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Restorative Care Practice as Leadership Development

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A Research Paper for Clore Leadership
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1. Introduction

“This is why white people are sane.”

Maxine was standing calf deep in the warm Mediterranean sea at sunset, or, according to the Tunisians, the Time of Beautiful People. I was 18 and Maxine, a little older, and this was the first package holiday I had ever taken in my life. Maxine, also a first generation Caribbean, had grown up on the same council estate where mainly white people lived and so I immediately understood what she was referring to. We had both grown up witnessing the exodus during the first two weeks of July when entire families would decamp on family holidays to rest and splash about in resort pools before returning pink and sunburnt. This was the first time that Maxine and I had experienced a holiday like this. Our mothers were too busy working, often a number of jobs, and raising children to have time or resources for such trips. If there were any to be made, they were often “back home” to countries of origin to reunite with family and take barrels full of clothes, toys and food to distribute among the needy. We didn’t take such holidays but the feedback from those who did sounded like they were perhaps less relaxing. The same situation seemed to be similarly true of my South Asian friends. The concept of rest, relaxation and play time as a way of treating oneself kindly didn’t seem to exist for our families.

I’ve chosen to open with that short memory to situate why this study of Restorative Care Practice (RCP) as leadership development for cultural leaders will focus on Global Majority cultural leaders in the UK. This report will also show how important reparative, reflective and rehabilitative RCPs are for *all* leaders especially at difficult cultural and economic times such as these. However, because the relationship to rest and restorative practice can be particularly charged for Global Majority leaders, this report will detail why RCP is *essential* for this particular group of leaders of which I am a part.

Why I am here

After thirty years working in the cultural sector I am re-centring my practice as a multidisciplinary artist who creates projects out of a desire for a more compassionately connected world. If anyone had told myself as a child that I would or even could be doing this for a living I would have blinked at them in bemusement.

No-one prepared me for the life I now have - thirty years working in a sector that was not even apparent to communities like mine growing up - in class or ethnicity terms. My journey began very much by accident on my lunch break from a telesales job in Leicester. An African man, who I later learnt was legendary UK African dance producer Kwaku Ampomah, hailed me and asked why I wasn't in college. It was 1988. I loved cinema but hadn't gotten the necessary grades to get into one of the only four media courses in the country at the time. He told me about a course he was taking at Leicester Polytechnic called Arts Administration. If I liked the arts I should enrol. I did like the arts - well from the am-dram courses I took, the fiction books I was addicted to and the movies that I voraciously watched. So I went home, looked up the number for Leicester Polytechnic in the Yellow Pages, and a few weeks later, thanks to Clearing and free higher education, I was embarking on a course to an unknown destination.

I mention this origin story because it might mirror many others who grew up outside the Cultural world in the UK and who, like me, did not attend theatre, art galleries, book launches or were part of a 'nepo' dynasty. I mention this because it has taken perhaps thirty years of working in the arts to learn *how* to work in this particular sector with its echoes of a cottage industry - specialised, low paid, low staff turnover and with a family business feel. The arts are known for attracting an in-crowd, pulling from white middle-class communities who grew up in the culture of Culture. There are those who perhaps were ready for the long hours, low pay, commitment-driven style that pervades, who understood that a network might be more important to cultivate than skill.

This was a work culture that I had to learn by doing rather than by being taught or instructed, which in and of itself has been stressful. Over my career I have suffered frustrations, burnouts, exclusion and traumatising experiences. I have worked for large cultural organisations where my "Only One" status (the only working-class, Black

woman) has led to a sense of cultural isolation leading me to empathise greatly with Jemma Desai's own research *This Work is not For Us* (Desai, 2020). I have fallen off the Glass Cliff many times where, despite my skill, the difficulty in maintaining a healthy physical, mental and soulful life forced me painfully out before my potential was fulfilled. This is to say there's a reason why the quest to develop a restorative care practice as a strategy for sustaining leadership is a live one for me. I was forced to develop one as a way to repair and to learn how to consciously craft a healthy life working in a sector that can be, at times, brutalising but one I still adore. During this restorative process, I was also forced to confront some of my own limiting beliefs that, hard as it is to admit, contributed to my position. This research will unpick some of them.

I created the Re-UP! programme in 2022 for Global Majority cultural sector workers with Clore Leadership, Wellcome Collection, Arts Council and the BFI in order to create a collaborative test space for the idea of RCP as a leadership strategy. While this report is not an evaluation of that programme, it will examine some of the processes and impacts.

Since the pandemic and George Floyd's murder in 2020, the cultural world has seen some dramatic shifts. Conversations about addressing cultural inequality have moved rapidly into action and there are now many more Global Majority professionals in positions of power and more culturally diverse works being produced. This has produced some exciting shifts and, as result, the hope is that some of the issues detailed in this report will be felt less by professionals. However other pressures have arisen that I will go on to explore here.

This study into RCP will be relevant to all cultural professionals navigating the impact of sector burnout and a reduced resilience, and will make a case for why RCP should lie at the heart of leadership development. However this report is written with Global Majority leaders in mind. I hope to contextualise some of your experiences whilst offering RCP as a potential support structure.

At times this report was difficult to write as I investigated some of the roots of sector challenges and my inherited racial trauma. The reason why this detail is important is that I am to make a case for RCP as a trauma-informed approach and for the need for healing. I hope that as you move through you can pay close attention to your own

needs - when you might need to take a break, breathe, drink a glass of water. I assure you though, the ending is happy.

Methodology

In this report I draw together a range of source materials to build a picture of where we are now and what lies beneath. I have used mainly UK references in order to address our national specificity and have found psychotherapist Eugene Ellis's book *Race Conversations : An essential guide to creating life-changing dialogue* particularly useful.

The report starts by detailing the current precarious cultural sector landscape and the current issues affecting Global Majority leaders especially the culturally isolated 'Only Ones'. Then I go on to outline why RCP's might offer a balm using the Re-UP! Programme as a framework.

I also include the findings of a research project where five Global Majority leaders along with myself regularly tested RCP exercises for three months. In the final Case Studies chapter you can explore the impacts on our lives.

Finally I use this as an opportunity to reflect on and better understand my decades of practice and lived experience as a Global Majority cultural leader, a coach and a facilitator to many others. I am on this journey with you.

2. The Case for Restorative Care Practice

a. What is Restorative Care Practice and why is it important for Cultural Leaders Now?

The idea for Restorative Care Practices is inspired by social health models.

“Restorative practice” is a “term used to describe behaviours, interactions and approaches which help to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict”. (Leeds.Gov.UK)

“Restorative care” is part of an ongoing nursing model, and often follows rehabilitation. Restorative care is used to the processes to preserve a person's optimum level of functioning and independence.

Restorative Care Practice (RCP) is my proposition for a series of tools and approaches that help cultural leaders consciously centre reparative, reflective and rehabilitative practices before, during and after intense times of stress in order to reduce the effects and create space for new meanings to emerge.

Such practices include the regular use of personal reflective tools, creative play, meditation and rest, physical activities and the active creation of supportive kinship networks. RCP is designed to provide the leader with a greater sense of perspective and compassion, supporting the development of a growth mindset, helping to better manage the nervous system and creating a sense of safety and connection. Some of these practices won't be unfamiliar for many leaders. Many find relief in playing a sport, having a good friendship network and reflecting on their work day over a glass of wine at the end.

However RCP is rarely shaped as a conscious and critical part of leadership practice and rarely takes place as a *key and central* part of leadership learning. At best these ideas are treated as an optional well-being module. As piloted in the Re-UP! Programme, specific tools can and should be designed to encourage a deeper RCP process.

This report is designed to make a case for RCP as *the* foundation to any leadership practice. Supporting leaders and teams to develop a regular RCP will help them to remain resourced, aware and better able to manage the inevitable vagaries of the job. RCP is not intended as a way to wring out more productivity from an already beleaguered and exhausted group. RCP should help to meet more foundationally needs. The better we know ourselves and our feelings, the better we can articulate our needs and the more aware and ready we are to meet others. This will allow us to form the basis of a caring, supportive, relational world, the very material upon which the cultural sector is and should be based. Adopting RCP is particularly important for the sector now due to the following reasons:

The Sector is growing in self-awareness

The sector itself is beginning to understand the importance of self reflection and self awareness as a cornerstone of leadership. In the Arts Council 2018 report *Changing Cultures: Transforming Leadership in the Arts, Museums and Libraries*, it was noted:

“The shift from the traditional ‘heroic’ concept of the leader towards a more collaborative approach is emerging across the private, public and charitable sectors. Business leaders recognise that more inclusive organisations will have competitive advantage and be more productive; and in the context of shrinking public funding, social and cultural leaders understand the need to connect within and beyond organisations to deliver and sustain their charitable purpose. The same is true of how leaders are being developed” (Hoyle et al 2018)

The report goes on to document how, over sixty years, leadership styles have shifted from Trait and Charismatic leader styles to “Post charismatic and post-transformational leadership theory; spiritual leadership; authentic leadership; leadership with compassion”

Crucially, cultural professionals identified four core areas for future-facing leadership skills, attributes and behaviours:

- Know yourself
- Build relationships
- Embrace change and innovate
- Be responsible.

