



TUKAE TUSEMESANE

Let's Sit Down and Reason Together
A Collaborative Curriculum



A silhouette of a tree with a glowing orb on its branch against a sunset background. The tree is dark against the bright, orange and yellow sky. A large, bright, glowing orb is positioned on one of the lower branches of the tree, casting a soft glow. The background is a gradient of warm colors, from deep orange at the top to a lighter yellow at the bottom.

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2014 we were awarded a generous grant from the [Taos Institute](#) to develop a culturally relevant curriculum for building strengths and collaborative dialogue in NGO teams in East Africa. We worked with the [Kimo Wellness Foundation](#) and present a structured process that:

- Intensifies listening and communication skills
- Cultivates character strengths
- Enhances safe connections in relationships
- Builds well-being and resilience
- Increases civility in organizations and communities


These pages reflect the ideas that many people have brought to bear on the question: What relational processes support the possibility of a good life, society or world? What kinds of dialogical processes cultivate strength and well-being in community? While the language and guidelines may appear fixed on these pages, as further voices are added to the mix, the vocabulary and the process itself will be altered and enhanced. As the team from Kimo reminds us, we are always in the process of “making a better bread”.



TIMELINE

Timeline	Preparation for Collaboration	Step One: Talking About Strengths and Taking the VIA	Step Two: Team Participates In Trust Interview	Step Three: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interview	Step Four: Strength Storytelling and Reflective Practice	Collaborative Planning
<i>Actions</i>	<p>Collaborative dialogue about project</p> <p>Coach leaders for VIA introduction to team – talking about strengths</p> <p>Leaders take the VIA assessment</p>	<p>Team takes VIA assessment</p> <p>Leaders discuss trust and safety discussed and “IMANI” interview reviewed</p> <p>Leaders model and share their trust stories</p>	<p>Team participates in trust interview</p> <p>Leaders analyze VIA data and prepare team report</p>	<p>Coach leaders for VIA group results</p> <p>Coach leaders for strength storytelling and reflective practice</p>	<p>Strength storytelling and reflective practice</p> <p>Sharing the origins of our strengths</p>	<p>New ways of moving forward together</p> <p>Strategic planning for future goals toward collaborative governance</p>
<i>Goals and Skills</i>	<p>Create a context for trust</p> <p>Collaborative dialogue</p> <p>Engagement To develop a mutual understanding of the meaning of collaboration and the project intentions.</p> <p>“Marrying our ideas to make a better bread”</p>	<p>Assess character strengths</p> <p>Develop a team language of strengths</p> <p>Self-awareness develops as we talk about our strengths</p>	<p>Increased trust and engagement</p> <p>Empathy and compassion increases and shared meaning develops</p>	<p>Learn dialogical practices: reflection, appreciation and practice</p> <p>Team facilitation</p> <p>Collaborative action: making sure all voices are heard</p> <p>Fairness and justice modeling and amplification</p>	<p>Develop a team language of strengths</p> <p>Witnessing, Listening, Respecting, Validation, Mirroring</p> <p>Self-reflection, Reflection-in-action</p> <p>Strength spotting</p>	<p>Putting the strengths to use through specific action steps</p> <p>Describing practical strategies to reach future goals</p> <p>Apply goals in action steps for success</p>

STEP ONE: Talking About Strengths and Taking the VIA



The VIA Survey is a widely used and validated tool that is used for assessing character strengths. This assessment explores 24 strengths and six organizing categories called virtues. The VIA Survey is an online self-administered assessment tool.

Here is the link:

<http://appreciativeaction.pro.viasurvey.org/Account/Register>

The VIA-IS was developed to measure character strengths. While the report provides a list from 1- 24, the 24th is simply a less used strength and not meant to be viewed as a deficit or weakness.

The survey was influenced by the great religious and philosophical traditions of the world. So for example for any of the strengths to be included, all cultures, traditions, people, would agree that the strength is valued. Courage for example is seen as a character strength by all people, as is Humor or Compassion.

The VIA fits with the Appreciative Inquiry belief that we move in the direction of what we study. So if we want to build an organization that is built on the strength of its people, then the first step is to create a process that allows for these strengths to be identified and appreciated. Once these are identified, they then serve as a resource that can be used in service of community or organizational goals or team initiatives.

STEP TWO: Team Participates In Trust Interview

Directions for facilitators

Goals

1. To explore the group's ideas and feelings about trust and safety.
2. To introduce and discuss the assessment of character strengths.
3. To learn the principles of dialogical practice for teams: reflection, appreciation and practice.
4. To conduct a team interview about trust

Time: (note - this really depends on the total size of your group. The following process is geared for about 15 participants.)

