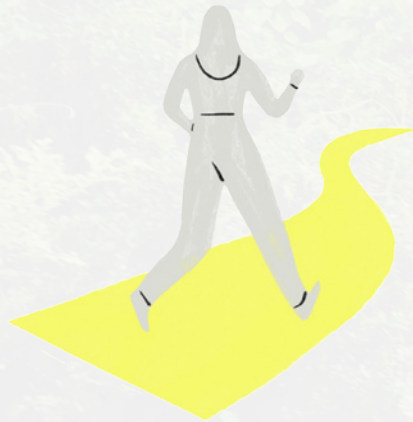


Why invest in inner work?

Making the case to professionals, change-makers, leaders, and organizations



INNER WORK *for* **SOCIAL CHANGE**

2020 presents an impetus for change. How will you and your organization respond?



Fetzer Institute



SYNERGOS

Building trust works

Making the Case for Inner Work

2020 – A year marked by a pandemic, George Floyd’s murder, migrant laborers trudging across India and Bangladesh, closed schools, quiet streets, zoom funerals, and PPE entering public vernacular. A year of isolation and trauma, of fires and floods. A year when “how are you?” became a laden question, and simple interactions with others in our community became unpredictable.

Navigating a world of uncertainty demands resilience and a deeper awareness of ourselves, our fears and prejudices, and our intricate connections across the globe. Many of us have responded by becoming more reflective and compassionate. We are seeing with new eyes the interconnectedness of us and them, our predecessors and ourselves, my actions today and our future together.

Compared to any other time in our recent history...2020 is the year when we all finally agree that some level of inner work might actually matter

(Gretchen Ki Steidle, Founder and CEO, Global Grassroots)

2020 presents an impetus for change. How will you and your organization respond? There are compelling reasons for putting inner work at the core of your response. We invite you to use this brief to make the case for inner work to your team or organization.

What is inner work?

Inner work is any form of deliberate and ongoing reflective practice that increases awareness of self, others, and the systems in which complex problems arise, and enables an individual or group to connect to a deeper sense of purpose.

Sometimes called self-inquiry or personal reflection, inner work encompasses an array of practices, alone and with others. Mindfulness practice, silent retreats, regular quiet times or conscious pauses in a busy day, journaling, creative exploration alone or in groups, dialogue walks, deep listening, contemplation of an object or image – these are a few examples of inner work practices.

Whatever its form, inner work needs to be tethered to a deeper understanding of outer reality. Without insight and attention to concrete circumstances and relationships, an inward turn may be mere navel-gazing or escapism. Awareness and connection are the roots of inner work practices that make a positive difference to our actions.

Inner work in this sense is not a distraction from real work or an indulgence for the privileged few.

It is a ‘muscle’, a ‘skill’, that all of us simply in virtue of being human must constantly work to develop. I spend a lot of time working with financial institutions – they need it. I spend a lot of time working in government institutions – they need it.

(Martin Kalunga-Banda, Senior Faculty, Presencing Institute)

A growing body of research shows the value of inner work

Inner work strengthens personal and organizational wellbeing. It shifts our way of seeing, being, and acting; it helps leaders improve focus, manage emotions, and think more holistically. It can catalyze and sustain innovation and collaboration, within sectors and across sectors, as well as in teams and organizations. How do we know?

A large body of research – spanning brain science, psychology, and social science – offers evidence of how inner work contributes to wellbeing, resilience, compassion, and pro-social behavior. In this brief we draw primarily from qualitative studies for the Inner Work for Social Change Project (<https://innerworkforsocialchange.org>) and The Wellbeing Project (<https://wellbeing-project.org>) to show the power of inner work for leaders and change-makers. Together, these studies demonstrate the value of inner work through its effects at three different levels – individual, team or organization, and sector or multisectoral field.

Individual outcomes

Inner work is essentially brain training. The more we do that inner work, the more we understand and regulate ourselves, the more we understand and feel connected to others, and this changes the way we lead and the way we solve problems.