Note, “Know Yourself” was identified as the most important.

“Self-awareness was cited across the interviews and focus groups as critical to contemporary leadership: knowing one’s own strengths and weaknesses, surrounding oneself with people whose skills and attributes complement those gaps, rather than replicate them, and giving authority to those people..... Self-awareness was also bound up with ensuring the relevance of cultural organisations. As a leader, being aware of the limits of one’s own worldview, and being receptive to people or ideas that come from a different perspective, are considered essential qualities for producing work that is genuinely inclusive....As a leader, the ability to *‘know yourself’* also rests on confidence. Participants in the established leaders focus group highlighted a variety of definitions of confidence, moving away from confidence as a *‘façade over vulnerability’*, which the group felt belonged more to an outdated, authoritarian style of leadership. (Hoyle et al 2018)

As this report will show, RCP is, at its core, designed to build self-awareness through robust and reflective spaces that allow for a wiser, creative and compassionate engagement with self, others and the world. This is why it is important to make a clear distinction between RCP and the more ubiquitous “self-care”. The development of an RCP will also affect how we build and nurture teams and communities. The Arts Council’s *Changing Cultures* report also makes mention of Mark Robinson’s 2010 paper *Making Adaptive Resilience*:

“Mark Robinson suggested that resilience was not only characterised by financial resources derived from a robust business model, but also other assets – intellectual, physical and human, including strong networks. He highlighted the adaptive skills needed for resilience; for example, *‘innovation and experimentation embedded in reflective practice’* and planning and preparation for disruption. (Hoyle et al 2018)

This call for greater personal accountability in our leaders is growing due to the historic and now well reported effects of bullying in the relatively informal Cultural and Creative sectors.

A number of bullying monitoring and reporting organisations have been set up in the past few years including the Creative Industry Standards Authority and the Independent Standards Authority (ISA), an organisation led by Creative UK and Time's Up UK.

The effects of existing in such violent environments can have long lasting and profound psychological effects. Arts Professional magazine recently covered a study on abusive leadership in the arts by Dr Melissa Nisbett, King's College London, Professor Ben Walmsley and Dr Emma McDowell, University of Leeds. The study:

“uncovered a spectrum of mistreatment: from racial, gender and age discrimination to sexual harassment, class prejudice and sidelining; and from fraud and financial mismanagement to bullying, victimisation and coercion.”
(Melissa Nisbett et al 2023)

The participants from managerial and leadership roles, across different artforms and organisations in the UK “revealed that arts professionals who have been the victims of abuse have suffered from depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, loss of confidence, and a fear of colleagues and the workplace.” (Melissa Nisbett et al 2023)

The historical and pervading issues of bullying in the sector makes it clear that a deeper more transformative approach to leadership preparation is needed. RCP could help by providing self-reflective tools that help to interrupt impulsive behaviours. Simultaneously there is a need for rehabilitative processes to help those who are surviving within such conditions. RCP could help here too.

The Great Exhaustion

This report is being compiled seven years after the Brexit referendum, three years after a global pandemic shut down the world and in the midst of a debilitating Cost-of-Living

crisis coupled with widespread industrial action. Just this week, fruit and vegetables disappeared from supermarket shelves and food is being rationed once more. There has been little time for the country and its people to recover.

In 2018, during the tumultuous fall-out post-Brexit the Arts Council *Changing Cultures* report noted:

“There is an increasingly high risk of burnout in the sector, at all levels of leadership. Cultural leaders have found creative responses to the external challenges of the last few years. However, the demands on the cultural workforce – and on its leadership in particular – mean that the sector may be vulnerable to burnout. If this is true, the consequences will be considerable.” (Hoyle et al 2018)

Four years on, the Centre for Cultural Value’s *Culture In Crisis* report, one of the largest studies into the impacts of Covid-19 on the UK’s creative and cultural sectors, followed up with:

“By Phase 3 (Summer–November 2021) the dual pressures of a sector beginning to open up and the social, economic and emotional effects on labour from the lockdowns had taken their toll on the cultural workforce and signs of an impending burnout increased. While some senior leaders had put in place packages to support their staff teams, worries about the mental health impact of continuing to overwork in a climate of volatility and risk remained live.” (Ben Walmsley et al)

Covid-19 had a devastating effect on the cultural sector and the rising Cost-of-Living crisis is increasing a sense of airlessness in the sector. This period of intense traumatic change has been dubbed The Great Exhaustion by researchers at the University of New South Wales where large numbers of the workforce, especially women, are experiencing an overwhelming feeling of emotional exhaustion.

In neuroscientific terms, Burnout is a result of Allostasis as Robert M Kliegman MD describes:

“*Allostasis* refers to the normal physiologic changes that occur when individuals experience a stressful event. These internal reactions to an external stressor

includes activation of the stress-response systems, such as increases in cortisol and epinephrine, changes in levels of inflammatory and immune mediators, cardiovascular reactivity, and metabolic and hormone activation. These are normal and adaptive responses to stress and result in physiologic stability in the face of an external challenge. After an acute external stress or challenge, these systems revert to normal baseline states. However, when the stressor becomes chronic and unbuffered by social supports, dysregulation of these systems may occur, resulting in pathophysiologic alterations to these responses, such as hyperactivation of the allostatic systems, or *burnout*.” (Kliegman, 2020)

Essentially the nervous system isn’t designed to take such prolonged stress without sufficient time to rebalance.

In the Stylist magazine article The Great Exhaustion, career change coach Alice Stapleton says:

“There’s something very tiring about trying to carry on as normal while the world turns upside down around you...Nothing feels certain at the moment, yet we’re expected to show up each day at work like none of that is happening. It’s exhausting.” (Porter 2021)

The challenges of leading a precarious sector

Such intense social and political conditions, as outlined in the last section, are increasing the pressure on leaders of an already precarious sector.

A recent CNBC.com article outlining the day-in-the life of Annie Schroeder, a 28 year old Assistant Theatre Company Manager, is a striking case in point. Schroeder describes her background as “always a theatre kid” and the article makes it clear that while this is her dream job, she is also experiencing precarity, hard work and poor pay:

“Something that I remember a college professor told me on our first week of classes was, ‘you have to be a little bit crazy if you want to do this for the rest of your life,’” she says. There are both daily fires to put out and uncertainty in the long run.” (Malinsky, 2023)

There are regular twelve hour days and six day week's, juggling a range of tasks and identities:

“At one point I was balancing a payroll sheet, budgeting, and at the same time I'm unpacking, like, 200 boxes from Amazon ”

Annie knows she cannot expect job security or a decent pay:

“I'm barely breaking even....You jump from show to show all the time,” she says. “You never know if a show is going to close. You never know if you get a job and then it's going to end up not getting to the stage.”

Despite all of that she ends with:

“It was tough at first,” she says of the job. “But I think, for right now, I love it.”

I include this article as a fair descriptor of many people's working lives in the Arts. Annie's story also offers an example of the kind of roles predominantly occupied by women. Women's role in the workplace is often expected to be an extension of an expected role at home - as care providers. Of Annie, cast member Michael Ivan Carrier says:

“She's a sister girl...and she's “the mother that needs to stay out of my room.””

It is no wonder that the University of New South Wales report referenced in the article about The Great Exhaustion (Porter 2021) found that women are suffering most of the effects of the Great Exhaustion. Finally Annie goes on to explain why many of us put up with these conditions. It is not sound employment structures and financial stability that drives the cultural sector. It is love and passion. I see a lot of myself in Annie. Passion has been the fuel to my own precarious career made even more so by my ethnicity which I'll go onto explore in the next chapter.

All to say that, given the culture sector's fragile foundation, RCP's alone won't be enough to make the industry more stable. The repositioning of culture as a vital component of our society and the stability of our social and political environments is actually what's needed to bring about lasting change.

However this is the situation we currently find ourselves in and so RCP is vital in offering leaders a critical space of respite and reflection and a more balanced place from which to imagine new strategies while taking care of our health.

The *Culture In Crisis* report stresses the critical point we have reached:

“The UK’s cultural sector is undoubtedly at an inflection point and facing imminent burnout alongside significant skills and workforce gaps. It therefore urgently needs to adopt regenerative modes of working. “ (Ben Walmsley et al 2022)

Again, this is where RCP could help.

Breathe

b. Why is RCP *essential* for Global Majority Cultural Leaders now?

We are beginning to see how RCP could support the future development of a beleaguered sector. However the healing and rehabilitative properties of the practice may well be essential for Global Majority leaders who, almost overnight, have gone from decades of being overlooked to suddenly being thrust on the frontlines of a frenzied moment of culture change,

This section includes some difficult truths so I suggest taking your time reading this section and taking breaks for breath and hydration.