Part I

90 minutes: Interview pairs

- Interview first direction- 30 minutes
- Interview other direction - 30 minutes
- 30 minute break

Part II

90 minutes: Reflective practice following trust interviews

- Large group sharing of trust stories

Discussion points and instructions for facilitators

Appreciative interviews allow us to discover what is meaningful and important to another person, and to learn how that person makes sense of the world. They are an opportunity to hear stories about another

STEP TWO: Team Participates In Trust Interview

person's life experiences: their successes, values, hopes and dreams for the future. Appreciative interviews create mutual understanding and respect. They build shared knowledge and collective wisdom. They deepen relationships and generate new possibilities for people to go forward together. Don't be surprised if you learn as much about your self in the process as you do about your interview partner.

The information and stories collected via appreciative interviews serve as data for identifying what works well when you and your team are the best you can be. You are invited to interview a partner and he or she will interview you as well. You will be asked to share your partner's stories and "quotable quotes" at a later time.

Please remind people to take notes as they listen to your partner's feelings and ideas. Participants will be asked to create a clean copy of all their notes after the interview and we would like to receive a transcribed copy of every-

one's interview. Please refer to the IMANI Trust in Teams document for a copy of the interviews to give out to everyone, and make extras so they can re-write them if they want to.

After the paired interviews, the whole group will get together and you will be asked to respectfully share your partner's stories. Make sure you that the stories you tell your partner are ok to share with the larger group, so you feel safe. We will provide specific and clear guidelines for the group so everyone will get some feedback about how their stories are being received. This is usually a very positive and uplifting experience for people.

Some helpful reminders:

- Take time to build a connection before beginning the conversation. Share a little informal time hearing who this person is and let them know a little bit about who you are.
- Have a second copy of the interview guide available. In

STEP TWO: Team Participates In Trust Interview



most cases, English will be someone's second language – more easily read than heard. In others, someone will be more visual than auditory. In either case, they might have an easier time answering complex questions if they can read along with you. Having an extra copy of the guide will give people that option, if they need it.

- Give people time and space to take things at their own pace. Some people warm up immediately; others take time. If the interview begins to get really interesting just as it's finishing, see if there is time to go back and think again about earlier questions. Likewise, if your partner's having difficulty answering a particular question, save it until the end.

- Show your partner that you are really listening and that you really care. Keep your body relaxed and open – comfortably close, and gently facing them. Try to avoid being separated from them by a table. Take notes as needed but try to avoid letting it be distracting. Make

eye contact. Allow your facial expressions and verbal reinforcement to reflect your genuine interest. If you are curious and want some more information, by all means ask for it!

- Close by summarizing what most inspired you. Because appreciative interviews are grounded in relationship, honor the relationship by sharing your experience. Tell people what you learned from them . . . how their stories have changed the way you see the organization and the world. Your partner has trusted you with his or her stories, hopes, and dreams. Honor that trust by trusting them, in return.

We suggest that you tell participants that this interview focuses on the importance of trust and safety. It is an inquiry into what you value most about trust in teams. Organizations are at their best when they are engaged and connected, and when trust is shared among people at all levels of the group. This interview provides a good foundation for all of the conversations that follow because we need to feel trust to share important parts of ourselves with others.

STEP TWO: Team Participates In Trust Interview

Please request that team members use the following questions to interview their partners and then be interviewed in return. The best way to do this is to go through one complete interview, and then shift roles and conduct the second interview. Remind them to listen with an open heart and an open mind. And please don't forget to take good notes.

Part I

Directions: (60 minutes) Paired Interviews

Pair up and take about 30 minutes in each direction. Make sure everyone fills out the responses on a copy of the interview guide, so handout a copy to everyone. They can take a 30 minute break after the pair is finished. It is useful to remind the pair when about 40 minutes has passed so they do not run over time. Read the interview aloud with the participants following along and then have

them get started. Good Luck!
Trust Interview

Imani- Trust in Teams

Let's start by talking about working with others. All teamwork requires trust among team members – trust that you can depend on one another, that all members will support the direction of Kimo, share information and resources equitably, and that everyone will be kept informed through open and honest communication. An environment of trust is established intentionally with lots of thought and patience.

Remember: Please take your time, because you should write down good and complete notes that we will collect about your partner's story. Use the back of the paper if needed. The facilitator will give you a new piece of paper to re-write your notes later if you need one.

STEP TWO: Team Participates In Trust Interview



Trust in Teams

Tell me about a time when you experienced being a part of a group like this. It could be with this group or another group or team that you have been part of as a member. It is often a family group or a community group. Please share that story. Really tell all of the details.

