

Work Self

A Village Framework

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My childhood taught me who I am as an employee, as a worker, facilitator, project lead and researcher. My 'work self' was being formed in those early years, within the culture, family and landscape I lived. By ten years of age I was confident and proficient at many skills, how I could use my mind to think through challenges, use my body to shape the task at hand and my spirit to imagine what was possible. I was encouraged to envision solutions as an entrepreneur and dreamer, hold a task from beginning, middle and end as a crafts-person or artisan, and to work deeply connected to my landscape and unseen spirit world. I grew up on a farm, I was a shepherd, a milker, a hay carter, a rabbit hunter, horse rider and rouse-about in the shearing shed. The balance, the dance between time and task, in a cyclical relationship with land and sky. I thought at ten years of age, I had learnt the **art of work**, and I was eager to become an employee in an Australian organisation.

At fifty four years of age I left the world of work, of employment. I was defeated. As a proud Aboriginal woman, also of Irish Ancestry, from a rural childhood, meant my way of working was foreign in many workplaces. My way of working included;

1. Task based work integrated within time, meaning I completed tasks from beginning, middle to end not based on nine to five timeframes. I was encouraged to grow my vitality, leadership and self-efficacy. However our task based work occurred within time constraints of night and day, celebrations and seasons.
2. Collective decision making, irrelevant of age or status. However respect is given to Elders recognised by the family or community. Understanding innovative ideas can come from all members of the group.
3. Non-competitive, meaning Dad would say 'whoever the best person is for the job', and it could be a younger sibling, Dad, myself or someone just visiting. We were a collective, together overcoming challenges and creating solutions.
4. Reverence and gratitude to Mother Earth. Our way of working was in relationship, grounded and localised to our landscape. Dad taught me to listen to the birds and be aware of the wind. Mother Trees, rock formations and waterways were sacred spaces within our work landscape.
5. Authentic humanhood, meaning humour, healing, celebrations, empathy and stillness or someone's need to 'just sit under a tree' were all integrated into our work day. I find authentic humanhood more efficient for competing tasks.

The framework below 'Village' describes workplace environments becoming informed by First Nations concepts of relationality, through practical applications. The

word village, is inspired by pre industrial age villages and current villages, as a metaphor for reforming current work environments which remain greatly informed by industrial age factory work principles. Village is a more humanistic work culture which encourages an employee's vital energy, their spirit, to remain strong. I understand this framework is idealistic, however it's been beneficial for me to reflect and create, as I now re-enter employment. I hope some of these ideas initiate your own creative thought, to reimagine your workplace.

Below are the five houses of the Village framework for work environments including Sacred Artisan, Balance & Healing, Seasonal Celebration, Gratitude to Nature and Village Meeting.



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Sacred Artisan

This house holds the understanding that every employee holds their own vitality, inner wisdom, gifts, full potential, master crafts person and sacred self. Within the organisation there are staff employed as a mentor, who spend one on one time with each employee to learn and record each person's unique skills and interests, including things that make an employee feel happy and strong. Together the mentor and the staff member, develop ways these areas can be integrated into their current duties, professional development, career progression or other organisational areas /

events. The Sacred Artisan house positions employees as a whole person, staff do not need to leave part of their self, worldviews, culture, hobbies or interesting skills outside of the organisation. Understandable not all aspects will be able to be integrated but the process of 'voicing', recording the sacred artisan self is in itself an act of celebrating all aspects of self, is a positive way, for the employees and the organisation.

The word 'artisan' also conveys that every employee is a master crafts person, in some way. A master crafts person holds the spark, the idea or the epiphany to create something or address a current challenge. A master artisan is oriented to creating a whole object or outcome, meaning they grow and mold the initiative from beginning, middle and to its completion. Current work environments at times crush the spirit of the inner artisan self when employees lose their creative ideas as they are transitioned up the organisational hierarchy or to a different department. To address this dilemma the Sacred Artisan house also holds the principle that the creator of an idea, no matter where this staff is in the hierarchy, maintains connection, if they choose, to the initiative throughout all stages of development. The benefits of this principle for an organisation are substantial. It means every employee, even if they are casual, are wearing their creative 'thinking caps' during employment, knowing their sacred self, their inner artisan self is respected and honoured if they 'voice' their ideas, within their organisation.

