

FLOCKING

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

A relationship-resourced resilience theory by Liesel Ebersöhn



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The CSR-vision is to be known as a knowledge generation platform of merit that makes a meaningful contribution to Global South issues of adaptation to chronic and cumulative adversity. The two-pronged CSR-research niche is, (i) to investigate resilience as complex transdisciplinary phenomenon, and (ii) to use systematic scientific evidence to centralise Global South knowledge on adversity and adaptation into existing global resilience discourses.

REPSSI, the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative is the leading African psychosocial support organisation. REPSSI's vision is that all girls, boys and youth enjoy psychosocial and mental wellbeing. REPSSI has strong partnerships with regional economic blocks, governments (particularly the ministries responsible for social services, education and health), development partners, international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in 13 countries of East and Southern Africa. The best way to support vulnerable children and youth is within a healthy family and community environment. For 20 years REPSSI has provided technical capacity enhancement to its partners to strengthen communities' and families' ability to promote the psychosocial wellbeing of their children and youth.

APSSI, the African Psychosocial Support Institute was initiated in 2016 in response to the persistent demand for PSS programming and training quality standards, quality research and data on PSS, a formal PSS academic discipline, excellent PSS resources and MHPSS (Mental Health & Psychosocial Support) thought leadership. It has been operating since 2016, registered by REPSSI as a non-profit company in February 2019. APSSI's mission is to foster professionalism and excellence in the provision of child and youth psychosocial support and mental health in Africa.

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Welcome to this manual on flocking. It has been designed for anyone who may be described as a “community worker” or anyone who is interested in strengthening social connectedness in a community. You can either read and work through this manual by yourself or it can take the form of a facilitated workshop.

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Strengthening community-based psychococial support

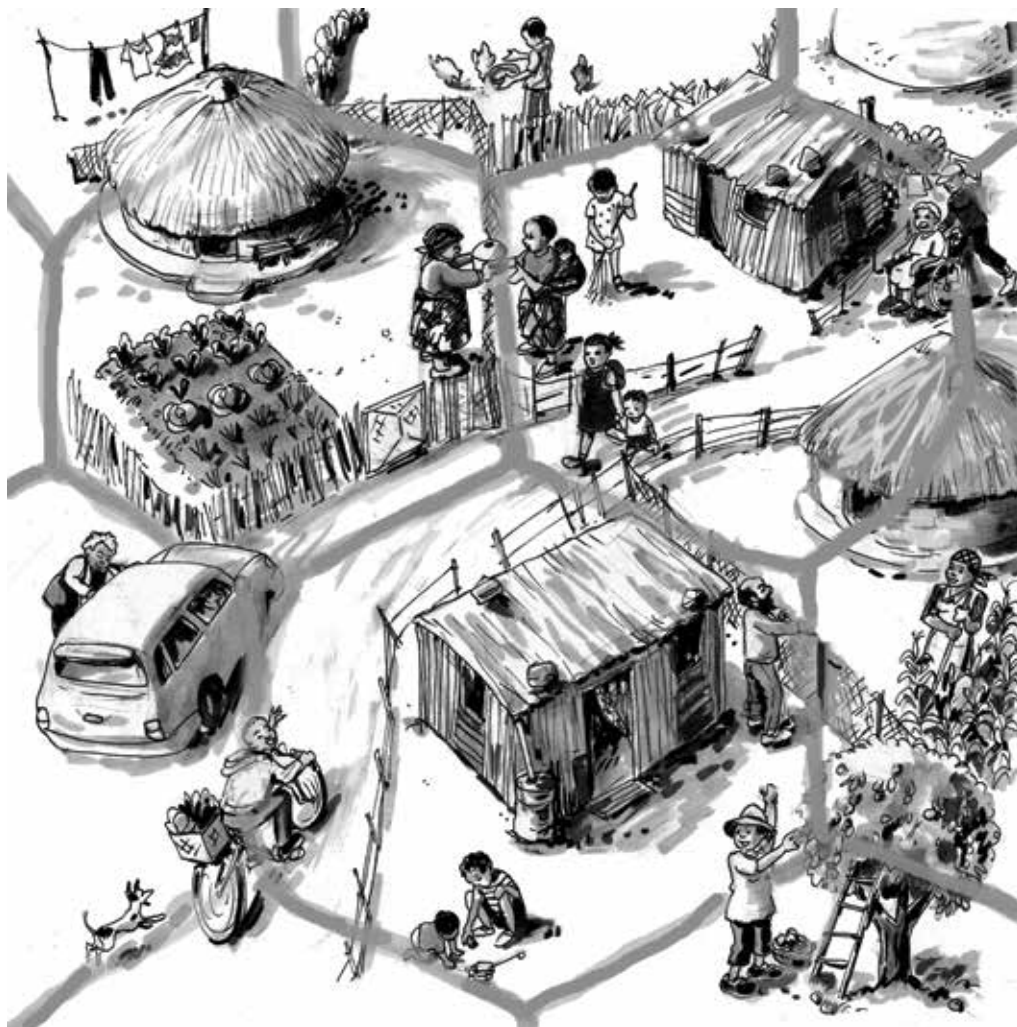
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In association with the Africa Psychosocial Support Institute (APSSI) and REPSSI.