(Gretchen Ki Steidle)

Inner work enables leaders and practitioners to reclaim a more whole and balanced identity. In a competitive environment, as we strive to cultivate a niche for our organizations or ourselves, our work practices may perpetuate blind spots and an anxious obsession with work. Work becomes all-consuming, cutting us off – mentally and emotionally – from family, friends, colleagues, and peers. Through inner work we become more aware of aspects of ourselves, our relationships, and our lives that we’ve been ignoring or hiding. Awareness brings greater clarity of purpose and reduces the gap between our professional and personal selves.

Inner work diminishes stress, renews hope, and releases fear of failure. By stilling the mind and calming the central nervous system, we are better able to regulate ourselves and our responses to stressful situations. Inner work fosters emotional intelligence. In this way, it helps us to be more level-headed in our responses to difficult situations. Examples from case studies of public health initiatives in The Philippines and Namibia illustrate how guided reflective practices invigorate hope and a sense of personal agency and resilience.

We impose harsh standards on ourselves, fearing that we fail if we show our weaknesses. When we acknowledge our vulnerabilities we are better able to act with integrity, to connect with others at a human level, to build trust, empathise with others, and respect their perspectives. Letting go of fear makes us more willing to risk new ideas and bolder action.

Inner work can awaken and hone leadership capacity. Inner work changes the way leaders lead, helping them discover a more compassionate, inclusive approach that builds on trust and collaboration. Being more trusting and trustworthy are preconditions for bridging leadership – the capacity and will to build trust and tap the

fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, across divides, to work collaboratively for a common purpose.

That inner space we come from before we take action is what to a large extent determines the quality of what we get Almost any traditional wisdom you go to talks about the need to widen ‘inner eyes’, ...to make sure your ‘inner ears’ are clean enough to perceive what is going on.

(Martin Kalunga-Banda)

The quality of our actions, relationships, and leadership is closely tied to discernment, to how and what we ‘see’, to how deeply we listen.

Organization and team outcomes

Inner work helps to build coherence between values, purpose, and practice.

When purpose, values and practice are not aligned, havoc ensues. Poor alignment shatters trust - within an organization, between the organization and its beneficiaries or clients, and in the public at large. Inner work can be a catalyst for transparency, a shared sense of purpose, better alignment, and more trustworthy relationships and organizational practices.

There is no wellbeing strategy without a well-doing strategy and if you have a well-doing strategy you have a happy management and, probably, happy shareholders and happy customers.

(Bruno Vercken, Global Head of Safety, Health, and Working Conditions, Danone)

Intentional reflective practice forges cohesive, resilient teams with a shared sense of purpose. Deep attentive listening, reflective dialogues, exercises in empathy and appreciation all contribute to a sense of belonging, where each team member’s contribution is encouraged, recognized, and valued. This can inspire and empower teams to do the best possible work, with the courage to persist in the face of adversity or uncertainty. Case study stories illustrate how a deep self-awareness, a sensitive external awareness, greater personal and team will, and ownership of a problem or challenge – whether in public health, education, or child nutrition – developed trust in

the team, which in turn translated into concrete actions based on an analysis of the problem.

Ultimately, if we have people doing their inner work, leading from a place of less judgment and bias, and a greater sense of purpose and connection, then we have organizations that function optimally, that can drive real transformation.

(Gretchen Ki Steidle)

Outcomes for sectors and multisector fields

Bridging leaders who have realized the value of inner work may build a collective practice in their own organization or reach beyond to cultivate reflective spaces for collaboration in the wider sector.

Well-crafted reflective processes can boost collaboration and create opportunities for innovative problem-solving that leverages wisdom from diverse groups of stakeholders. Cases from the Inner Work for Social Change Project show how inner work engenders whole-hearted collective agency towards resolving an urgent, complex problem. For example, through the Bhavishya Alliance, diverse actors from across the system worked together to end child undernutrition in the Indian state of Maharashtra. They learned together, looked within themselves and opened their hearts to listen to others, allowing new kinds of solutions to emerge. In South Africa, honest conversations during retreats for school communities engendered a shared commitment and mutual accountability for quality education in participating rural schools.