Balance & Healing

The house of balance and healing is for all staff from CEO to casual staff. This house informs the environment, meaning the buildings and surrounding landscape. New builds and re-builds informed by Stephen Kellert biophilic design principles (Kellert & Calabrese, 2015) connect the buildings we work in to nature, through enhancing each staff's experience of nature during work their hours. Connection to nature within our work environments can reduce stress, improve our mood and alertness and have a positive overall physiological impact. This may include maximising daylight, experience of fresh air, thermal comfort and connectedness to nature through access to outdoor areas, views of nature and indoor nature wall art and plants. Possible questions; can each employee tell what time of day it is and what the weather is like outside? Does the lighting help regulate each staff's natural circadian rhythms? The Balance & Healing house also holds different healing modalities for staff to access, understanding wellness needs to be integrated into working hours, not tagged on at the end of a day. These may be breathwork facilitators, meditation sessions, gentle yoga, grounding opportunities, Forest Therapy visits, staff walking groups, First Nations Traditional Healing events, arts and crafts space for team meetings which include an activity, staff picnics, swimming time and organisation vegetable / herb garden. The inclusion of even a couple of these modalities will greatly improve stress levels and sense of belonging to the organisation. Productivity drops significantly after 3pm, these healing modalities could be allocated to this time

on particular days to enable improved wellness and efficiency the following day. Staff experiencing burn out or stress can also request a 'social prescription' to access services offered through the Balance and Healing house at other times.

Seasonal Celebration

Historically the concept of 'celebration' has been pivotal to being human. However in our current work environment this core part of being alive is regulated to the periphery, mostly end of year parties. Historically celebrations were seasonal and cyclical, it was a way people felt connected to nature, the cosmos and the seasons they experienced in a local area. It was something to look forward to, deeply connected to a sense of belonging and a way to celebrate group achievements. Celebrations generate opportunity for positive affective resonance, or shared emotional states, leading to deeper connections, shared identity and group cohesion. Seasonal celebrations for an organisation could be for winter and summer solstice from either scientific or spiritual viewpoints, the four or six seasons of the year of the local landscape, an all staff birthday party, local cultural celebrations, picnics or organisational achievements. Seasonal celebrations could be minimal cost for organisations if needed with staff 'bringing a plate' to share and the organisation could create a 'celebration' area so there is no venue cost or choose a spot close to nature for an hour or two at the end of a day. Celebrations are also an important opportunity for non-hierarchical unity, when staff applaud the best dancer or try to sing a song, participants are enabled to be their authentic self irrelevant to their position in the organisation.

While travelling overseas I facilitated a workshop for an organisation, following the session everyone from the organisation came outside to gather under a tree for an hour to celebrate a success. Bread was shared, and people drank tea. Shortly people started singing, a couple dancing, and I was asked to sing a song from my culture as well. As quickly as the celebration started the laughing and singing stopped, and everyone walked back into their offices in good spirits.

Gratitude to Nature

Gratitude is a powerful mindset to create change, in our individualised societies. Group actions of gratitude can shift the morale quickly within an organisation, creating greater cohesion. The house Gratitude to Nature reminds us to recognise the air we breath, the water we drink, the animals we live with and the earth we stand on, find shelter, grow food and are held by. First Nations, Indigenous and African communities have been teaching for a long time, humans need to remember

and re-join 'all their relations', the much larger, human and non human community we belong to.

As members of this large community consisting of nature, animals, humans and energy or the spirit world, organisations taking up responsibilities is an initial step to healing the deep cut which occurred when humans separated themselves from other entities. Aligned to the landscapes an organisation is located on, in the house Gratitude to Nature, an organisation includes a particular river, park, forest, beach, animal/s as members of their organisation. This is **not** the First Nations concept of 'totem' but a new relational way of being for organisations. Through conversations and partnerships with Traditional Owner Groups, Wildlife Rescue, State Parks Authorities, staff develop knowledge about the landscape, waterway or animals, they can volunteer during 'clean up' and tree planting events, and can raise awareness of their organisations 'non human members', the landscape, waterway or animals in the local broader community.

Village Meeting

Communication within organisations is stratified, meaning each piece of information moves up and down the hierarchy, meanings can be lost, staff who initiated the idea forgotten and opportunity for solidarity missed. The other styles of communication currently used within organisations is at the team level, others below or above in the hierarchy not attending. Organisational wide meetings occur however the primary function is for management to update staff, not open dialogue. These communication processes are not inherently negative, they are just not enough for organisational full potential. From the above processes staff say; I have no idea what's happening, it's above my pay grade, or I wasn't allowed to give my update for my project in person I had to hand over a brief.

The house Village Meeting draws on the relational concepts of community and equality, where every member is as important as another member. For particular focus areas relevant to the organisation or current organisational challenges a Village Meeting is scheduled and any staff of the organisation can attend. The Village Meeting follows a community dialogue process, meaning people irrelevant of age or position are invited to speak from their authentic self, lived experience and intuition. The attending staff decide if they want the conversation to result in an outcome or if the process of open dialogue is enough at this time to hear ideas, creativity and innovation. Facilitators will prompt the area of conversation and enable as many attendees to speak as possible. If the group decides to stop the conversation for the relational process of 'wait a little' to go for a walk or time to reflect, then the Village Meeting stops and resumes at a later time. Points of discussion, decisions and ideas from each Village Meeting are distributed throughout the organisation, including the organisation Board. Village Meetings are respected and honoured, they are like the heart of the organisation, encouraging the vital force of each staff member to grow the organisation to its full potential, its full vitality.

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