George Floyd and the era of Hyper visibility

My own journey through an often complex sector has been further complicated by a sense of cultural outsiderism. This was particularly felt after I left a large organisation after two years of an intense and unsupported period of leadership, where my own inclusive cultural vision was at odds with the then Creative Director's, so much so as to make my position untenable. A few months before, I had found myself in floods of tears during a coaching session. At the end of the session, my coach asked me a simple question:

“Gaylene are you ok?”

My tears stopped suddenly as my brain tried to process the question. Was I -? I had approached my job like the duty I felt it was. I was on the inside of a large prestigious cultural organisation - the only Black women, from what I could tell, at that level across the whole of Europe. I had a mission to complete. I had to change the organisation from the inside, open up for the countless communities banging on the doors from the outside. This was a big job - with a pay packet. I was a single income household with a mortgage and no inheritance on the horizon. Was I *ok*? In the growing pause, I realised I didn't know. I had never asked myself that question.

A few months later in September 2019 I left that job without another to go to. I received very few calls from sector leaders inviting me to a coffee, or to see if I might be available for work despite my appointment receiving a lot of attention a few years previously. I didn't feel, at the time, like I had much of a network to call on.

Hilary Carty Director of Clore Leadership, a Black woman and one of the few who had reached out, offered me a job to design a support programme for Global Majority cultural leaders as part of the Arts Council Transforming Leaders programme. I quietly began fashioning Brilliant Routes, a programme based on what I had wished had existed in my last job - a dedicated network for The Only Ones, those isolated Black Asian and ethnically diverse leaders languishing in cultural institutions. This would be a place where you might be asked if you were ok and your response be understood.

I also settled into a period of healing, of peace, quiet and grief drawing heavily on the self-compassion meditation practices of specialist Dr Kristen Neff whose work taught me how to take a kinder, more caring approach to myself during a tender time. I was learning how to ask myself if I was ok and then to listen.

Eight months later, the quiet was shattered. I was living alone with the existential terror of the pandemic blooming, when video footage of the execution of George Floyd, a Black man, at the hands of a white police officer in America went viral. Suddenly my inbox went viral too. Invitations began to pour in from white cultural leaders professing to be great admirers of my work, inviting me to meet, talk and to see how we could work together. At no point in the previous nine months did those leaders offer any clue that they were even aware of my existence,

I was not alone in this experience. Many incredulous Global Majority leaders suddenly found themselves feted, consulted and called up. That old adage that ran throughout my entire career "we would hire more diverse staff but we can't find any" proved to be a lie. Suddenly we were found. I was swamped by feelings of outrage as well as grief, loss and fear.

Even writing now I feel the shadow of the fury that I felt back then. I am feeling a tightness in my belly, a shortness of breath and my temperature is rising.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Back in 2020, such physiological effects were intense. I received many calls from other Global Majority cultural leaders in similar states of distress who were suddenly thrust on the frontlines of guiding their unaware organisations through a rapid accountability process. Many of these professionals had not particularly been engaged or nurtured by the organisation before this moment. I saw my anger reflected on the faces of the thousands of Black Lives Matter activists around the world while ancient wounds marking every incidence of ignorance and racism that I had endured began to reopen.

Inhale

Exhale

We decided to launch Brilliant Routes immediately. This was not a time for strategy or planning. What we needed was a space to hold and process our feelings and to find kinship. Inspired by my own growing self-compassion healing work, I co-designed a self-compassion workshop with coach Jackee Holder, for groups of 20 that offered participants tools to hold compassionate space for themselves.

During two and a half hours, we were quiet together, wept, reflected and practised activating our own compassionate voice through listening and writing exercises. To many this type of leadership space was new. Many, like I, hadn't realised that asking themselves if they were ok and listening deeply for the response was a kind of strategy. Like me, many had approached their jobs like a warrior but didn't know how to attend to their own battle scars.

Learning outcomes of a session like this are very different from other leadership development programmes. We were here to practise a different kind of leadership skill, one that would help us to rebalance during an intense period and then to find a glimmer of clarity.

Breathe

Since 2020 there have been a slew of high-profile appointments of Global Majority leaders, across the cultural sector most of them Black African or Caribbean. The

honing in on the issue of anti-Black racism made it that Black people (as opposed to South or East Asian, Middle-Eastern or other ethnically diverse groups) were the chosen ones. This reduced the possibility of true cultural expansion while increasing the potential of greater cultural divisions.

Recruitment agents began to call me for advice on applicants and a number of agencies focusing on diverse hiring sprung up. However, two years on we are already seeing what happens when skilled people of colour are promoted into organisations that are not yet ready for change.

A recent North American article tracked this boom and bust trend in the cultural sector by following a number of high profile Black women hires who then chose to leave their jobs within a relatively short period.

“Women leaders of color are often hired by arts groups to diversify programs and reach communities of color. But once they step into these leadership roles, they often don’t have the support to succeed or even stay, according to Artnet contributor Lise Ragbir.

Problems they face include pressures to assimilate, different expectations from their white or male colleagues and added stressors from taking on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, according to six women leaders of color in the arts from across the country.” (Myong, 2023)

Been there, done that, was my response on reading the article. The suggestions for how organisations can prepare for cultural leadership shifts are wise ones: including ensuring the Board is supportive and leaders can build their own teams and lead inclusively. However, there are, arguably, few established cultural organisations ready for such a root and branch overhaul. In the meantime we need a carefully designed support and nurturing system for those who are at that coalface of change.

The Culture Wars & Invisibility

In diametric opposition to the current 'Black love-in', the "Culture Wars" have intensified. The term "Culture Wars" was first popularised by the sociologist James Davison Hunter in the early 1990's who used it to describe the deep-seated tension that had emerged in the US between orthodox and progressive worldviews.

King's College, Policy Institute are currently carrying out a major research programme to understand the particular drivers and features of cultural division in the UK. Director of the Institute Professor Bobby Duffy and Research Associate Dr Kirstie Hewlett write in their article *How Culture Wars Start*:

"the term not only captured a political struggle over cultural issues, but a conflict *over the meaning of America*, who we have been in the past, who we are now, and perhaps more important, who we, as a nation, will aspire to become." (Duffy et al, 2021)

The Policy Institute's research has shown that the culture wars are principally being inflamed by over reporting in the media and political ideology. However nowhere is this struggle over the meaning of Britain (who we have been in the past, who we are now and who we aspire to become) being more felt than in the world of culture and across lines of race and identity. The tension between restitution versus the government's preferred "retain and explain" policy is primarily centred around race and identity.

"Based on a close reading of a quarter of all articles on culture wars in the UK in 2020, the British empire and slavery were the issues mentioned most often (in 36% of the sample). Race, ethnicity and racism (26%) came next, followed by discussions of the response to Covid-19 (22%) and politics and political culture (21%)." (Duffy et al 2021)

In January 2021, the government's Communities Secretary released a press release announcing new laws to protect England's cultural heritage. New legal safeguards were introduced for historic monuments requiring full planning permission to be overseen by the Secretary of State. This coincided with the removal of key Black and Asian trustees

from some government appointed museum boards. The most high profile was the vetoing of British-Bangladeshi academic Aminul Hoque's reappointment on the board of the National Maritime Museum. In an in depth article published on November 7th 2021, the Guardian's Social Affairs Correspondent Robert Booth writes:

“Hoque describes himself as an “east London boy, son of an immigrant” and said that after the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 he had argued “this is ... a moment in history where we as a responsible national and international museum ... have an opportunity to retell a critical story of Britain's past, present and future ... These were the kinds of discussions I was having at boardroom level and then the news of my dis-appointment came,” he said. “What I was doing within the boardroom was no different to what I do in my lecture halls: I ask critical questions. My instincts are around humanity, equality, inclusivity, a multicultural, equal world ... Just maybe I asked one too many critical questions.” (Booth, 2021)

Global Majority leaders are often pulled between these two positions - hirings that signal, perhaps virtuously, that the sector has changed and the intensifying of cultural protectionism. The former brings a hypervisibility, the latter invisibility. Global majority leader's presence within culture is often experienced as a perceived threat, an exceptional invitation, or an urgent push to make an intervention all of which come with extra pressures. What is less experienced is being welcomed with joy, care and curiosity.

Breathe

c. What is Cultural Neglect & what are the effects?

It's not often that you hear traditional cultural leaders express *love* for doing diversity work, being more mindful of their cultural assumptions, excited by the inevitable clash of cultures. However, as we have seen in the case of Annie Schroeder in section 2a, it is love that makes the cultural world go around. People are turned on by those who share their cultural sensibilities. People programme what they love. They design spaces to reflect their own versions of reality. For most of my working life I, and many others like me, existed outside that sphere of cultural recognition.

