

# Volunteer Reflect Grow



**By Susannah Pickering-Saqqa**

# ABOUT THESE CARDS

***VOLUNTEER, REFLECT, GROW*** is a collection of 27 cards each introducing a model of reflective practice designed to inspire and sustain volunteering. Each card is colour-coded using four themes: **volunteer training**, **volunteer motivation & commitment**, **resource constraints** and **diversity of volunteers**. An academic reference is provided for each model for further reading.

The themes and cards were developed from a research project led by Susannah Pickering-Saqqa, University of East London, to investigate how reflective practice can support volunteering in charities or nonprofits. Reflective practice is a structured way of thinking about, understanding and learning from what we do.

We worked with 4 nonprofit partner organisations to understand their priorities for volunteering which were: training, commitment & motivation, resources and the diversity of volunteers. We chose these 27 models of reflective practice through a process of mapping research (1938-2023), ranking against our partner priorities, workshops with volunteers, partners and students, and their feedback.

These cards introduce you to a range of reflective practice models. Some are based on ideas which are the specific focus of training courses e.g. "Action Learning". Some were originally developed as models to be used in practice, such as "Motivating Change". Other models have been extrapolated by Susannah from research findings which are relevant to the 4 priorities, such as "Risky Conversations".

## PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

**CARE 4  
CALAIS**

**FREEDOM 2**



**INADES**  
Initiative for the Advancement of  
Ethical Standard



Graphic design and illustration work developed by Charlie Minnion. [www.charlieminnion.com](http://www.charlieminnion.com)  
For more information about this research, access to the digital resource and where it goes next, please contact Susannah: [s.pickering-saqqa@uel.ac.uk](mailto:s.pickering-saqqa@uel.ac.uk)

# WHY USE THESE CARDS?

**There are lots of good reasons to use these cards, whether you are a volunteer or someone who works with them. Here are just a few!**

## **GOOD REASONS TO USE CARDS:**

- **Get into good habits - reflection is useful in all aspects of life.**
- **Learn from your past and current actions as a volunteer.**
- **Understand yourself & your motivations better.**
- **Make sense of what is going on around you, including the motivations of others.**
- **Build your professional skills for the future, especially working with people.**
- **Be part of improving the work of the nonprofit sector.**
- **Inspire and sustain your volunteers and volunteering.**
- **Look after yourself - volunteering and the work of the nonprofit sector can be tough, so it is important to develop ways of caring for yourself. 🧡**

# HOW TO USE THESE CARDS

## AS A VOLUNTEER

Explore the cards by reading one before each volunteering session. Build reflection into your volunteering routine. Experiment using them in different ways, for example:

- Think about your **MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING** on your own or with others by using the **PINK CARDS**.
- Identify and discuss your **SKILLS & TRAINING NEEDS** by using the **ORANGE CARDS**.
- Consider how your volunteering connects with the **RESOURCES** your organisation has by using the **BLUE CARDS**.
- Build your skills in working across **DIFFERENT CULTURES & WITH A DIVERSE TEAM** by using the **PURPLE CARDS**.
- Understand the complexities of the nonprofit sector by using cards such as "**Risky Conversations**" or "**How To Be Relevant**".
- Ask how others used the cards.
- Learn new skills by using a combination of cards, for example, "**Action Learning**" and "**Asking Useful Questions**".
- Find out more by following up the reference at the bottom of each card.

## AS A LEADER OR VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

- Recommend individuals or groups of volunteers to use cards by theme, depending on their needs. For example: "**Volunteering and Social Justice**", "**SWAIN**".
- Encourage those responsible for volunteers to use cards, such as "**Individual Capacity Strengthening**", "**Looking After Ourselves**", as the basis for supportive conversations.
- Support the inclusion of volunteers in organisational planning and learning. Use the cards with Trustees in away-days, training, meetings. For example: "**Collective Reflection**", "**Sustainability of Small Organisations**".

# VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

**This model asks us to see ourselves as part of a larger picture so we can identify the purpose in our volunteering.**



**While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, ask yourself:**

- **What are the root causes of the problem your host organisation addresses?**
- **Does your volunteering address these?**
- **What wider societal issues are at the root of these problems?**
- **How are these connected to issues of justice?**
- **Who has the power in our society to change these issues?**
- **How does your volunteering empower others?**

# RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**This model asks us to think about who “holds” the rights in our work and what is our relationship to them.**



**While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, ask yourself:**

- **Who do you report to in your daily volunteering?**
- **To which people and organisations are your host organisation accountable?**
- **What rights do you rely on in your daily life? And in your volunteering?**
- **Whose rights are you trying to realise in your volunteering?**
- **What mechanisms is your host organisation using to achieve these rights?**
- **What would success look like for the “rights holders”?**

# ACTION LEARNING

**This model suggests that we learn best when we go through a cycle of action-reflection-action & are able to ask questions before deciding our next steps.**



