Self and collective care: How do we nurture, rest and play?

We've learned from our histories and lived realities within the oppressive and exploitative ableist systems and gender norms that precarity, poverty, structural discrimination and exclusion perpetuate and deepen the red flags of our vulnerability. Those red flags are harder to pinpoint in the shared digital reality, unless we clearly communicate them in advance and/or as they happen.

Care is central to our work, meaning that we focus on people and decisions that protect, support and facilitate the development of connection and relationships. At APC we are still building our model of care that is based in justice, and this is an ongoing process and something we are still learning about. However, here are some of our insights and reflections gained so far:

Consider having permanent spaces dedicated to self and collective care. Dedicated virtual rooms can be set up during your event to share the skills and rituals people use to practice care. This will open an informal space of sharing where participants will be able to share their own ways of caring and learn new ones. At APC we have started doing this weekly with dedicated time and virtual rooms where people can come together to do collages, to meditate, to journal, to create their personal emojis and explore care.

Time management is an act of care. Go back to your event duration considerations and program design. Be gentle with yourself and your team, as you will need more time for planning than anticipated. The way in which you implement your online events can increase your participants digital fatigue and stress. Be mindful that 4 hours online can be as tiring as much as a full day of physical meeting. Also keep the schedule and boundaries around time firm.

We should be reminded that our work is a complementary part of our being, but not the defining core. Time is the most valuable currency we have in this life and it is a limited resource. Plan ahead for all of your personal time-off after the event ends so you all have time to recharge and rest.

Organise "red flags" group activity for your team. What are your red flags when working online? What makes you feel better? Make a list of your red flags and needs and assign each other a care bear or a care buddy in your team, so you can check up on each other.

Connect to what nourishes. Identify simple activities you can do alone or together. You can also use those activities during your events, either in spaces for care or as suggestions for breaks.

Consider yoga, journaling, meditation, stretching, drawing, creative writing, dancing. If your breaks are designed for physical moving away from the screen - add music, avoid timers on the shared screen of your platform, and use inspiring images or videos.

Make a clear communications protocol with your team. Discuss your different approaches to work time. What time is big-no-time for synchonous exchange of communication (audio/video calls)? Are there exceptions? When and why?

Make a clear protocol on how staff conflicts are addressed. This can make a safeguarding framework for your team if the level of frustration comes to the tipping point and a conflict breaks out.

Dance and sing! Make sure you celebrate your event given all the hard work and commitment both by your team and your participants. Add music, singing and dancing to the sessions, breaks or where you find fit. Invite participants to add their songs to DJ lists and discover new mixtapes!

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