In 2015 I coined the term "Cultural Neglect" during a talk entitled How To Love Differently for a conference organised by Nitrobeat and the Barbican in an attempt to capture the particular experience of cultural outsiderism. Neglect can be emotional, (distress or anguish caused by being ignored, belittled or infantilised) involve abandonment (not having your caregiving needs taken into account) and financial (being under resourced).

I had experienced all three while attempting to deliver cultural projects which attempted to broaden culture within institutions. Because my cultural references did not resonate with the organisation as well as my other white programming colleagues, my projects often received less financial and human investment. It would often fall on my shoulders to deliver the project. Despite an internal lack of support, these fragile projects bowed under the weight of internal targets and external expectations.

The traditional one-in, one-out approach to hiring people of colour led to, what I call, The Only One syndrome intensifying a sense of isolation and neglect for that single hire.

Mia Farrell, a freelance PR consultant working in film, wrote a personal and damning reflection of the film PR industry in Screen Daily in January 2023. She responded in print to an industry publication listing celebrated film PR professionals all of which were white which led her to break her own code of silence and detail her painful 25 year experience as being one of the only Black women in the field.

“Despite working with the some of the best executives, filmmakers and talent in the business I have not been afforded the opportunity to have the kind of mentorship and support from my bosses or colleagues that would have allowed me to have a real seat at the table....And as I have not been accepted into the cliques that exist in the larger agencies, or taken under the wing of someone powerful, I have not been able to visibly excel in the same way my colleagues have. I have built a great reputation based on my skills and work ethic but even in a fantastic role of substance and with great promise, I hit a ceiling and was not able to ascend any higher. I languished....Black women in particular face heightened challenges. We are more likely to face isolation as an ‘only’ and more likely to lack role models in leadership who share our identity. We have to work harder than white counterparts for less recognition. We often try not to take up too much space and speak only when we have something important to say.”
(Farrell, 2023)

Recent research undertaken by the research institute Coqual called *Being Black in the UK* backed up Mia’s experience showing that more than half of black women tend to stay at their companies for two years or less (Taylor Kennedy 2022). As one such statistic it was eye-opening to know that I was far from alone.

Neglect is often the root to a whole suite of mental health problems including depression, dissociative and memory disorders, post-traumatic stress, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. Neglect can lead to changes in the brain and can cause serious long lasting personal issues. This is why RCP might be a critical intervention for people who have been subject to long periods of Cultural Neglect as a preventative and restorative strategy.

Following are some of the symptoms of Cultural Neglect that I, and others who I have coached, seemed to have experienced and which RCP is designed to counteract. These symptoms draw heavily on psychotherapist Eugene Ellis’s book *Race Conversations : An essential guide to creating life-changing dialogue* (Ellis, 2021) which offers an illuminating insight into the psychological effects of growing up within a historical ‘race construct’, a human-made narrative around race, ethnicity, power and dominance. I outline these symptoms in order to illustrate that our intimate feelings and

responses may have roots in a larger dynamic. I hope that they might offer an awareness. However they may also have an overwhelming effect so I encourage you to take a break and breathe deeply whenever you are feeling the need to.

Lack of a sense of safety

A sense of safety is needed for the healthy development of people. However British culture hasn't always provided that for many people-of-colour. I do not always feel a sense of safety working within cultural institutions due to a lack of connection to the mores and rituals. Ellis references the *Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health: Breaking the Cycle of Fear: A Review of the Mental Health Services and African and Caribbean Communities* report:

“Internal felt safety is critical to people of colour, being given opportunities for some measure of healing and to break the ‘circles of fear’. These circles of fear cause people of colour to wait until their mental health condition is so acute that the only options available are medical medication or admission into a psychiatric ward.” (Ellis, 2021, p29)

Ellis goes onto assert:

“The ongoing experience of not feeling safe has been shown to literally rewire children's brains and nervous systems.”(Ellis, 2021,p37)

Affect on our nervous system

This lack of safety can have a lifelong effect on our nervous systems. Ellis uses American Psychologist Dr Stephen Porges Polyvagal theory to explore how our nervous systems use neuroception to evaluate safety, danger and life threats:

“The concept of neuroception in neurobiology is the ability of our nervous systems to detect unintentional and unconscious behavioural cues of safety,

danger or life threats in others and the environment without our having any awareness that this might be happening.” (Ellis, 2021, p43)

Those who do not receive cues of safety from their environment, may exist in two of the more taxing neural circuit systems - the immobilising circuit which leads to a shutting down or a freezing or the mobilising circuit which we experience as fight or flight. These are also commonly known as the strenuous sympathetic system fuelled by an increase in the anxiety chemicals, Cortisol and Adrenaline, which keeps our systems on high alert. Feelings of safety allow us to “rest and digest” in the parasympathetic system where deeper social connections form. If we exist primarily in the fight or flight system, we may not be experiencing that sense of social connections nor are we resting or digesting.

Intergenerational

To complicate this even more, our nervous systems can be somewhat “inherited” intergenerationally in a term which Ellis calls Generational Loading.

“From birth people of colour and white people would have had their expectations and assumptions about themselves and others influenced and shaped by racism both inside and outside of the home. There is also the transmission of unresolved trauma passed on from one generation to another. This generational transmission of racial trauma within families needs far more attention than it receives and holds an important key for understanding the challenges of the race conversation. What I am proposing is that the difficulties in the race conversation are a direct result of relational trauma in the past that has been passed on intergenerationally event triggered in the present” (Ellis, 2021, p39)

These past, passed on events and untreated traumatic experiences are handed down and played out in the present. They live in our unconscious implicit memory and impact our encounters even if we are not aware.

Science writer David Robson outlines in his podcast episode *The Prediction Machine* on BBC Sounds:

Before you walk into a room, your brain has already built many simulations of what might be there which then compares with what it actually encounters. At some points, the predictions may need retuning to better fit the data from the retina. At others, the brain's confidence in its predictions may be so strong that it chooses to discount some signals while accentuating others. (Robson, 18 July 2022)

Essentially, our generational loading makes us predict, assume and prepare for a reality that we remember but may not have directly experienced and which can lead to the fulfilment of prophecies.

Disembodiment

The race construct also affects our relationship with our own bodies, Ellis believes, causing people of colour, in some cases, to disconnect from their own physicalities.

“Just as certain bodies are evidence of low status, other bodies are evidence of high status. Higher status bodies receive a higher degree of safety, more rights and more access to resources. In the race construct, the body of a person of colour will have a lifetime of exclusion and coercion when comparing it with the white body. The pain of this cultural pressure forces abandonment of the body’s wisdom in favour of ignoring the body, objectifying the body or seeing specific parts of the body as the problem. Abandoning the body’s wisdom in this way, results in self-criticism, attempts to control the body’s appearance, chronic health issues and exhaustive attempts to either fit in or resist the dominant white body narrative.” (Ellis, 2021)

As women it is sometimes hard to feel full ownership of one’s body. As a Black woman, it is sometimes hard to inhabit it at all, given its lack of a “normalised” existence in the wider world.

Working three times as hard

Most children of immigrants have been told to work three times as hard if they want to get as far as their white counterparts. Given structural racism, this is not wholly bad advice. While facilitating Brilliant Routes sessions, I always ask if people believe this idea and almost all agree. I imagine that many Global Majority senior leaders who have worked their way up through the ranks have done so driven by this belief. I know I have. This idea is an example of “generational loading”, a passed-down belief that becomes part of the next generation’s belief system. In an interview between writer Colin Grant and memoirist Margo Jefferson in an episode of the London Review of Books, there is this moving exchange.

“CG: There's a line in your book towards the end where you say “You do not stop working to live up to your grandmother's. Your task is to justify their accomplishments by exceeding them.”

MJ: I wrote it with a kind of awe and with great love and also from a kind of terror because it's formidable. It's *so* much to aspire to, to live up to. And it can be merciless. Yeah, you can feel like you're worshipping a kind of unapproachable goddess, as well as this creature you're intimate with well.

CG: ...towards the end of the last line, you ask yourself, have you the right to be tired yet?

MJ: Because those were my grandmother's last words on her deathbed. She said I'm so tired, so tired and ...then I imagined her saying ... you know, firmly but but with tenderness. you haven't.” (Grant & Jefferson 2022)

This resonated with me deeply. I recognised the sense of gratitude and duty to my forebears who, I view, as having suffered greatly in order for me to have my life. I also experience the terror and fear of letting them down. In Ellis’s book he quotes meditation teacher Artie Wu who works in the area of ‘race construct shame’ who describes the desire “to shield your ‘identity wound’ by over proving yourself” (Ellis, 2021, p80) and I wonder how much my own identity wounds have propelled me into a cycle of graft?

Black Writer Arnell Thompson wrote an article in Black Ballad magazine entitled *How Can I Unlearn Guilty Feelings When I Rest?* (Thompson, 3 Feb 2023) She described seeing the black women in her life always 'in motion'. Even when they were supposed to be resting they were cooking, cleaning or doing hair. "I struggle to recall a time when we'd just be together."