**During or after volunteering, try this process with friends or colleagues:**

- 1. Form a group and choose a facilitator.**
- 2. One person ("problem holder") chooses a challenge or problem they have experienced and want to address in the workplace. This must be a problem you can directly influence. Tell the group about it in no more than 5 minutes.**
- 3. Everyone in the group asks the "problem holder" useful questions to help them consider the issue from different perspectives.**
- 4. The "problem holder" decides what action to take and tells the group their decision.**
- 5. At the next group meeting, the "problem holder" reports back on the impact of their action and whether it addressed the challenge or not.**

**REPEAT as required!**

# ASKING USEFUL QUESTIONS

**Generating useful questions is an important skill which ensures volunteers are really listening to people. It is also part of the action learning process.**



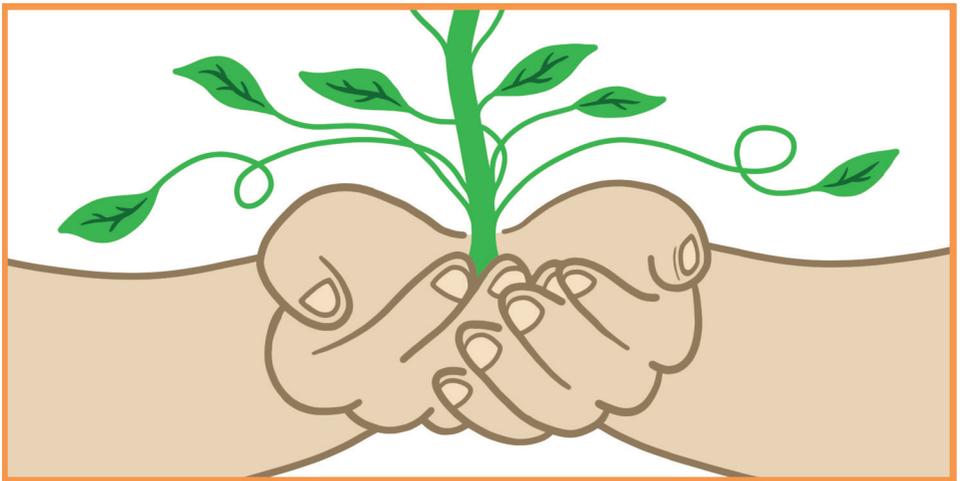
**When someone is speaking to you, try to do the following:**

**Put your phone out of sight. Hold back from making suggestions but ask thinking, feeling and future action questions instead, such as...**

- **What have you done so far to tackle the issue?**
- **How much of your time are you spending on this problem?**
- **Who else is involved in this?**
- **Why is this challenge so important for you?**
- **How did you feel when...?**
- **What help or support do you need?**
- **How will you get that support?**
- **How will you decide what action to take?**

# LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES

**As volunteers you may meet people whose lives are traumatic. This can lead to you and colleagues experiencing burnout. This model offers a way of feeling connected and understood, enabling you to interact with other people and continue volunteering without experiencing emotional exhaustion.**