- a. What group are you thinking about? Can you tell me some of the details about this group? Who are they? How old were you when you were a part of this group? Are you still connected with them?
- b. How was trust established and maintained in the group?
- c. How did you know that trust was present and how did you establish and nurture it?
- d. What were the benefits of having an “environment of trust”? To you? To the group?

STEP THREE: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interviews

ACTION:

Reflective practice

GOALS:

Individuals develop micro skills for success
To develop a team language of strengths
Team develops skills and rules of engagement needed for dialogical process
To increase team trust and connection

SKILLS:

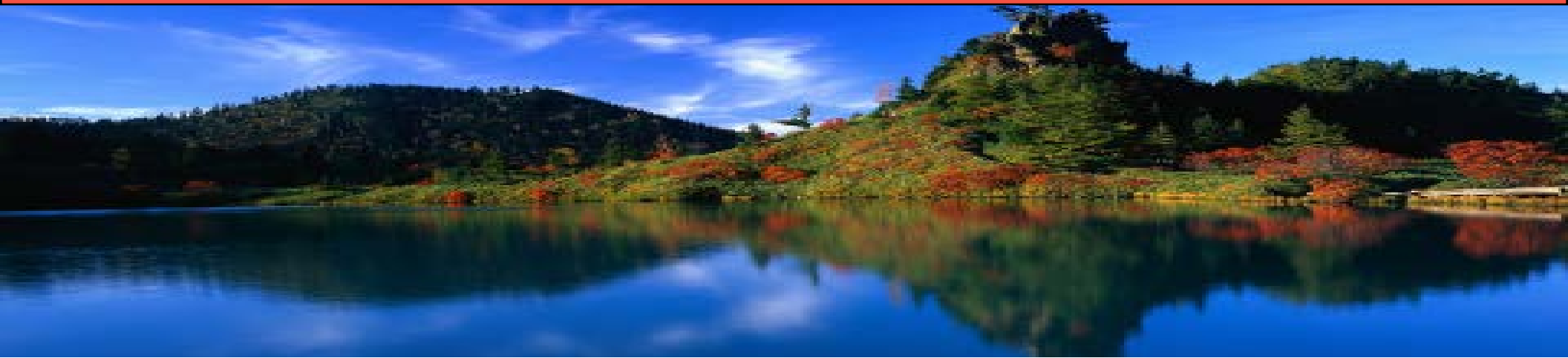
- Witnessing
- Listening
- Respecting (e.g., eye contact)
- Validation
- Mirroring
- Self-reflection
- Reflection-in-action
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Strength spotting

Background Information for Team Leaders

Why pay attention to Character Strengths? Character Strengths and Resilience.

There is a growing body of research that indicates that character strengths predict success in challenging contexts. For example, Duckworth, et al. (2007) found that “grit” or perseverance was a strong predictor of successful completion of basic training among West point cadets and US Army Special Forces completion (in Cornum et al., 2011). The character strengths of teamwork, courage, optimism, honesty, leadership, persistence and self-regulation are important mediators of success in situations characterized by significant physical, cognitive and emotional challenges (Matthews, 2008). Hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-regulation, and perspective buffer against the negative effects of stress and trauma (Park & Peterson, 2006, 2009). Posttraumatic growth in various dimensions corresponds with particular character strengths: improved relationships with others (kindness, love), openness to new

STEP THREE: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interviews



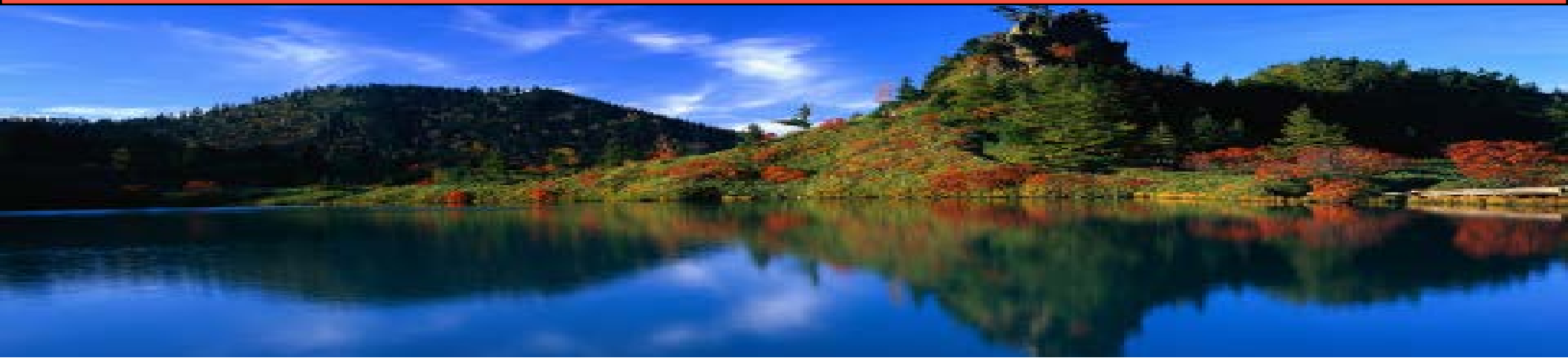
possibilities (curiosity, creativity, love of learning), greater appreciation of life (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, zest), enhanced personal strength (bravery, honesty, perseverance), and spiritual development and religiousness (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Persistence, honesty, prudence, and love were inversely related to acts of aggression (Park & Peterson, 2008).