Her therapist called this Black Woman Workhorse (BWWH) syndrome or "the inability to perform the self-care required to actually take care of yourself." Thompson ends her personal exploration with the invitation: "As foreign as it may feel, we need to secure our own oxygen mask before we secure anyone else's. It's time for us to water our own gardens."

Loneliness

"Black people more lonely than general population, says new study" reported BBC News in an article in May 2022. The Mental Health Foundation featured study suggests one in three black people have experienced feelings of loneliness (BBC Newsbeat 13 May 2022)

In the article a young woman is quoted: "It's a bit shameful... you feel like you're alone but you've got all these people around you....Having to admit that - as a strong black woman - can be something you don't want to admit in our communities because you want to keep on going."

The sense of isolation that the 'Only Ones' might feel can be compounded by passed down cultural beliefs that do not encourage communication in vulnerable times. There is an oft quoted Caribbean saying: "Don't tell people your business" which sounds like the fearful Sympathetic nervous system talking.

Care Givers rather than Care Receivers

This point particularly concerns women-of-colour whose roles in the West have often been positioned as caretakers of white people, men and children. Particularly Black and sometimes South Asian women are often caricatured as the stern matriarch. There

is a public perception that Black women are strong, infallible and that our value lies not in our innateness but in how well we take care of others. For this reason, it can be hard for women-of-colour to place themselves at the heart of their own care.

Inverted Rage

“I have had to have a very strong demeanour on the outside to mask the pain, anxiety and rage on the inside. “ Mia said (Farrell, 2023)

Same, Mia, same. Our experiences of racism and the handed down memories, our lack of safety and care, our immobilised and mobilised nervous systems, our disembodiedness, our exhaustion and loneliness and a continual sense of powerlessness can only lead to an inner rage that is inexpressible in the polite society of English culture.

This chapter has been painful to write and may have been painful to read.

So let's take a deep breath

And feel our feet connected to the ground for a moment

Another symptom of growing up as a “child of empire” is that I can either turn away from difficult truths or turn to fight. Both can leave me emptied.

Restorative Care Practices are designed to provide a more sustainable way forward, a path that avoids burnout and supports a deeper healing. The idea of RCP has been inspired by the foundations of one of the world’s oldest spiritual practices that teaches how to nurture a compassionate response to a challenging world. Buddhism’s Four Noble Truths advises that for transformation to take place there first needs to be an acknowledgement and an acceptance that suffering is apparent. This is where we are now in this report. The next stage is perhaps the most difficult and that is simply to

cease, or stop. Rather than jump in and try and fix, amend or tear apart a situation, there needs to be a space created for respite, repair and compassionate inquiry that will allow us to pay attention to our physical, mental and soulful selves thus allowing a wiser awareness to emerge. This is the job of Restorative Care Practices.

Possibly because of the challenges that we have encountered, Global Majority thinkers, practitioners and artists carry some of the greatest wisdoms and RCP insights which I drew onto shape the first RCP programme, Re-UP!

But, before we explore this, I'm off to drink a cool glass of water. Why not join me?

3. Re-UP: The Balm of Restorative Care Practice

So far I have set out why I believe the most urgent area of cultural leadership support is in the area of restorative care. The widening threat of burnout leads us to the question of inner resourcing - how do we summon the energy to go another day, week, month, year and then in which direction?

At the end of 2021, hearing the growing wails of exhaustion coming from the sector, I decided to pivot the Clore Leadership Brilliant Routes programme to a dedicated programme focusing on what I am now term Restorative Care Practices. I called the programme Re-UP!, a fun Black colloquial term, and the only in my experience, to describe respite activities. When I was younger, we would often describe engaging in a fun but purposefully rejuvenating activity as a “re-up”.

I designed the programme around four focus areas: Care, Mind, Body and Kinship which mirrored Ellis’s own antidote to the psychological challenges he outlined in his book:

“There are three elements to this process that could simply be described as mind, body and heart.” (Ellis, 2021, p160)

Each area had a dedicated full day programme with three half-day Kinship Circles running across six months . The Mind, Care and Body sessions included a mix of Keynote conversations with sector leaders who let us in on their own regular care regimes, discussions about how these practices might be applied on the shop floor, a tool kit practice workshop where people could test RCP’s and a Creative Intuition section which allowed people to engage in creative flow activities. The Kinship sessions offered Thinking Environment and Action Learning Tools for small groups of participants.

Due to a great demand, the programme extended out to Global Majority staff at the BFI, Wellcome Collection, Arts Council England as well as those who were supported by Clore Leadership. The programme is in its final month and has been running for the past six with a cohort of approximately 65 regular attendees.

The programme assembled some brilliant Global Majority practitioners from across the UK who could share their own understandings, practices and perspectives on RCP. The quality of ideas offered an insight into the depth of wisdom carried by many contemporary creative and arts practitioners spreading beyond culture into areas of philosophy, spirituality, community care, social transformation and psychotherapy. South African artist-curator and spiritual Sangoma Khanyisile Mbongwa and psychotherapist Joel Simpson both offered ideas on how to connect into our ancestral lineage. Cultural Thinker Suzanne Alleyne, and curators Joon Lyn Goh and Aisha Akhtar helped us to think about ways to use caring practices to transform power structures. Ije Nwokorie, Global leader at Apple, gave us an insight into ways to restore the mind. Artists Emmy the Great, Ekta Kaul and Zara McFarlane offered us respite through creative activities and embodiment practitioners such as joyful yogi David Kam reconnected us physically. The programme launched with a playful immersive “Late” style taster event where Global Majority professionals could move through a variety of Re-UP! Stations from flower design, meditation, intention setting and rest stations with sound works.

This report is not an evaluation of the programme, however I will go into the thinking behind the session design in order to explore the potential RCP benefits. The case studies section, more specific results and awareness that arose from some of the participants.

Compassion and Care

It felt important to centre the first day on care given the challenges this particular group may have to offer care to themselves. The aim was to create an intentional space of safety given that many may not experience this in their day to day work. We ensured that almost all contributors and participants were from the Global Majority in the hopes that this would allow participants parasympathetic nervous systems to be activated.

We followed various trauma-informed processes including sending out a special Care Form in advance to all participants so they could make us aware of any care needs which went allowed for more than simple access needs. The feedback included people's needs for pacing, the look and feel of the documents we created, the availability of a prayer space, who was shy and needed support. The aim was to create a space that would allow for inter-regulation.

“The idea that something outside of me is regulating me is called inter regulation. If there is enough inter regulation, these experiences become imprinted neurologically and become auto-regulation, auto-regulation being the ability to manage and soothe our own emotional states.” (Ellis, 2021, p122)

The foundation of the programme was to establish a compassionate (kindness in response to another's suffering) framework. We helped participants to collectively create their own agreement of how they would like to work together. We shared tools for Kinship building (see below), and modelled and provided supportive space for sharing vulnerability.

It was critical to provide space to practise *self* compassion. Dr Kristen Neff ,the leading researcher in the field describes this as:

“Self-compassion is simply the process of turning compassion inward. We are kind and understanding rather than harshly self-critical when we fail, make mistakes or feel inadequate. We give ourselves support and encouragement rather than being cold and judgmental when challenges and difficulty arise in our lives.” (Neff, 2022)

Self-compassion practices have been proven to directly affect the chemical balance of our bodies, flushing out the worry drugs, Cortisol and Adrenaline, and flooding us with the more connecting and loving chemicals Serotonin and Oxytocin. These, in turn, help us to think better and more expansively. Given the specific psychosocial impacts on Global Majority leaders, self-compassion practices are foundational to repairing, soothing and restoring our relationship to ourselves. Fight or flight mode can lead to harsh inner chatter developing.

“The social emotion of compassion, when it comes to race construct arousal or indeed any distress, needs first to be developed for the self before turning out with and focusing on others.” (Ellis, 2021, p18)⁶

Some of the tools we worked with are designed to encourage us to develop a compassionate relationship with the self, replacing our inner voice with one more supportive one.

Mind

Highly stressed states affect how well our minds work. Our nervous systems shut us down or speed us up and the chemicals mess with the clarity of our thinking. Understanding the way our minds respond to stress is a first step in beginning to work with it.

Mindfulness, the act of slowing down and paying attention to what’s occurring in the present, is a tool to work with the mind. Each session was held with mindfulness breathing and grounding exercises led by co-facilitator Alia Alzougbi.