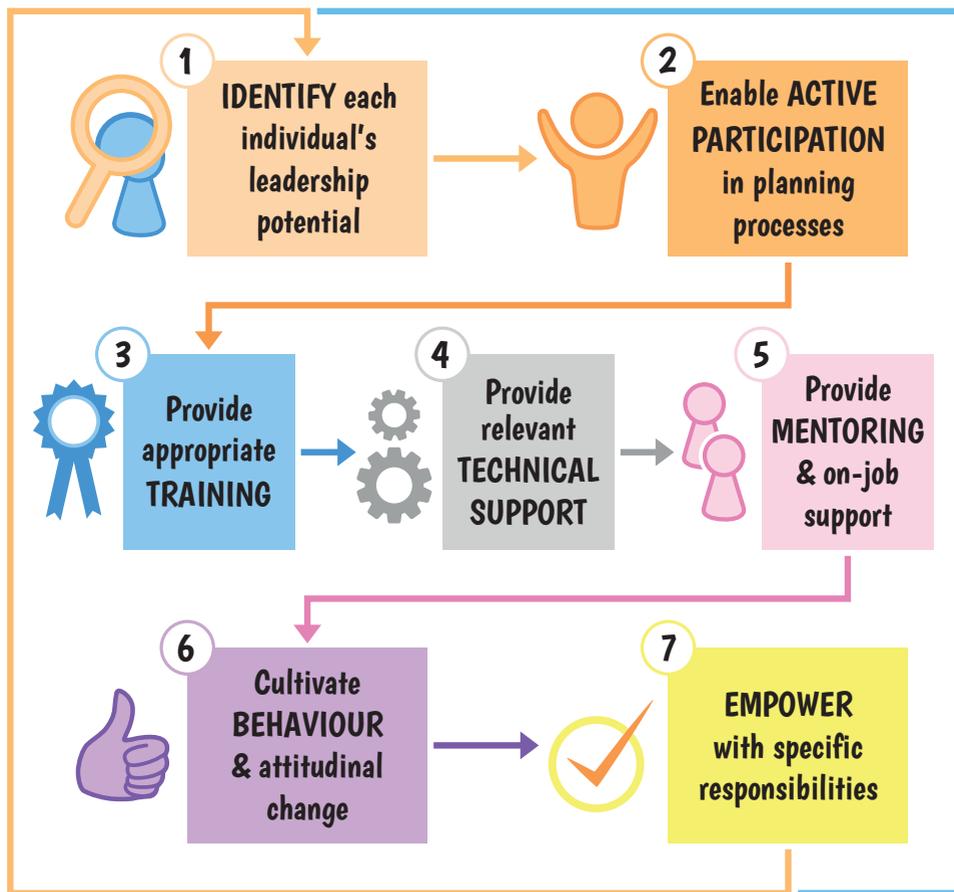


**This is a 5-step process which you can work through with another volunteer or colleague.**

- 1. Acknowledge your uncomfortable emotions after a difficult interaction, begin to regulate and calm yourself.**
- 2. Talk about your feelings and their intensity with another person.**
- 3. Explore and think about the issue together to understand what happened to you and the other person in the difficult interaction.**
- 4. Plan how you can do this differently next time.**
- 5. Reflect on your next interaction... wait for the "aha" moment!**

# INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

This model argues that reflection should become a normal and routine part of the work of NGOs and charities, including volunteers. The skills and capacities of volunteers need to be developed as part of a planned and intentional 7-step process.



# DIALOGIC CHANGE MODEL

This model helps organisations work towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It argues that organisations can contribute to transformative change by being part of complex ecosystems of stakeholders.

Relationships between different stakeholders are built across 4 phases of dialogue.

1

## EXPLORING AND ENGAGING

Organisations understand each other's context, find resonance and create the energy for change.

2

## BUILDING AND FORMALISING

Agree goals, resources and plans to get delivery structures in place.

3

## IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING

Deliver and celebrate tangible results, ensure transparent communication and mutual learning.

4

## SUSTAINING AND EXPANDING IMPACT

Establish long-term management, governance and learning structures for transformative change.

# SIX STAGES OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

This model helps you to learn from experience in your volunteering and plan for improvement in the future. It is particularly useful for thinking about repeated experiences that go well and not so well.

Use this process as the basis of a discussion with another volunteer or colleague. Or you can reflect on your own.

1



2



3

**EVALUATE** the experience:

What went well? How did you and others contribute to the situation?



4

**ANALYSE** the situation:

What meaning did this have for you? Why did it go well or not?



5

**Draw your CONCLUSIONS:**

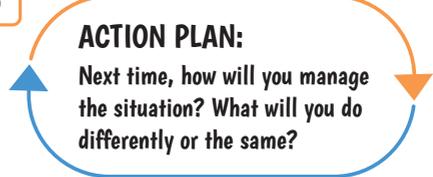
What did you learn? What could you have done differently?



6

**ACTION PLAN:**

Next time, how will you manage the situation? What will you do differently or the same?



# HOW TO BE RELEVANT

This model is based on the experiences of a volunteer aid worker in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo following the end of the genocide in Rwanda, 1994 and volcanic eruption, 2002. He concluded that aid can be harmful if it is not relevant, defined as "doing the right things to have the intended effect" (p.56).

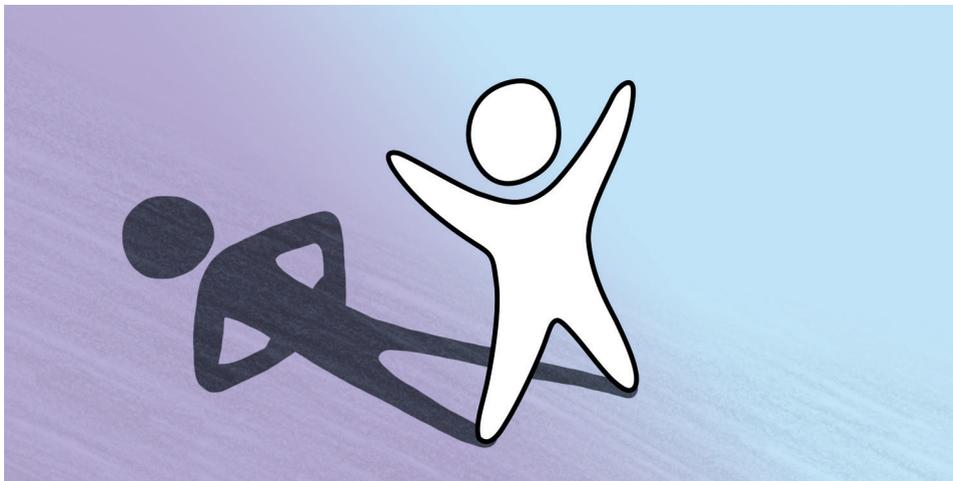


When delivering any service to people as a volunteer, use the following considerations to help your work stay relevant.

- Make sure you ask people what they need. Don't assume you know or are the experts.
- Ask yourself what you would need if this was your community.
- Treat all service-users as your equals.
- Think about the language you use to describe those you work with and make sure it does not suggest they are passive recipients but active participants.
- Have you included your service-users in the planning and decision-making?
- How can you become more accountable to your service-users?
- Is your service just covering basic needs or is it addressing the bigger problem?