In her review of the US Army Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) Program, with a sample of over 1.1 million participants, Cornum, et.al. (2011) says “research has linked character strengths to positive adjustment among people who had experienced a significant psychological or physical illness (p.6).” While traditional organizational development measures have focused on repairing weakness, these approaches have little to offer with respect to how to improve the performance and well-being of large numbers of people. The resilience agenda outlined by USAID similarly suggests that they are “doing business differently” to help vulnerable communities emerge from cycles of crisis onto a pathway toward

development by connecting humanitarian assistance and development programs more effective “across the common goal of building resilience (<http://www.usaid.gov/resilience>).” There is a clear and voiced need for “resiliency programming that contributes to a sustainable reduction in vulnerability and more inclusive growth.” This cannot be realized in isolation. If these goals are to be reached within communities, NGO’s will need parallel effective and measurable interventions for resiliency within their own teams and organizations.

The need for a team intervention model Cooperrider (2011) suggests that for true organizational and community transformation the relevant question is: “How do we take isolated strengths and help take them to a new octave?” In addition to empirically based assessment and analysis, interventions need to have measurable impact. Clifton and Harter (2003) suggest that changes in one’s sense of self helps interpret the situation and context around that person through a different lens and leads to changed behaviors and improved performance at work. Mayerson

STEP THREE: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interviews



(2013) suggests that when people think that their organization is attending to optimizing their character strengths they are motivated and feel that they are up to the challenge. “Adequate resources have to do with not only having the right amount of person-power and associated physical resources, but also the degree to which people feel they and their co-workers are deployed to optimize their talents and motivation. In this light it becomes important to not only explore the prevalence of certain VIA character strengths but also the degree to which people feel that their top strengths and the top strengths of their colleagues are being maximized (2013, Mayerson, personal communication).”

Pre-step. Please form a large circle with the group. Check-in and recall the rules of engagement. The team will unite for a common task. You will aim to have a feeling of oneness. You can speak one language and appreciate each other’s strengths for the growth of your group and community.

Step 1.

The first pair of interview partners start the process. The first pair pulls their chairs outside of the circle and face each other. The rest of the group forms a semi-circle and gets ready to observe and listen with full attention. Each person tells the other one’s story about trust while the group just listens.



STEP THREE: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interviews



Step 2. Reflective feedback - This part occurs after the trust storytelling is over and the first interview pair has shared their stories. Now, the group offers appreciative reflections using the Walking the Journey Together rules of engagement. The pair stays outside of a closed circle and are free to just listen to the team reflect on the stories. They do not respond. They are free to purely listen. Each team member takes a turn and offers brief reflections. Usually speaking for about 2 minutes each, but this is flexible.

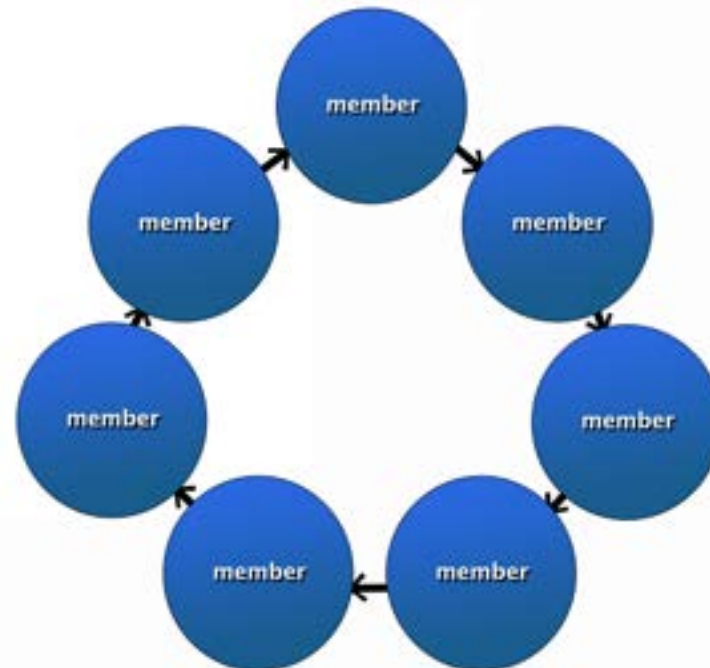
After the reflections are complete, the pair express gratitude for the reflections and then rejoin the group and another pair takes their place. Repeat with the next pair (see Step 1.)