Inner work that focuses on the multi-layered ecosystems that give rise to social and environmental problems, such as Covid-19, can deepen understanding of the root causes of a problem and of the lived experiences and priorities of those who are most directly affected.

Start investing in inner work now

Inner work demands and sparks courage; it can be frightening or discomfiting; and it cannot be forced. So, how can an organization even begin to invest in inner work? Here are some suggestions.

Make small shifts to organizational life to support individual and team well-being. Well-tailored incremental changes to policies, personal development procedures and workflow management can go a long way toward nurturing a healthier and more attuned organizational culture.

Let a new energy emerge in your organization through an inclusive, participatory process of working towards your stated values, incorporating a commitment to personal growth and reflective practice.

Use practices that fit the purposes of your work and its unique circumstances. Inner work practices often draw from spiritual traditions of historically marginalized groups. Practice with care and respect for these traditions; invite the wisdom of people within your organization to develop practices that explore diverse voices, traditions, and experiences. Acknowledge systemic racism and create an environment where people can reflect on and talk productively about issues related to race and inequity.

Make space for reflection in your frantic day-to-day business. Embed some simple practices in your regular work. These could include: deliberate pauses for quiet time or journaling; moments of silence or attention to the breath at the start of a meeting, followed by a brief round of personal check-ins. In individual quiet time, you might set a topic for self-reflection. For example,

...you can reflect on yourself as an instrument...when you truly reflect on yourself as an instrument, there are many aspects that come into view, and that's an exciting journey to travel

(Henri van Eeghen, CEO, Synergos).

Periodically, set aside for time for group reflection on questions like: What is holding us back as a group from truly pursuing our purpose? What may we need to give up to build more authentic relationships with other groups? Where are we reluctant to give up power, and why?

In conclusion

We need new ways of being and relating; we need bridging leaders who act with moral integrity and courage; we need well-doing organizations. Most of all, we need innovative solutions to the incredibly complex problems we are facing.

Inner work on its own is no panacea. Yet its benefits are clear.

Why wait? Go to <https://innerworkforsocialchange.org> for more resources on inner work and how it can help you transform your work and the world.

Resources

Video conversations about inner work, leadership, and social impact work

What is inner work for social change? A fireside chat with Peggy Dulany (Founder, Synergos), Bob Boisture (President, Fetzer Institute), and Krista Tippett (Host, On Being). <https://youtu.be/U0WB02PvdGs>

What does inner work for social change look like in practice? A conversation with case writers Andrea Rodericks, DeeDee Yates, and Morabo Morojele. <https://youtu.be/Roy49DZj1ZQ>

How does inner work improve us and our world? A conversation with case writers from Brazil (Renato Guimaraes), Ethiopia (Beyene Tadesse), and the Phillipines (Heidee Buenaventura). https://youtu.be/lxdB_ej3cfs

How to make the case for inner work in your organization: A conversation with Gretchen Ki Steidle, Martin Kulunga-Banda, Bruno Vercken, and Henri van Eeghen. (Part 4 of a four-part virtual learning series on Inner Work for Social Change) <https://youtu.be/zNW4J32KLzc>

Stories about the value of inner work and bridging leadership

Baj's story – How inner work helped a public health official come back from the brink of despair. <https://www.innerworkforsocialchange.org/baj-philippines>.

Finding the Courage to Lead: Manish's story. <https://www.innerworkforsocialchange.org/manish-india>.

Leading Through Listening: Usman's Story. <https://www.innerworkforsocialchange.org/usman-ethiopia>.

Walking in their Shoes: Alicky's story. <https://www.innerworkforsocialchange.org/alicky-namibia>.

Segogo's Story – How exercises in radical honesty and trust building helped a school principal and his community change the trajectory of a struggling school. <https://www.innerworkforsocialchange.org/segogo-south-africa>.

Aurelino’s Story – How an education secretary used the power of multi-sector collaboration, rooted in trust, to help more students in his city access a quality education. <https://www.innerworkforsocialchange.org/aurelino-brazil>

Case studies and cross-case analysis

Buenaventura, Heidee. Bridging inner and system governance: Co-creating responsive health systems for better health outcomes of the Filipino Poor. Synergos, 2020.