# DEEPER AND SHADOW MOTIVATIONS

**This model claims that the most fulfilled and effective practitioners have learned to be reflective. An important part of this is to understand your deeper motivations.**



**While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, ask yourself:**

**1. Why are you now in this role?  
Which of the following make up your deep complex reasons for volunteering?**

- Make a difference to society
- Help people in the way you have been helped
- Understand people better
- Make people feel better about themselves
- Your family and teachers always said you were good with people
- You played a caring role in your family

**2. What other shadow motivations do you have which help you fulfill your own needs?**

- A need for power and control of the world around you?
- Do you look for self-esteem through other people's need for or dependence on you?
- Do you like to be seen as a "good person"?
- What core beliefs do you have that are most resistant to change?

# S.W.A.I.N.

This model helps you identify your strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, interests and needs.



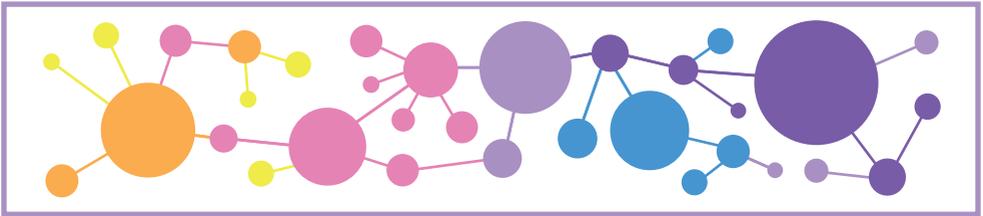
While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, discuss with a friend or colleague these aspects of your motivations to volunteer.

For example:

- Where would I like to be in a year's time? Doing what?
- What do I love doing and gives me energy?
- Who inspires me?
- What do I need to succeed?
- Which new skills and training do I need?
- When do I need them?

# SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE

**We all have a responsibility to share our knowledge and experience with colleagues and the communities we serve. As community-based organisations have limited resources, a clear step-by-step approach to sharing knowledge and experience is suggested.**



**During or after your volunteering, try this process with friends or colleagues:**

## **1 Choose something you do frequently while volunteering**

- **What makes it enjoyable or not?**
- **What does it ultimately achieve for our community?**
- **How do I know I am achieving it?**

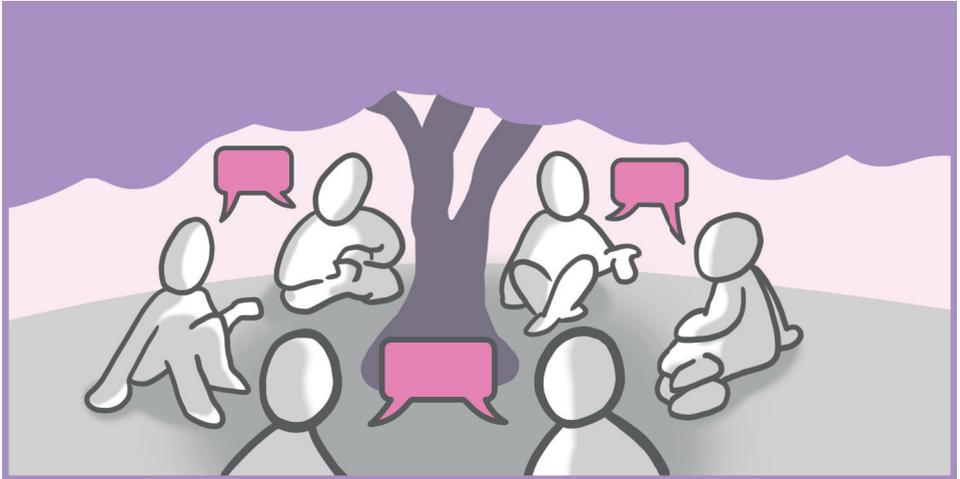
## **2 Who do you tell about your volunteering: what you do, how you do it and what you learn?**

## **3 When next in a team meeting try to:**

- **Describe what you do.**
- **Explain why you do it and how it connects to the work of the team and organisation.**
- **Discuss how this sharing process can be used to connect back to your organisational aims.**

# INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

**This model rejects the idea that research and practice can always be carefully planned and structured.**



**This model recommends four principles for ethical practice which make space for ways of knowing and being that have been marginalised:**

- **Create an ethical space through pausing and reflecting**
- **Honour local and traditional knowledge**
- **Bring spirituality to the centre**
- **Maintain genuine durable connections with communities through times of stress**

**Think about how your volunteering aligns with these principles or not.**

# WORRY OR WONDER?

**This model encourages us to squeeze maximum learning out of moments of worry, wonder or unease that we experience as volunteers.**



**When you become aware of either worry or wonder, try to follow the process below with colleagues:**

- **Stop....pause....allow yourself to process the wonder or worry**
- **What has made you worry or wonder?**
- **Name it.**
- **Identify the multiple ways this could have been done differently**
- **Generate ideas as to how you could act to address or respond to this**
- **Test the ideas out in action**