STEP THREE: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interviews



Step 3. When everyone has had a turn, the group discusses the process all together.



STEP THREE: Reflective Practice Following Trust Interviews



Rules of Engagement for Dialogical Practice

For your group to be successful, the members must trust and come from their strengths

1. Suspend assumptions and keep an open mind. A dialogue is a shared quest for meaning.
2. Lift every voice. Our intention is to lift everyone's voice higher. Make sure every voice is heard.
3. Honor our differences. We can honor our differences without trying to reconcile them. Wonder, "Where is our common ground?" How do we walk the journey together?
4. We create meaning together (a "memorandum of understanding"). Without others meaning breaks down, value is lost, and the team loses its vitality.
5. Create a safe place. There must be a "safe container" created for the conversation, a place without hostility or fear.
6. Observe and listen to one another. Also listen to your own inner voice.
7. Be appreciative, attentive and respectful, allow space for the other without interrupting and offer positive rather than judging comments or questions...

STEP FOUR: Strength storytelling and reflective practice: Tukae Tusemesane



In the following facilitation, the team will engage in a presentation of their strengths. The presentation of strengths invites team members to wonder where their signature strengths might have originated and what people, places and situations encourage them to thrive.

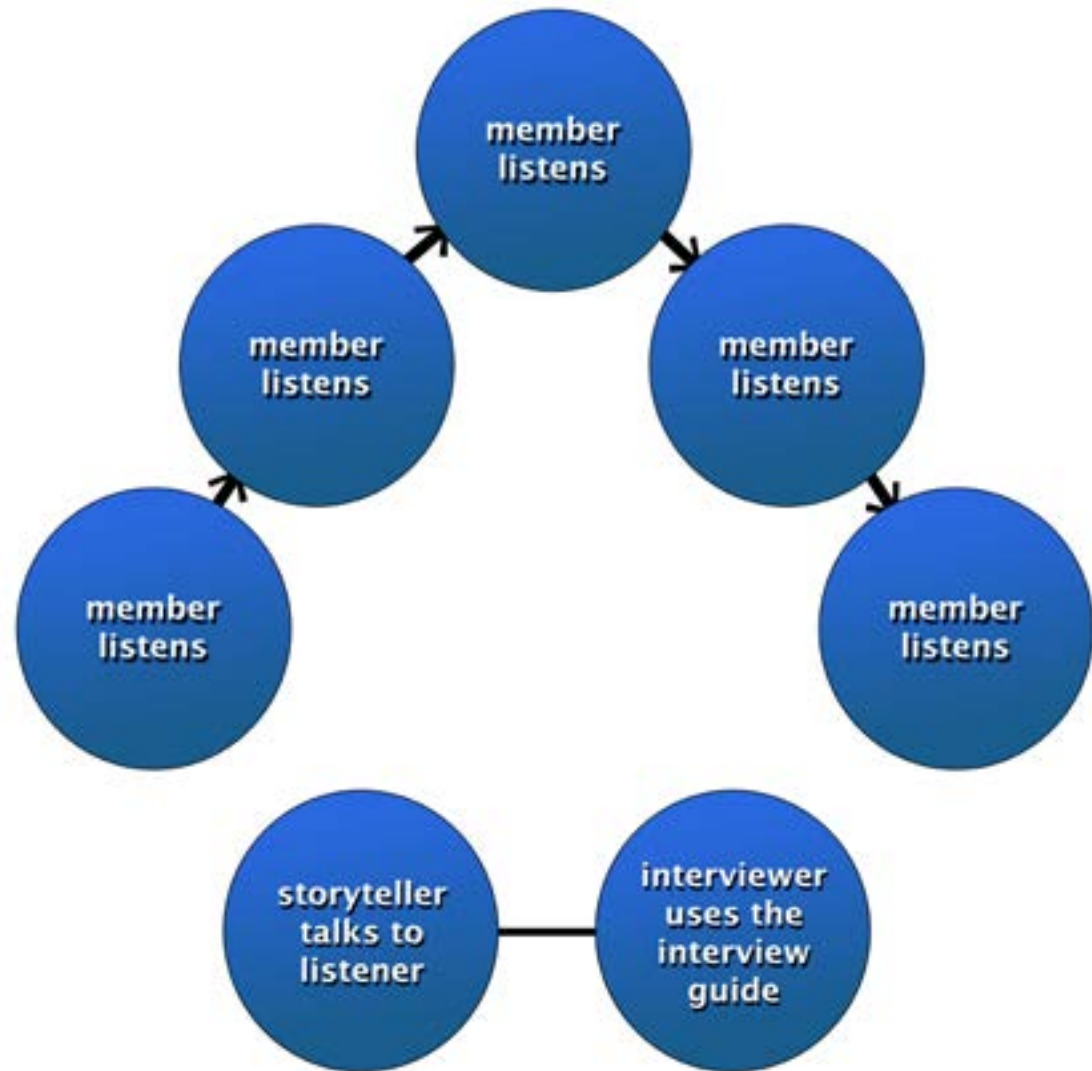
Pre-step:

Please form a large circle with the group. Check-in and recall the rules of engagement from the last group meeting. The team will again unite for a common task. You will aim to have a feeling of oneness. You can speak one language and appreciate each other's strengths for the growth of your group and community. Now recall the conversation from the last meeting about trust and safety. What are the factors that created a feeling of trust and safety in this group? List them on a board or large piece of paper for everyone to see and remember throughout the day.

Step 1:

Next, choose pairs of interview partners. This can be done in whatever way works best for your team. The first pair pulls their chairs outside of the circle and face each other. The rest of the group forms a semi-circle and gets ready to observe and listen with full attention. The storyteller (everyone gets a turn eventually) recalls his or her VIA strengths and picks one or two that he or she wants to talk about with the interviewer. The interviewer will ask (see the Cultivating Strengths Interview at the end of this guide) the storyteller to think about where his or her strength came from, was the strength learned from life's lessons, or were you born with it? If they were learned, who taught them to you or how did you learn to have the strength? The storyteller is then interviewed by his or her partner in front of the whole group. It is important for the interviewer and storyteller to just look right at each other and pretend that no one else is there so you can concentrate. After your interview is finished (about 20-30 minutes or more if needed), you relax and just listen to the group offer their reflections.

STEP FOUR: Strength storytelling and reflective practice: Tukae Tusemesane



STEP FOUR: Strength storytelling and reflective practice: Tukae Tusemesane



Step 2:

Reflective feedback - This part occurs after the interview is over and the first team member has told his or her story. Now, the group offers appreciative reflections about the strength of the storyteller, using the Walking the Journey Together rules of engagement that are attached here and also included as a separate handout. The storyteller and the interviewer stay outside of a closed circle and are free to just listen to the team reflect on the interview and the strengths. The interview pair stays outside of the circle to listen to the appreciative feedback. They do not respond. They are free to purely listen. The storyteller might want to take notes because it is hard to remember everything that is said. Each team member takes a turn and offers reflections. Usually speaking for about 3 minutes each, but this is flexible.

