the side. It is not their full time work or even their part-time work. The challenge is having sufficient resources to get trained community coaches to the community in a way that is economically viable.

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Sistahs' Circle	
Structure	Dr. Joi describes herself as the holder of a space/keeper of the circle.
Membership	• Many members are meeting each other for the first time, although they may have seen each other in another setting. • The Circle is for Black woman (mostly African American and some women from across the diaspora) who are interested in a healing space, radical self-care, and willing to use themselves in that process. • It is a mix of voluntary and invitational. It is not advertised. At the end of a Circle and at the end of the reminder e-mail. Dr. Joi tells people that they can invite another sister as long as they are willing to be in community to heal themselves and other sisters
Size	Currently the Sistahs' Circle has about 100 women on the invitation list; a typical Circle meeting involves about 10-15, sometimes 25 women.
Functions	• Personal healing • Radical self-care • Connection • Family healing
Typical activities	The Circle meets on Friday evenings twice a month for about two and half hours each time. A typical flow of activities: • Arrival—a spacious beginning supports members to just "be, connect, and land" (20 minutes), • Meditation (5-10 minutes), • Circle check-in with a talking stick—each person says her name and shares something that came up from the meditation or a reading; there may be a Circle question (for example: What is your hope for today? What did you have to move through to get here? Where do we access joy as black women?), • Movement—may involve yoga or dance, • Small groups—members break into smaller groups to go deeper, • Large group sharing. • Circle Check-Out and lots of hugging and long good-byes

History and evolution	In 2005, Dr. Joi started with eight Black women who were particularly interested in looking at their bodies, weight and food. They got together to look at what they were eating and realized it was more about "what was eating us." The group used the book, Sisters of the Yam. They met weekly for two years, ending when Dr. Joi moved from Minnesota to California. Dr. Joi then started a Sistahs' Circle of 30 or 40 women of color in California that met monthly. In 2012 Dr. Joi returned to Minnesota and In 2013 started a Sistahs' Circle again. There were many women who already knew about it or soon heard about it. The Circle supported issues beyond food addiction (FA). It incorporated yoga, meditation, and mindfulness practices. Dr. Joi is being identified as a healer in the community. She was asked to start Healing Circles in North Minneapolis as part of a Fairview Health Commons initiative. Recently healing circles have grown out of the organizing around Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the 4th Precinct Occupation in Minneapolis. Healing Circles focus on healing among those involved in the BLM movement so they can have a sacred space and healing for the healers so there is a place for them to do their own work and to get support.

Resources

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