# SUSTAINABILITY OF SMALL ORGANISATIONS

**This model claims that small organisations can become more resilient and sustainable when individuals and the organisation regularly use reflective practice.**

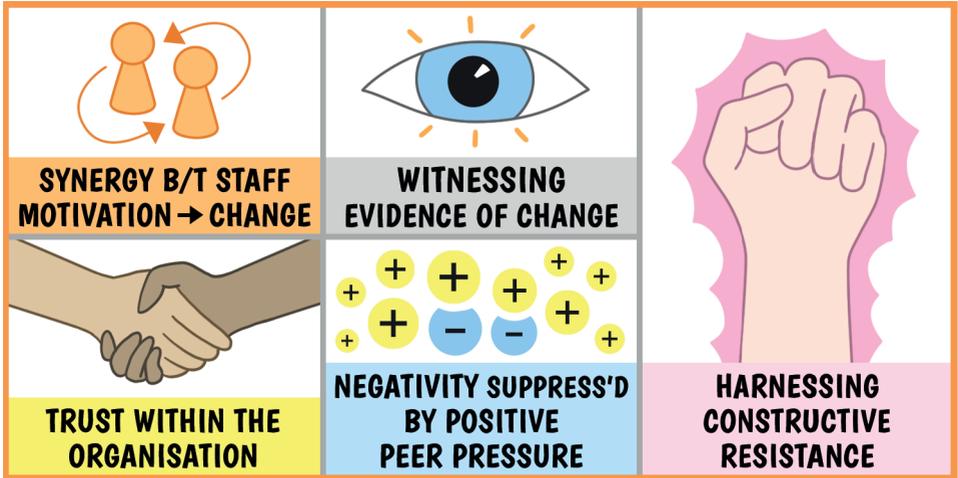


**This can be encouraged by using any of these cards and considering the following:**

- **How open are individuals to learning, questions and being vulnerable?**
- **Does every volunteer have access to a mentor or supervisory relationship in which there is a "safe space" for reflection?**
- **Do supervisors and mentors have adequate listening and feedback skills and support?**
- **How can this safe space for reflective practice be protected from organisational counter-pressures to increase performance and meet targets?**

# MOTIVATING CHANGE

This model is based on the idea that large-scale change can be achieved and sustained in organisations if there are the right psychological, social and structural conditions.

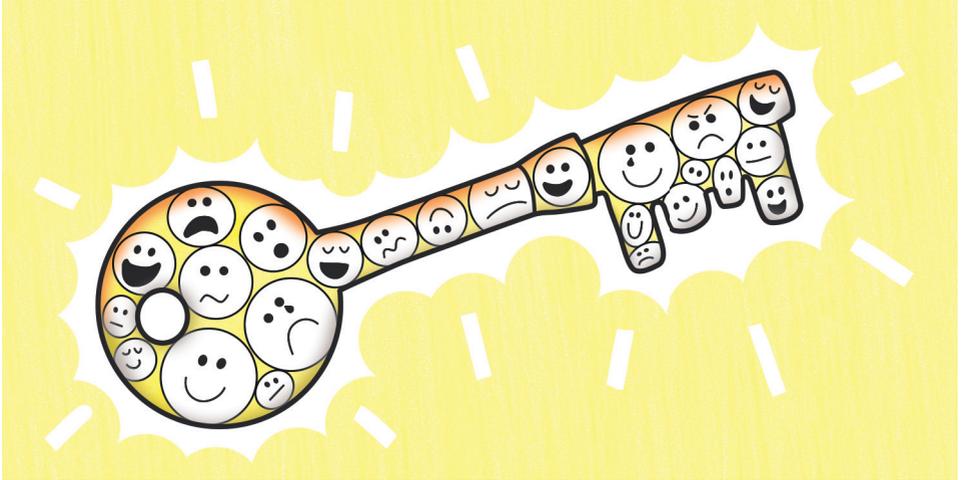


While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, ask yourself and /or discuss with colleagues:

- What motivates you to participate in change as you volunteer?
- Are there factors outside work that influence your motivations?
- Have you seen change happening at work?
- Do you think it was successful? Why or why not?
- Are you aware of any resistance to change in your organisation?

# EMOTIONS AND RESILIENCE

**This model sees emotions as a resource to be embraced in your volunteering rather than something to be managed and controlled.**



**While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, ask yourself:**

- **How does this experience build or conflict with your sense of identity?**
- **How does compassion and empathy drive you? Does this have any negative consequences?**
- **Are there moments when you feel vulnerable or privileged?**
- **With whom can you share joys and disappointments?**
- **Can you make time in your day to reflect on the things you are finding challenging or frustrating?**