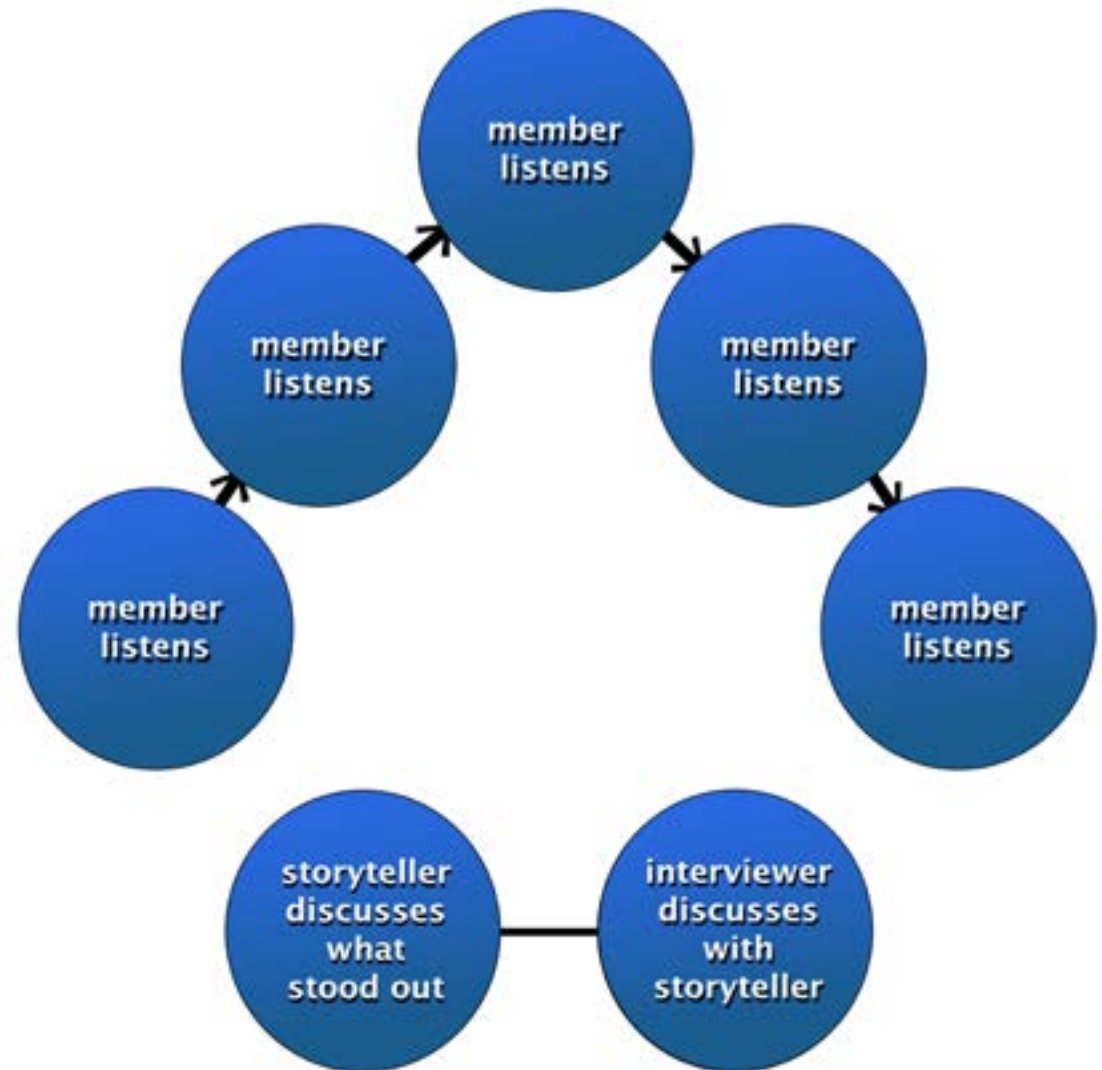


STEP FOUR: Strength storytelling and reflective practice: Tukae Tusemesane



Step 3:

After the reflections are complete, the interviewer and the storytelling then discuss the ideas from the group reflections that were most useful or meaningful. They just have a dialogue with each other and not with the group yet.