We also included a workshop using an adapted version of Dr Chris Johnstone’s Strengths, Strategies, Resources and Insights (SSRI) resilience exercise from his book *Find Your Power: A Toolkit for Resilience and Positive Change* (Johnstone, 2020) which allows participants to reflect on previous challenges and mine the learnings. This helps to develop, as Ellis describes, “reflective functions”:

“Metacognition and reflective function are largely implicit abilities to reflect upon your own state of mind and the state of mind of others. These abilities are also an important protective factor, that minimises the probability of the intergenerational transmission of insecurity. “ (Ellis, 2021, page 123)

Rather than use the mind to make decisions, we used the mind as a reflective tool. Johnstone’s SSRI exercise is a way to undertake a personal Appreciative Inquiry, analysing what we are doing that is working for us and the insights we are gathering

along the way. This practice helps to counteract the overly critical inner voice that can arise in stressful times and can lead us to overlook our potential. My *Listening To Yourself* (Gould & ANNN 2020) audio journaling tool uses an especially produced audio soundscape by artist ANNN and writing instructions to invite participants to compassionately inquire and coach themselves. Both reflective tools are designed to lead to new awarenesses through gentle and inquiry methods.

Body

Claire Dale was once a dancer, choreographer and artistic director and now uses her deep understanding of the body to specialise in the study of Physical Intelligence. In her book of the same name she writes:

“Being emotionally intelligent requires a high degree of physical intelligence, because we experience emotions largely in the body as physiological changes. Emotions are actually strands of neuropeptides – chemicals released into the bloodstream that arrive at receptor cells and activate circuits of response that lead to behaviour; sadness, elation, frustration, and pride, all have a different chemistry and a distinct feeling to them.” (Dale & Peyton, 2020, p2)

So not only is connecting intelligently with our body good for developing our emotional IQ but also for releasing stored trauma. In Ellis’s book, somatic movement therapist Christine Caldwell uses the terms ‘Bodyfulness’ as a way to “facilitate body identity development”. “If we consciously move the body as we listen to its sensory signals, we connect to the inside of the body with the outside, rather than reinforce the bodies domestication” (Ellis, 2021, p175)

This idea of Bodyfulness is a way to combat the physical disconnection that can take place when living in a decentred, disembodied way.

Even though all other events took place online, this session took place in person which was vital for a sense of physical connection. Contributors and dancers Freddie Opoku

Addaie and David Kam shared alternative non-verbal leadership tools and ways to regularly ground throughout the day including stretching, touching and looking. Other physical experiences included a lunchtime sound bath, a shared voice workshop and a Free Your Spine practice that offered practical tips to stretch spines and hip flexors.

This final all-day session demonstrated the real power of Re-UP! which is to offer an embodied space or respite and restorative care. One participant commented that even though she didn't remember all the content of the first session five months before, her body strongly remembered the expansive *feeling* of that session which she continued to carry within her.

Creative Intuition

At key points throughout each sessions, a selected artist ran a "Creative Intuition" workshop: singer Emmy The Great ran a collective songwriting workshop, Ekta Kaul ran a popular mindful embroidery workshop and Nicole Cher Geismer ran a lively Free Your Spine pilates-based movement session.

There were many reasons that artist-led work felt important to include. Firstly, many cultural professionals enter as artist-practitioners before occupying management positions and losing connection with their practice. This can cause creative blocks that can have an ongoing and low-lying detrimental effect. Secondly creative practices can provide an internal space of respite by accessing a Flow State. The idea of Flow States was branded by happiness researcher MihalyCsikszentmihalyi in his 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. They are characterised by:

1. Complete concentration on the task;
2. Clarity of goals and reward in mind and immediate feedback;
3. Transformation of time (speeding up/slowing down);
4. The experience is intrinsically rewarding;
5. Effortlessness and ease;
6. There is a balance between challenge and skills;
7. Actions and awareness are merged, losing self-conscious rumination;
8. There is a feeling of control over the task.

Flow states are important in RCP as they are thought to downregulate the busy hard working pre-frontal cortex of our brains and allow for the more unconscious implicit mind to take over which can lead to fresh awareness. A competent runners' flow moment is when they go for a run and solve some problems at the same time. Creative practices, like embroidery, can do the same and given the amount of participants who are continuing to sew months after the workshop, this would appear to be the case!

The recent *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* has underlined the importance of arts practice throughout our lives on our physical health too.

They found

- that arts engagement at work and in leisure time can address work-related anxiety, depression and stress.
- Arts can support recovery from illness and long-term conditions, for example:
- listening to music after a stroke speeds recovery and lifts mood
- dancing and group singing enhance cognition, communication and physical functioning in people with Parkinson's
- singing alleviates chronic respiratory conditions and cystic fibrosis
- arts engagement plays a part in diminishing the physical and emotional effects of heart disease and cancer (*All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2014*)

Kinship

Meeting like minded others has always been a big draw for participants on the Brilliant Routes network and Re-UP! programme. The Global Majority-only network seems vital for those Only Ones working as a cultural minority within an institution or working independently and alone.

Many come to be one of many rather than one of the few. Eugene Ellis who established the BAATN network for Black and Asian psychotherapists thinks this togetherness is enough to start the fundamental act of healing and reparation:

“For people of color, coming together to create a sense of belonging with those who want to heal together is the single most important thing that I believe can be done to mitigate against the detrimental effects of racism” (Ellis, 2021, p198)

After running the Brilliant Routes network for a few years and now Re-UP! I would agree. I’ve witnessed how the space to voice, share and be met with understanding has had a transformative effect on many over the years. In addition we offered space for people to practise co-supportive and co-coaching tools like Nancy Klein’s Thinking Environment tools and Action Learning to help deepen the connections.

RCP as regular strategy

To be truly effective, RCP will need to find its way into our regular work and life schedules. This will ensure that the effects of stress are continually managed and the practices help to assimilate into our physical and mental processes.

The Re-UP! Programme is still ongoing and so we haven’t yet completed the full evaluation. However as part of this research I wanted to test whether a daily or a regular RCP might have an effect on our capacity for leadership. Five participants from the Re-UP! Cohort, alongside myself, undertook a regular practice which included a morning Listening To Yourself Journaling exercise, a 15 mins Creative Intuition practice and an evening SSRI Reflection exercise for three months. See Appendix 1. The next chapter outlines some of the case studies findings.

4. Case Studies

Methodology

I designed a research study for five participants and myself to undertake a three month Re-UP! trial to test the impact of regular RCP's on our leadership practice and lifestyles.

After an Ethics Review five participants from the Re-UP! Cohort consented to take part. All were women; two work in larger cultural organisations, one for a small organisation, one runs her own organisation and one is a freelancer.

A pack was sent with details of three exercises to try preferably daily for three months:

- Listening to Yourself: 22 minute audio-journaling tool
- SSRI: resilience building exercise
- Creative Intuition practice: 15 minutes a day

Each was offered a password protected dropbox to share any thoughts, artworks and writings along the way.

Two group Kinship reflection sessions were held at the end of the practice phase facilitated by myself using Active Listening and coaching techniques. These sessions also offered us a chance to share our experiences with each other fostering kinship.

I have edited and anonymised the transcripts and organised them to capture the shape of our conversation.

Responses

Why did you want to explore these practices?

Carving out time dedicated for me

“It was me carving out time for me. Something that I can struggle with. I’ve committed to doing it now! Yeah, a challenge, but also an invitation. I saw it as a bit of a gift. But it begs the question, why do I need to legitimise that time and space?”

2022 was a year of challenge

2022 was a year of challenge. I discovered that I had autoimmune disease and the doctors were experimenting with a drug that sent me on a roller coaster. I wasn’t feeling connected with myself. Secondly, I had made a choice for stability in my vocation, but actually, in my heart, I’m an artist. I’m getting really upset thinking about it. I felt blocked. I was making irrational decisions, and I wasn’t deeply connected with what I was feeling. And that means that I wasn’t really listening to my intuition.

Structure around the exploration

It definitely felt like an invitation to explore and to have structure around the exploration, to really commit to it. I was hoping to give myself that time and to get some clarity.

An identity crisis

Well, I’m having an identity crisis, if I’m perfectly frank and it’s pushing me out of my comfort zone. Since I was a child, I had geared myself up to push forward for a specific career identity but when I arrived I had to take a step away partly because I just didn’t feel that the convention, the connections, the way that those operations work, were healthy for me, mentally or physically. But now I don’t know quite what I am, except I know that I don’t fit any milestones culturally, in terms of my Indian culture, like getting married, kids, or Western culture. I know I’m in a reckoning time. I don’t know where

it's going but I know that I need support especially from other creatives of colour, people who perhaps understand this situation.

I'm quite ambitious, I'm quite driven and I am also an anxiety sufferer

I run my own business. I work really hard, and it's doing really well which is great. I'm very good at looking after other people. I'm known as Mother Teresa. I'm Chair of a board - I look after people there - as well as in other networks. And the reason I think that's an issue is because I often place myself last. And I don't think that's necessarily because, oh, I'm just a kind person. I think it's sometimes easier to look after other people. It's a way of focusing externally, and I think I've done that for quite a long time. I'm quite ambitious, I'm quite driven but I have been an anxiety sufferer for a very long time, probably way before I knew what it was. And that, obviously, jars with the hard work and the long hours. As exciting as it is, and I bloody love what I do, it's not great for somebody who suffers from anxiety. I'm just not very good at looking after myself. My mum's not very good at it. And I think I've just modelled her behaviour for a long time.