Please view the video on this link for
an overview of flocking:

https://www.up.ac.za/centre-of-the-study-of-resilience/news/post_2833947-preview?module=news&slug=news&id=2833947



Case example: Flocking

Imagine you are in an aeroplane or sitting on a cloud. From above the village of X looks like a honeycomb or a net. Households sit next to each other and people support and interact with each other.

Y is old and sick and Z who has finished school but has no job cleans Y's house twice a week.

B who has a small business selling firewood also visits Y and Z once a week with a bag of maize meal.

Q is a teacher but has not been paid for a whole year, the school desks are broken, often there is no chalk and often no electricity in the school. Yet he continues to teach and perform a vital role in the community. The fact that he has not been paid for a year due to an administrative error is made possible by other community members sharing their food with his family and providing him money for taxi fare.

G has also matriculated but has not been able to find work. On 3 afternoons a week he helps other children whose parents are illiterate or unavailable with their homework and usually eats his meals with the family of the child he helps.

Some woman members of the community are members of a R5 club. There are other self-help groups, credit unions and community safety schemes in the community. Typically people meet to put some of their savings into a communal saving scheme. At the end of each month one member gets a turn to take home a pot of money. These days are also celebrations and the "winner" shares some of her winnings with others who need it most.

The meetings are not just about money. Group members sing, pray and listen to each other. They discuss who in the community needs urgent help and they discuss ways to support them and each other. They have truly clever support strategies that have been honed to perfection over time. After all, because they are part of the community they have their ears on the ground. They flock together to share social resources in order to provide social support. Their flocking network operates like a sophisticated supply-chain management system. They identify need,

determine where resources are available, provide resources that fit the needs they identify in their community, and monitor and evaluate the use of resources.



Some of the men in this community have started a communal food gardening project using the land and the water at the school where there is a windmill and a pump. The food is either given to households who need it most or sold to community members. Some of the women run a soup kitchen at the school so children are ensured at least one meal a day. Community members who are in dire need can also enter the school grounds and receive food. Households who receive food can give something back by working in the vegetable garden.

G who has a car takes community members who are too ill to do so by themselves to the clinic for check-ups and treatment. The R5 society helps him with petrol money from their savings. Other members of families of the people he transports come and clean his house.

From the cloud or the aeroplane the honeycomb of cells you see from above also looks like a net. Not only are the bees in the honeycomb all working together and supporting each other but the net is a safety net that catches the most vulnerable and protects them from adversity. There is terrible poverty and inequality in the village of X but something is still working. Despite all the challenges people are showing resilience. Flocking is what we call what this community is doing so well.

Flocking is a social support pathway to resilience, which identifies social vulnerability, promotes agency, regulates emotions and manages the supply chain and distribution of social resources in order to bolster better than expected wellbeing outcomes for members of a collective. Flocking includes psychosocial support as well as support in the areas of income generation, food and nutrition, health, spirituality and education.

Flocking provides a sense of inclusion, communal mastery, solidarity and control of a harsh environment where chronic vulnerability prevails. Flocking champions the efficacy of the collective to adjust positively to multiple risks based on what is collectively available in the social ecology.

Elements of flocking

1. Flocking is rooted in and draws on indigenous knowledge and social and cultural practices of interdependence as expressed in the Afro-centric philosophy of Ubuntu often translated as “I am because we are”, “humanity towards others” or “the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.”
2. Ubuntu and flocking, as resilience-enabling collective responses, hold interdependence and associated agency in the highest regard — rather than chronic dependence and passivity. Flocking aims to build pride and to lessen dependence.
3. It is important not to demand more than is available and not to overly tax or put strain on the system. In one way or another to be part of the social support net everyone needs to reciprocate and give something back although this need not to be done at the time of receiving the support.
4. The theory submits flocking as such an age-old indigenous knowledge system of resilience and as a powerful pathway to resilience.
5. Resilience is central to flocking however resilience is less about individual mastery over a set of skills but is more about the strengthening of the social fabric that protects and supports. The form of resilience central to flocking is not about having a special skill or set of skills that allows you to “bounce back” or “to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps”. Its focus is on strengthening the social fabric.
6. Flocking mobilises social capital (e.g. psychosocial support), cultural resources (e.g. celebrations and funeral support), collective resources (e.g. the use of one person’s car to transport the sick), and economic resources (e.g. small loans to begin and sustain businesses).