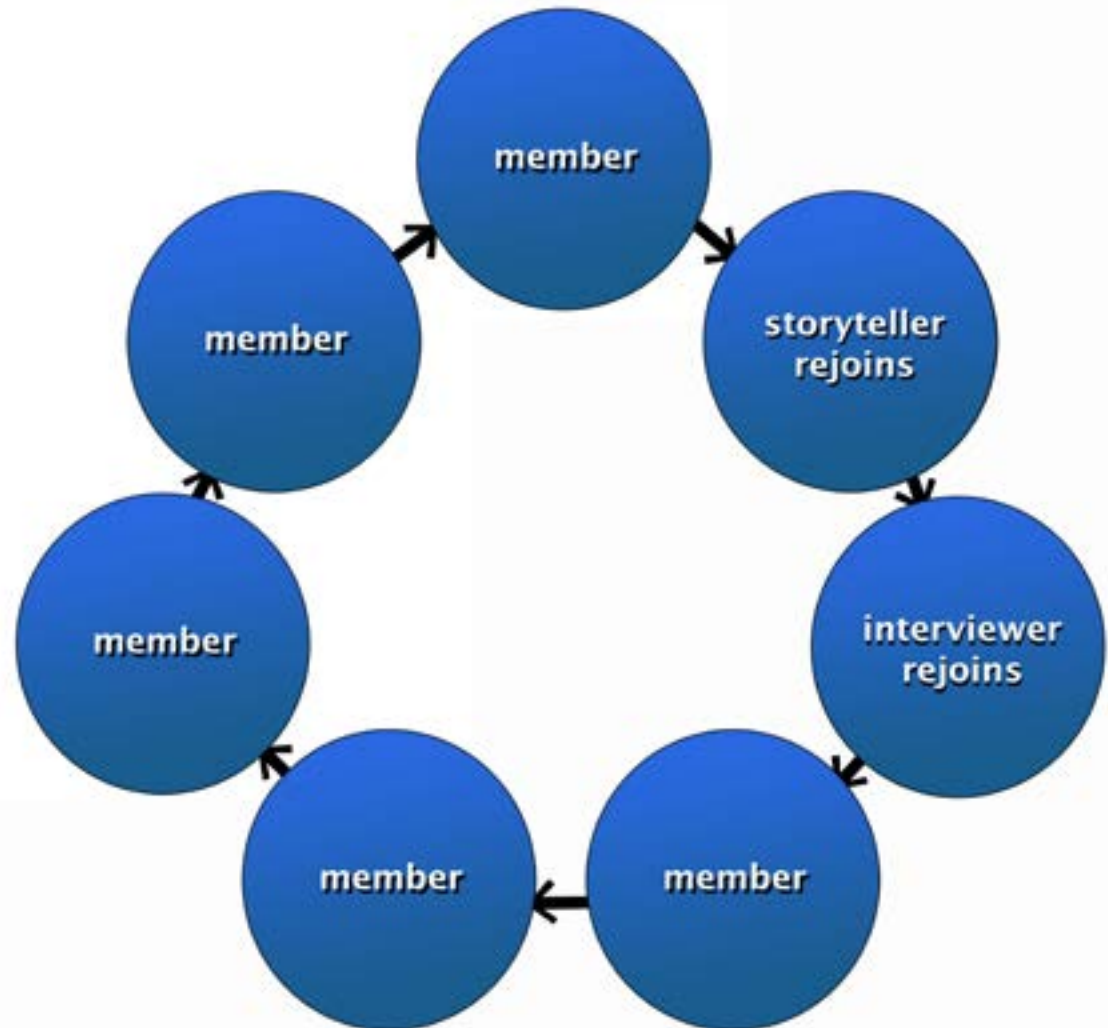


STEP FOUR: Strength storytelling and reflective practice: Tukae Tusemesane



Step 4:

When the interviewer and the storyteller are done discussing, the storyteller and interviewer rejoin the circle and everyone talks together about the experience. Then, the next storyteller becomes the interviewer and the process is repeated with all the pairs until every member has a turn.



STEP FOUR: Strength storytelling and reflective practice: Tukae Tusemesane



Cultivating Strengths Interview

When we live connected to our strengths we are more likely to feel a sense of purpose that gives rise to psychological well-being and happiness. In this exercise we invite you to take a deep dive to the origin of your signature strengths. The VIA provides a lens from which we can view and reflect on our strengths. A signature strength is a character trait that is deeply held – a trait that is part of defining one's essence. It is a very strong tendency of thought, feeling, and action. As opposed to other character strengths, signature strengths are so central to a person's psychological identity that suppressing or ignoring any of those strengths would seem unnatural and very difficult. There are many different kinds of stories that might be told. While some might include positive emotions, many tales of courage, justice, humanity, wisdom, temperance, and transcendence are filled with struggle or adversity. All of these situations provide us with valuable lessons.

1. After reviewing your VIA results you may recognize some strengths as very familiar or you may have a different understanding of your strengths. You know yourself best. How do you describe your signature strengths?
2. Next, pick one or two of your signature strengths and think about the origin of these strengths and connect them with your early experiences. Some strengths feel as though you were born with them, they are just part of who you are and have always been. They are part of your temperament. Other strengths are learned through experience, some are even learned through adversity or especially challenging circumstances. What might give your partner a pretty clear picture or idea about where this strength came from? Tell the story of the origin of your strength(s).
 - What are the factors that were important to the situation?
 - Who noticed this strength and endorsed it for you?
 - What good things have come from the times that you have “lived into” or actualized this strength?

TRUST INTERVIEW



Imani - Trust in Teams

Let's start by talking about working with others. All teamwork requires trust among team members – trust that you can depend on one another, that all members will support the direction of your group, share information and resources equitably, and that everyone will be kept informed through open and honest communication. An environment of trust is established intentionally with lots of thought and patience.

Remember: Please take your time, because you should write down good and complete notes that we will collect about your partner's story. Use the back of the paper if needed. The facilitator will give you a new piece of paper to re-write your notes later if you need one.

Part 1: Trust in Teams

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How was trust established and maintained in the group?

How did you know that trust was present and how did you establish and nurture it?

What were the benefits of having an “environment of trust”?

To you?

To the group?

REFLECTING GUIDELINES

Ideas for dialogical practice

For communities to be successful, the members must trust and come from their strengths

1. Suspend assumptions and keep an open mind. A dialogue is a shared quest for meaning.
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We thank the Taos Institute for their generous support and guidance and the Kimo Wellness Foundation for their wisdom and friendship.