What were some of the challenges that got in the way?

Evening/SSRI practice most difficult to embed

The evening one, I felt the hardest to embed.

Similarly, I struggled a bit with the evening practice. And it [SSRI exercise] was the most 'thinky'. I'd have to think, What did I do today? And should this be below or above?

I kind of understand it, but maybe it didn't feel as inspiring - that felt more like homework.

The evening, I found that a bit difficult because when it occurs to me that it's the evening. I just want to go to bed, I'm not very good at thinking very much.

It depended on where I was emotionally, mentally, physically

And then with the daily practice, I found that inconsistent as well. It depended on where I was emotionally, mentally, physically. If I had a really tough day at work, then the last thing I wanted to do is get my paint set out. But I've been reflecting on that. Now I know that that's actually what I really did need to do.

Pressure on myself

I'd wake up and I'd be like, Okay, do this [writing] thing first. But then I might end up like reading a news thing and then I would feel like I put a bit of pressure on myself, I guess. Because when I first wake up, I don't know that I feel like laying in bed and writing. It took a while to give myself permission to find what that rhythm meant to me. So now I'll get up and I'll sit at a desk to write.

My brain hurts!

Sometimes I'd get to a point [with the Listening to Yourself writing exercise] where I'm like, Oh, my brain hurts! Even though it says keep going, I'm like, I'm actually tired now. I'm a thinker anyway. And then you're asking me to overthink even more!

Finding three opportunities of 20 minutes a day

I did find it was a lot. Finding three opportunities of about 20 minutes a day - an hour for myself and I thought, 'O, my God, that's difficult' which is ludicrous. On about the 9th January, my diary just exploded, and after that I found it much more difficult.

What did you enjoy or find most useful?

There were elements to play with

I enjoyed playing with consistency. I loved that the creative activity could happen any time of the day. And that journal had this kind of rhythm of starting something in the morning. And then how do the other things play around it? So yeah, it's not like a set rhythm. It's almost like there's a frame of a rhythm. And then things can kind of move around. And I liked that. I felt like there were elements to play with.

Cue myself up for the rest of the year

I loved it. It felt like there was a practice in the morning, practice in the evening, and then play in the day. It just allowed me to cue myself up for the rest of the year. And reading back some of the things I've reflected on this morning. I was like, oh, like I really did come out with some goals, (which I vaguely forgotten in the last two weeks as I've been back on the hamster wheel.) But there was a lot of clarity in some of those tools.

Listening to Yourself Writing Exercise

The writing I really enjoyed. Especially writing with the left (less dominant) hand. I had to think in a more succinct way. I'm a very long winded person who likes to talk about the details. So it just shifted the way I thought about myself. I had to really get to the nub of what I wanted to say

Listening to yourself. What I found was that I would ask that first question. 'So what do you want to talk about today?' and as I asked more questions, I got to the root of what I was actually talking about.

Creativity

I converted the stress of getting ready for Christmas into some of my creative exercises. So where I would normally buy myself a wreath, I said, I'm going to make a wreath. So I went out foraging down the park and walking in the local woods and just built them. So that was, surprising. And then when that finished, I went and brought embroidering materials inspired by the session that we had. And now I'm sewing a little bit each night. I know now this is what I need to do. I need to do those things. They're very important. I don't consider myself to be particularly talented but it's actually much bigger and more central to that - self expression. That intuition had been quelled. purposefully quashed. We've been taught to ignore bodily and other intuition. So in that space, I feel that's where my power and routes to success lie. Just sitting there focusing on something quite simple, quite repetitive - it's really peaceful. At a really hectic time.

Throughout the [creative] practice, I was able to let go of control and actually the freedom within that created something that I didn't imagine - it just came. And just allowing whatever came through to come through in whatever way that it would. But it was nice, like, I guess, on my own to really not have an endpoint or the work to be contained within anything.

I picked up the bass, and not because I have any history of playing bass, or know anything about music. But I've always wanted to learn how to play an instrument. So I was like, Oh, let me just, you know, pluck some strings and see what sounds I can make, and not go on to YouTube and try and teach myself a song. And not try and learn chords or techniques, but just follow what sound I would want to hear after a particular sound that I played before. So that was really peaceful and really freeing, and it helped me process feelings as well, because I could just *be* - it's so wordless. I guess I'm following intuition. And because I don't know anything about music, it feels like I'm discovering something. And discovering it on my own terms.

I have been an oil painter, but since I've come back to London, I haven't really done that and I've really missed that. And obviously working in the arts and being around a lot of creative people (my partner's a sculptor) I kind of got used to absorbing culture

rather than making it. I stuck with the sewing and I just, I loved it. It reminded me of my painting, and how much I missed that, you know, painting's about problem solving to me. I'm not a sewer but I love the process. I loved the idea of problem solving, you know, how to make that look different and better. It felt relaxing, but also like something that you should do? It felt like it was really valuable. It really takes me somewhere else. I get really absorbed in it. It reminds me of how oil painting used to do that for me.

I haven't actually drawn in a while. So I started drawing. My big thing is animals. And it was enjoyable. And I really enjoyed doing it. I included colors and everything, because sometimes I'll just get a bio and scribble. But then I was like, actually, this could be a card. So I ended up sending a couple of cards out to people. Like my friend, she's so weird, she has this obsession with dead pigeons. So I drew her a tastefully done dead pigeon, made it into a postcard and sent it to her,

After three months of RCP what did you discover about yourself?

Unblocking of the Spirit.

All that disconnection and discombobulation of last year, something realigned. Everyone talks about mind, body and spirit. And I've always thought what does it mean to be connected to spirit? I think that through the Listening to Myself exercise, and doing the creative activities, I was in direct relationship with my spirit. I feel more deeply connected with my spirit now, through this practice. There were times in the day where I felt completely disconnected from my spirit. But now I understand what that spirit balance feels like I can see when I'm the furthest away from it. And I know when I'm unsettled, that I'm not connected to my spirit.

I feel like my life depends on it.

Looking back at the writing I can see just how much of a state of overwhelm I was in. I was having to confront some real dynamics and dilemmas within the family. And somewhere in this writing, I realised how some of this stuff was really about deep seated issues that have come through generationally and why I'm not devoting time for

myself and instead, doing for everybody else. I think there is still a way to go but I've found some grace and compassion and forgiveness for myself. And for others. So I think this process has been like a marking of territory to open up ways to sit in what I recognize now is a period of overwhelm and discomfort. It's a really important space because it's allowed me to just unlock some of those blockages and start to access that deep intuition. There has been a flow of things I've done that have happened on the back of that, and it's like they've happened like I've had nothing to do with it. It's about how I move in the world and not hide myself or reduce myself. I think I'm still scared of it because it signifies big change and the unknown, and something different. But I'm also absolutely drawn to it. And there's no question of not doing it [RCP]. I feel like my life depends on it.

I find it so hard to make time for myself

The biggest revelation was, how I find it so hard to make time for myself. It's a really tough decision to not say I need to prepare for that meeting so I should probably do that instead of this [RCP]. I had to choose that every day in the same way that you have to when you giving up sugar. You're not yourself at all. So that was really interesting. I'm always the first thing to dump in my life when things get busy.

I just rolled with the punches

I think the writing really helped me feel that I could cope. I'm juggling. I run five or six clients at once and all sorts of interesting projects, I love what I do. But you have to have a lot of belief in yourself. You have to really embrace failure, and you have to just push forward and get on with it. And this really helps me to do that. The morning exercise, it was almost like I'd gone through a to-do list, sorted a few things out that I didn't know I needed to. I can't really describe it. I felt really calm. And those first few weeks of January were like full on and I just rolled with the punches. And it really helped. Actually, that was a really great discovery.

What matters

Sometimes it's very easy for me to start listening to lots of other people, because I want their advice. I want to understand where they're coming from, or they know far more about things and then this forced me to actually ask myself. I have been asking myself who do I matter to beyond myself and my immediate family and what matters to me? And actually, I find that questioning not particularly comfortable. But I do think the processes has helped me get to this point. This Re-UP! process has given me the courage to apply for a scholarship for an improv class and so I'm actually going to do something that's just for the sake of it. And I do think that's from having questioned myself on what matters.

Mental First Aid

I've been using Listening to Yourself as mental first aid. So sometimes it just helps me process the stuff that I need to get out of the way, like maintenance work almost. I might have something that I need to do for the day or the week. And just asking myself that question, can help unlock the steps that I can take. And then other times, when I have quite a bit of space, Listening to Yourself was a bit more. I could pluck something that was like a feeling or an idea in my unconscious and explore it and come out with what felt like an expansive self discovery.Over Christmas, I would go for walks in the park and do it as an audio exercise. And how lovely it is to do it while walking while being around nature. Different things unlock and it definitely feels more spacious when I do it in that way.