Guimarães, Renato. Jumping into the waves of the river: A case study of the Pact for Education in Pará, Brazil. Synergos, 2020.

Morojele, Morabo. Remember not to forget: Reigniting ubuntu for school change in South Africa. Synergos, 2020.

Pendlebury, Shirley. Take heart: Learning from six case studies. Synergos, 2020.

Rodericks, Andrea. The courage to lead: The Bhavishya Alliance’s journey in tackling undernutrition in Maharashtra, India, 2006–2012. Synergos 2020.

Tadesse, Beyene. A blink of transformation: Building trust and collaboration in Ethiopia’s malt barley value chain. Synergos, 2020.

Yates, DeeDee. Exploring inner and outer geographies: A joint expedition in public health leadership. A case study of the African Public Health Leadership Initiative, Namibia, 2008–2013. Synergos, 2020.

Books and articles on inner work, leadership and social change

For articles from The Wellbeing Project, see the special series, “Centred Self: The Connection between Inner Well-Being and Social Change”, in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, especially:

Beidenbach, Joanna. Addressing the Critiques of Well-Being, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Jun. 17, 2020.

Cookman, Alana and Gayle Karen Young Whyte. Integrating Individual and Organizational Well-Being, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Jul. 15, 2020.

Grdina, Linda Bell, Nora Johnson and Aaron Pereira. Connecting Individual and Societal Change, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Mar. 11, 2020.

Winters, Mary-Frances. Equity and Inclusion: The Roots of Organizational Well-Being, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Oct. 14, 2020.

Also see:

Steidle, Gretchen Ki. “Leading from Within: How Mindfulness Drives Effective Leadership and Social Innovation.” Executive Forum, *Leader to Leader*, 2018.

Steidle, Gretchen Ki. *Leading from Within: Conscious Social Change and Mindfulness for Social Innovation*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017.

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The Inner Work for Social Change Project



Synergos and the Fetzer Institute began the project on Inner Work for Social Change in 2018 to demonstrate how Inner Work and Bridging Leadership can enable more effective social action towards a better world. Through six commissioned case studies and in dialogue with thought leaders, development practitioners, and others, the project aims to spark a global conversation on how reflective practices can make social action more aware, more ethically attuned, and more sustainable.

Together, the case studies explore the intricate connection between our inner selves and our work in the world, between reflection and action, between leadership and collaboration. Each case study portrays an effort to address a systemic and complex social problem: child malnutrition in the Indian state of Maharashtra; infant and maternal mortality and troubled public health systems in Namibia and the Philippines; dysfunctional schools and an underperforming education system in South Africa and in the state of Pará in Brazil; and a fragmented, stagnating agro-economy in Ethiopia. A cross-case analysis draws out the main themes and lessons from the case studies.

Within the project, *inner work* is any form of reflective practice that increases awareness of self, others, and the systems in which complex social problems arise. Inner work is core to *bridging leadership*, which is the capacity and will to build trust and tap the fullest contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them to come together across divides to work in concert for the common good. A definition paper for the project elaborates the concept of inner work and its relationship to bridging leadership and social change.

Synergos is a global organization helping solve complex issues around the world by advancing bridging leadership, which builds trust and collective action.

The Inner Work for Social Change project aims to shed light on the power of personal transformation in social impact.

To learn more, visit innerworkforsocialchange.org.

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INNER WORK for SOCIAL CHANGE

ABOUT SYNERGOS

Synergos is a global organization helping solve complex issues around the world by advancing bridging leadership, which builds trust and collective action.

We believe in the power of building trust. It's how we create regenerative solutions around the world.

For more information, visit synergos.org.



ABOUT THE FETZER INSTITUTE

The Fetzer Institute builds the spiritual foundation for a loving world: a world where we understand we are all part of one human family and know our lives have purpose.

Creating a more just, sustainable, and thriving world requires new forms of leadership that use the power of spirituality and Inner Work to create a more connected, loving society.

For more information, visit fetzer.org.