# THE COP IN THE HEAD

**This model helps us to identify who the "cop" in our head is and what holds us back from acting and speaking.**

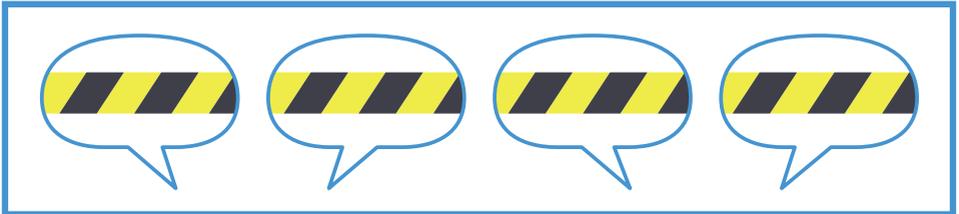


**While you are volunteering and looking back on your day, ask yourself:**

- **What holds you back from saying and doing what we feel is right?**
- **What is exerting control over your thoughts and imagination?**
- **Who is this "cop" and how did she/he/they get into your head?**
- **What effect is this having on your behaviour at work?**
- **Who can you discuss this with?**
- **Once freed of your "cop", what action would you take at work?**

# RISKY CONVERSATIONS

As a volunteer you will be aware of policies, procedures and guidance that set boundaries to and define your "professional" behaviour when interacting with service-users. These may cover developing friendships, sharing your phone number, involvement in social activities, accepting gifts. These rules are there to protect vulnerable people from exploitation and you from accusations of unprofessional behaviour.



These boundaries are easy to create in theory but more difficult to navigate in practice. Work with people and communities is the "human world of swampy, messy work" (p.190) rather than dominated by technical skills and fixes. This means that volunteers and practitioners need to be prepared to have "risky conversations" with each other about boundary crossing.

These conversations can be provoked by asking the following questions:

- How does our current practice work with contradictions and complexity?
- How do we experience the tensions between boundaries and empathetic solidarity with service-users?
- Do we have safe spaces to discuss moments of "boundary crossing" without fear of disciplinary procedures and censure?
- How can the organisation commit to ways of working that acknowledge the inherent boundary dilemmas of community work?

# DISCOVERY LEARNING

**Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Angola are good at community mobilisation and understanding community dynamics. However, there are weaknesses in their ability to design and implement community-led programmes and diversify their sources of funding. Short workshops and subcontracting have failed to build these organisation skills.**



**Discovery learning is a process through which people work with an experienced practitioner and gradually assume more autonomy. The model can build capacity among staff and volunteers, enabling local organisations to contribute meaningfully to a country's development.**

**THEORY:** Basic concepts are taught and learned in a workshop setting.

**MODELLING:** The skill is observed in practice and demonstrated by an experienced practitioner. This could be on a field trip.

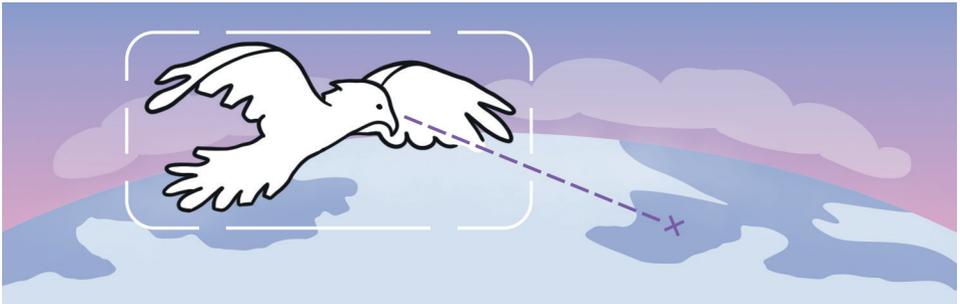
**PRACTICE:** The learner now tries and experiments with the practice themselves.

**FEEDBACK:** Practitioner provides comments on areas of strength and improvement.

**COACHING:** At this stage, the learner takes responsibility for driving their continued journey of discovery, working with an experienced practitioner coach. This is a horizontal relationship of joint analysis and learning, rather than a hierarchical relationship of grading or criticism.

# OODA LOOP

**This model has its roots in military strategy which, some would argue, should have no place in the nonprofit world of volunteering. Its starting point is that we live in a world of increasing uncertainty and change, and we need to be equipped to respond to it... Decide for yourself whether it is useful or ethical!**



**This is a decision-making loop which repeats itself in response to new circumstances and feedback on your actions.**

**OBSERVE:** Understand the external environment in which you volunteer and what is changing. This includes learning about other organisations working in this area. For example, other charities working on education or with refugees.

**ORIENT:** How do you interpret the situation that you see around you? Be aware that this can be influenced by your own previous experiences and culture.

**DECIDE:** This is always a fluid process rather than a fixed point in time. You will need to continually assess new information.

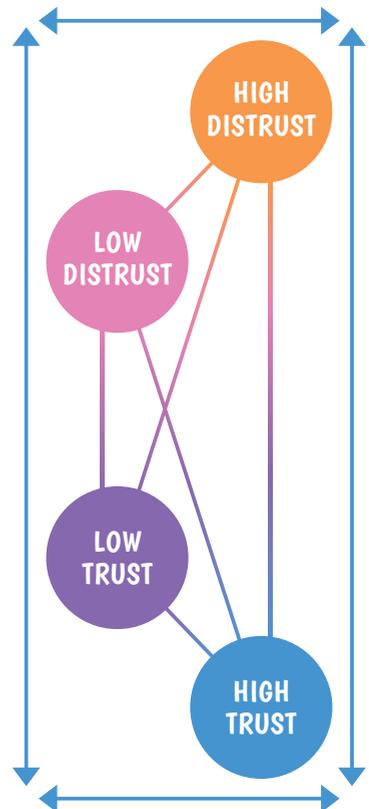
**ACT:** This is the implementation of your decision. Feedback and your observations on its results will take you into a new loop.