I've become my own observer

I've become increasingly the observer. I have my hotspots and those moments when things are happening to me. And it's [RCP] has given me a bit of distance on it. It's like I can see what I'm worrying about and say that's okay, you hold tight you'll get through it. And that's happened to me far more frequently since starting this exercise. Yeah, I've become my own observer. Which gives me a level of comfort.

I found the SSRI really. It helped me to see the things that I do well, that I hadn't recognized that I was doing well. It is really about noticing those strategies, even if

they're subtle, like I've imagined something beautiful when I was feeling down. And it was quite good to notice.

Taking time to work intentionally

It's made me initiate far more at work leading with how I'm feeling and being unapologetic about it. So my mission now is to work quite intentionally well paced and not to jump back into the overwhelm. I've certainly maintained my workload, I've managed that really intentionally. And it's actually impacted others around me. So the whole team around me, now have less cases to do. Everybody's now well paced. So it's contributed to something that's been very useful for everybody. Actually, I should own that!

It's made me more understanding, less immediate and quick to respond

So last year at work, I might think that a particular person's not very nice, or that they're being difficult, but I think it's changed the understanding of what's going on and the relationship in the energy field between me and this individual, rather than arising to conflict or confrontation. I'm now finding out what's going on with myself. So taking a moment to take a breath, seeing what narratives I have been telling myself about this individual, and then using that as a source to figure out what's going on in the bigger field. It's impacted my work because, it's made me more understanding, less immediate and quick to respond. I can use my judgement better, rather than saying something that could be harmful to other people. Just consciously being more centred within myself, is allowing those around me to also be more centred. Often as women, we often have to feel that we have to say the right thing, or, fix things but I'm now feeling okay to not have the answers right away. Just that space is allowing a more compassion to arise I think.

Capacity for discomfort

I do think that there's something about my capacity for discomfort that's increased, especially things I might be finding difficult in a practical sense. Rather than going straight to a narrative of, 'oh, I can't do it. What's wrong with me?' I'm more able to be

like, Okay, what's the problem? What could you possibly do to fix it? Who could you possibly ask for help?

I feel more in control

You know, I feel calmer, I feel more in control, not in a weird kind of controlling way. But I'm creating my own compassion or creating my own care or well being or whatever you want to call it, which feels really nice.

I've put in more boundaries

One thing that I have definitely done since Re-UP!, and it doesn't feel nice, but I've put in more boundaries. And I've put in more boundaries of people that aren't of colour, And before maybe I'd be a bit more like, well, you know, don't rock the boat, or, you know, just be very careful how you navigate. I feel like I'm rising up more in this period of reckoning and Re-UP! feeds into that. Life is short.

I'm giving a bit of time to myself, and, and actually, a lot of the time, that is about putting boundaries in place. I think part of compassion is saying it's not selfish, to be kind to yourself. It's helped me to understand what I need to be able to support myself and be there for other people. But also, boundaries come into that, you know.

Case Study Reflections

The conversations with the participants were deeply moving. In many ways the five represented an average slice of the lived experiences we find across the arts. Women who are juggling health issues, identity questions, working out how to carry their jobs responsibly while looking after friends and family. Many of them are clearly dealing with the challenges outlined in this report.

It's clear from the feedback that RCP offered the participants a transformative set of tools to reflect, process the complexities and find moments of respite, elevation and joy. The most popular practice was the Creative Intuition 15 minutes a day exercise. Even those who professed not to be artistically creative professed excitement and joy at playing for playing's sake. For the lapsed artists the reconnection to their "spirit" seemed to have a radical impact. Creativity seemed to be the space that all found ease, instant well-being and a valve release from various pressures.

The Listening to Yourself exercise seemed to provide space for the most transformative reflections and, powerfully, the development of a more supportive and self-compassionate voice. Day to day problems were solved and larger complex dynamics reflected upon and equanimity found. One person spoke about how the exercise helped them to change the "field" of dynamics with colleagues, allowing her to take a breath before responding and reframing the relationships which offered space for more generative potential. These particular reflections suggest a powerful potential for this tool to reframe professional and personal challenges, broaden perspectives, allow fresh solutions to be found and relationships to be rebuilt.

Chris Johnstone's adapted SSRIE exercise seemed to be the most challenging for all and yet allowed some profound new self-awarenesses. One participant said that this tool helped her to shift the focus away from the problem to the capacities she already possesses, helping to reboot energy and resilience. We all agreed that this was not best placed as a nightly exercise. I found this exercise worked best as an end of week exercise, a chance to process the week's ups and downs.

It was also acknowledged that rather than these tools be approached as a fixed unamendable task, seeing the practices as playfully adaptive, a chance to further investigate our own styles and proclivities, was a great way to use them.

My own three months RCP experience was also powerfully illuminating. Similar to one of the participants, the end of 2022 was a personally tumultuous time for me too. The Listening to Yourself daily writing, reflection and stitching exercises provided a critical anchor. I even carried the SSRIE exercise over into stitch. Thanks to this regular RCP ritual I remained compassionately connected and grounded at a time when I could easily have lost perspective and moved to a space of blame or self-blame. These touchstones also reminded me to take seriously my need to repair and heal. Usually I would find this prioritising of my own need above others difficult. The exercises helped me to have greater patience with myself and treat myself with more care than I may have normally.

The clarity also helped me to communicate my position honestly with team members and friends and ask for support at specific points - all things I would have found difficult at previous times.

The effect of RCP made to myself and the participants makes the case for these tools as an accessible and critical ballast that can help maintain a deft balance of equanimity, clarity, fresh perspective, and rest and healing. As two participants said “my life depends” on them.

The question for all of us was how to maintain these practices.

Like many of the participants, as soon I grew busy it was easy for these practices to be jettisoned from my schedule. I ended our discussion asking what would help you to continue and both groups agreed that the peer accountability helped to form a regular relationship with practice. The sharing and witnessing of our experiences seemed to be a crucial part of cementing the process for many of us. The group finally agreed to continue to meet every 3 months alongside other creative meet-ups.

For RCP to be fully transformative, they need to be encoded into our lifestyles as essentials rather than add-ons especially for those groups who are not practised nor have a history of prioritising personal restorative care.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This report has been a profound writing experience for me. It has forced me to confront some difficult moments in my career while investigating both external and internal contributing factors. However, ending the report with the words of those who are walking complex terrains with grace, awareness and a desire for healthy growth and to make a mindful contribution to the world, is a humbling reminder why designing a supportive framework for such professionals is important work.

Restorative Care Practices have been shown to pack a punch. As little as thirty minutes a day of intentional reflective, creative intuition and thoughtful processing have proven to profoundly deepen internal capacity, help to rebuild relationships and open up fresh ideas for leaders and professionals. Importantly RCP helps to rebuild a healthy supportive relationship with ourselves. Two participants now feel their lives “depend on” RCP.

Strategic resource planning has always been considered as an organisational skills-led exercise. Rarely do we consider how the people within the organisation are being resourced to deliver that plan. What if the planning process were to strategically factor in ways to support the inner resourcing of our teams? What if we developed a personal resource plan for ourselves and our teams that ensured we were creating regular supportive space for rest, reflection and for new perspectives to emerge from a place of compassion?

As our culture and society teeters amidst the economic and climate crisis and increasing polarisation and leaders teeter under the effects of the Great Exhaustion, it's clear we need new tools to forge a new way of working. Sustainable practices must begin with the people who are tasked to design them.

While I have centred my own experience and the experience of other Global Majority leaders here, RCP's have a wide application for any cultural leaders who are asking serious questions about personal sustainability - and also those who aren't yet. The

challenges outlined here are decidedly human and encompassing and so have the potential to benefit all professionals. However it is important we remember that the Only Ones, the cultural outsiders need extra care.

RCP is not a solution to the fundamental task of eradicating systemic inequalities in culture and society. Essentially, it is this that will fundamentally shift the well-being of our nation. However, until then we deserve to thrive. And to create new shifts, we need to come up with new ideas and so we need to create space to do so. RCP is also not a replacement for deeper therapeutic or other supportive health treatments although this research shows they sit well beside them. The proposition here is to bolster the validity of Restorative Care Practice and place it at the heart of a leader's development ensuring that our sector is led by self-aware, resourced, resilient, relational and compassionate people. My role is to continue developing tools and RCP spaces to help develop that compassionately connected world. Nine year old me would like that.

Recommendations

- Further invest in embedding RCP development tools into the heart of cultural leadership training and development programmes for all cultural leaders particularly those most affected, and those at the forefront of cultural change
- Continue to support Global Majority only cultural leadership spaces
- Embed RCP into organization's strategic and resource planning processes

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