# COMMUNICATION FOR TRUST

This model builds trust through communication. It emerged from civil society peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and assumes that communication choices shape social realities. Use it at the start of a partnership or working relationship with a new organisation, colleague, donor or supporter.

These seven stages can guide your communications to move from high levels of mistrust to high levels of confidence and trust.

1. **PREPARE** to engage by agreeing expectations and boundaries.
2. Create **COMMON GROUND** by bringing people together in informal non-threatening spaces and initiatives for low-risk easy wins.
3. Give people the dignity and respect of **LISTENING** to them - use your active listening skills.
4. **ENCOURAGE OPENNESS** by offering the opportunity to discuss an issue from any perspective with no value judgements made.
5. **CO-ORIENTATION** is a commitment to understanding the "baggage" that others carry and seeing things from their perspective.
6. **CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS** you hold about others that may underpin stereotypes.
7. Be ready to **PERSUADE** people to stick with and support the process when they express doubts or external events threaten to undermine trust-building.



# SOCIAL GGGRRRAAACCCCEESSS

This model names aspects of our personal and social identity that give us different levels of power and privilege. It can also help us understand our backgrounds and those of others.

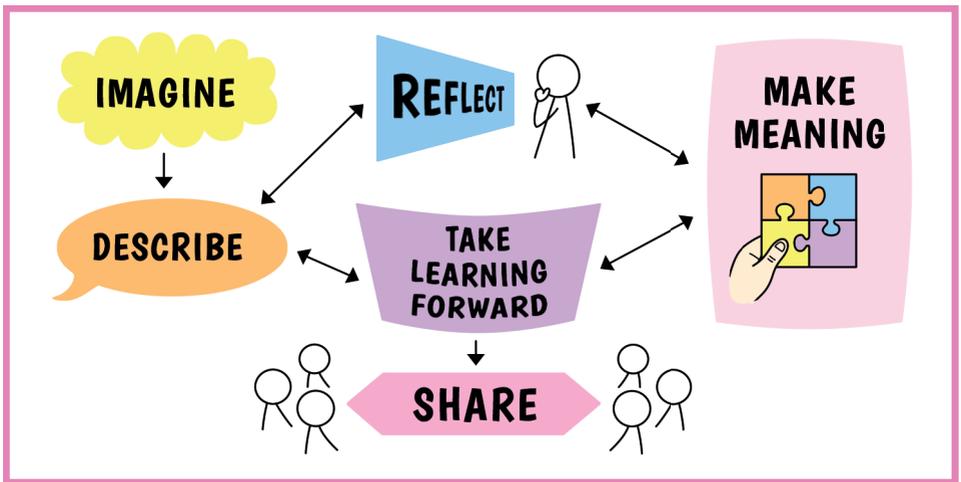
<b>G</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	<b>RACE</b>	<b>AGE</b>
<b>GENDER</b>	<b>RELIGION</b>	<b>ABILITY</b>
<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>		<b>APPEARANCE</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>CLASS</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>SPIRITUALITY</b>
<b>CULTURE</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>SEXUALITY</b>
<b>CASTE</b>	<b>ECONOMICS</b>	<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>

When you are volunteering with a range of different people, ask yourself:

- How the aspects (listed above) of their (and your) identity affect their lives, decisions, behaviour?
- Which of these grab you?
- In which do you hold privilege (or not) and how does this impact you in your volunteering?

# CROSS-CULTURAL WORK

This model helps us to learn from significant events or experiences when we work across cultures. It takes us through a six-stage process which begins with recalling or imagining the event or experience.

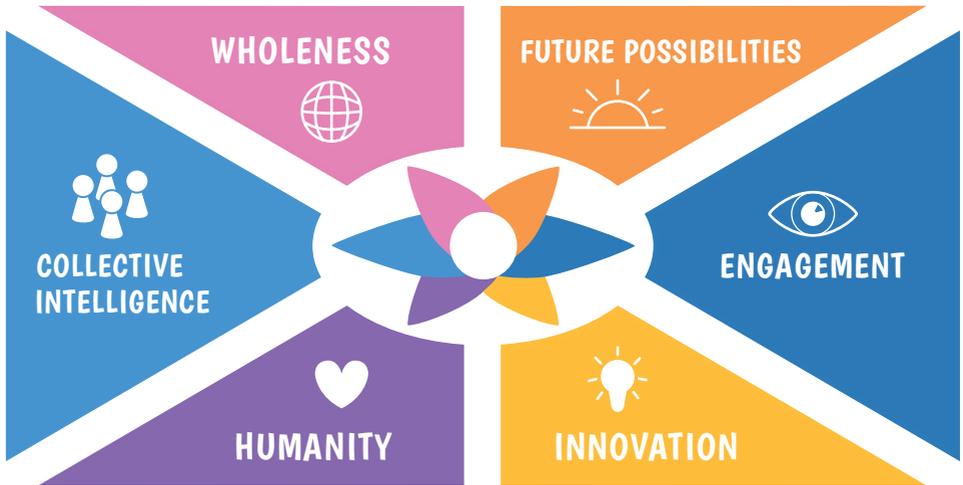


When you have imagined and described the experience, ask yourself and colleagues the following:

- What sticks in your mind ?
- What were your feelings and those of others?
- What values emerged?
- What were the cross-cultural skills that you used or gained?
- How can you share these insights in the workplace?
- What meaning does this experience or event hold for you now?

# COLLECTIVE REFLECTION

**This model maintains that organisations can only bring about change in response to complex sustainability challenges by developing a culture of collective reflection and learning.**

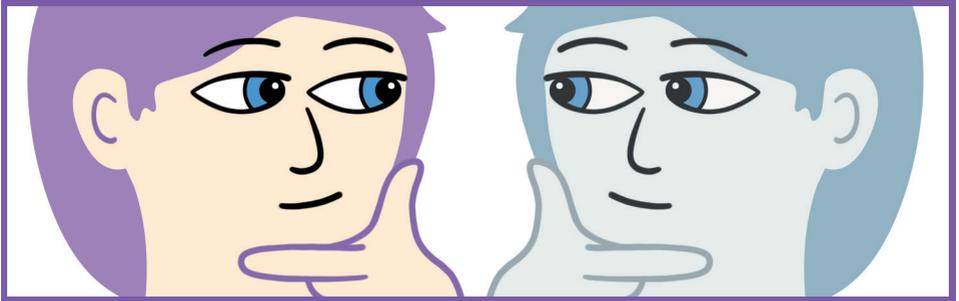


**The process needs to be driven by creative, regular dialogue. Volunteers and leaders can ask the following questions across six domains of work:**

- **What are our potentials and shortcomings as individuals, teams and our organisation in these six areas?**
- **How can we build our skills in these six areas?**
- **How can we keep human dignity at the forefront of our work?**
- **How can we bridge power differences in our work?**
- **How can we embrace the perspectives of others and open gateways to reconciliation in our work?**

# TEACHERS' REFLECTION

This model was developed to support teachers of English but has relevance for volunteers who want to keep updating their knowledge and learning. It focuses on who we are and what we do rather than "tick boxing" technical knowledge.

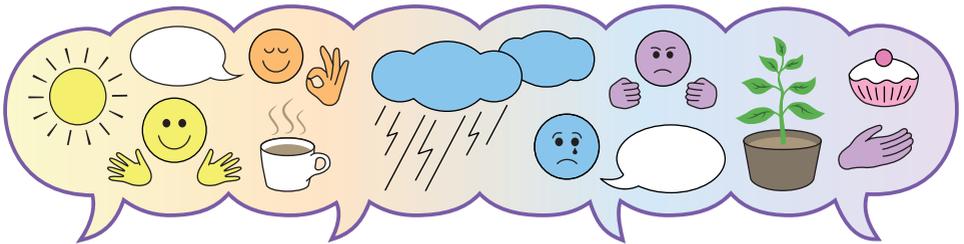


Use this process with other volunteers to think about the different life experiences you each bring to your volunteering.

- **Your philosophy:** what are some of the important experiences and influences in your life?
- **Your principals:** what assumptions and beliefs do you have? For example, a teacher may assume that students will attend and participate in classes if the teacher is approachable and, therefore, prioritise interaction with students.
- **Your theory:** what theories underpin why and how you volunteer? For example, how can volunteering bring about positive changes in the lives of others and ourselves?
- **Your practice:** what do you do as a volunteer? Do you always stick to your initial plans? Do you follow guidance closely or interpret given the situation?
- **Beyond your practice:** what is the social, political and economic context that impacts your volunteering? For example, is there an expectation by future employers or University that you will volunteer?

# THINKING SPACE

This model was designed by the Tavistock Clinic to examine areas of difference, such as culture and race, which generate high levels of emotion and anxiety. This can block true learning. The "thinking space" requires three elements: a set of values, a clear method, and a chair who facilitates. It is an emotional and thought-provoking event.



## VALUES

- Respect
- Openness
- No correct answers
- Mistakes are OK

## METHOD

- Create an informal relaxed atmosphere
- Encourage free thinking, challenge and debate
- Acknowledge pain and frustration as part of the process
- Give enough time to consider the significance of "emotional storms"

## THE CHAIR

- Starts the process by making a presentation
- Ensures the "Thinking Space" follows the values and method
- Invites responses, reflections and free-thinking
- Offers the opportunity to discuss the presentation in small groups/pairs

**Volunteer  
Reflect  
Grow**



**CARDS TO INSPIRE & SUSTAIN VOLUNTEERING**