7. Flocking is driven by a sense of social justice.
8. Flocking is supportive, preventative and protective. Like a net it prevents the most vulnerable from inequality-associated risks. The carefully constructed honeycomb provided a grid of comfort and nurture.
9. Flocking is not a top down approach but rather a bottom up approach that involves listening, participation, consensus and democratic problem solving.
10. By supply chain management of resources flocking refers to the questions: which resources are required, how to procure these resources, how to distribute the resources and how to monitor the use of resources.
11. Flocking demands a level of socio-emotional competence in order to succeed and also provides socio-emotional (or psychosocial) support to its participants (see below under discussion section).
12. Flocking is not an individual response and requires a high level of active concerned citizenship or good neighbourliness. A good neighbour is a person who sees the needs and worries of their neighbours as their own and takes active steps to share and spread resources.
13. Alternatives to flocking in the face of adversity are to fight, take flight, freeze or be selfish.
14. In order to be part of the honeycomb of support and protection everyone needs to do their best to give something back (not necessarily to the same person who helped you). A philosophy of the “gift must always move” prevails. If one cannot repay or give something back in the form of money, labour (e.g. cleaning someone else’s house) is encouraged.
15. For those who do not conform to prevailing social codes, who subjected to social exclusion, and to whom flocking support is not extended, life can be very difficult indeed.
16. For flocking, the endpoint of emotion regulation is social harmony and a sense of identity built on social usefulness.
17. Flocking has developed and even strengthened in the face of the failure of governments in service provision. It can be considered an extremely sustainable form of PSS and economic strengthening.
18. The element of social connectedness inherent in flocking extends to ancestors and spiritual beliefs.
19. It is not enough to just be connected, flocking needs deeds that activate the system.
20. Flocking is dynamic. Supportive and protective actions and deeds create ripple and knock on effects. One action prompts others which collectively constitute a living and breathing flock of support surrounding all individuals.

21. Flocking is not about individual ego-centric strength or independence but calls forth and supports a different kind of strength – what can be called a community embedded inter-dependent social strength – to be strong not only for yourself but also for others.

Flocking can be said to involve the following steps:

- There are numerous social networks in a community that already exist and have expertise to provide social support. They make use of formal (churches, schools) and informal (co-operatives, social media groups) spaces to function.
- Because of their networks in the community they know and are vigilant around *identifying* who in the community is in *need* of support.
- Each of these networks make use of practices of consultation and consensus to decide how to flock.
- They know which *resources are needed* to lessen each particular challenge a person or family faces.
- They have a social resource database and know *who* in the community could have *access to the required resource*. They can navigate to the source of the resources they need.
- They know how to *negotiate the use* of such resources.
- They have a social system to distribute the resources to those facing hardship.
- They monitor how recipients of resources used what they receive and they keep beneficiaries accountable.



Some of the features listed above deserve further elaboration.

SHARED VALUES AND BELIEFS

The system works because the community have *similar values and beliefs* that direct their support practices.

- Being *interconnected* (with each other, nature and the spiritual realm) is valued. A core belief is that we are born because we are needed to support others in their living. Similarly when we die it is because ancestors need us. The reason for existence is equated with how we respond to such calls of help in times of need.
- Thus a central value is that both *being-in-need and giving-help are positive life-experiences*. The belief is that there is no shame in being in need. A related belief is that helping others is a source of pride. Both can be expected as part of life. In fact, being aware of expected need in a community also provides an opportunity to live a meaningful life as it gives you a chance to care for others. It is inconceivable that you would not support someone in need.
- The value of *collaboration* is equally important. In fact the actions of the flocking network described above is the result of a belief in collaborating. Practices of consultation and consensus align with collaboration. Everyone's views matter and discussion will bring the group to a space of mutual agreement.
- Everyone in the community values *communality*. They hold to the belief that the resources they each have form part of a larger pool of resources. And that these resources can be used to support one another. The sum total of what can be shared to care for each other, and the supportive networks are thus always more than that of an alone-standing individual.
- A related value is that of *reciprocity*. Community members who share their resources can expect, in turn, to benefit from family and friends who will share resources with them in times of challenge.
- Another value is that of *conforming* to generally held, in-group beliefs. If you struggle to buy-into these values and beliefs you may not be rewarded by the group. This may be problematic as you may be excluded from social support.

INTERDEPENDENCE, INDEPENDENCE AND DEPENDENCE

- It follows that being *interdependent or collectivist* is highly valued. Interdependence links with all the aforementioned values of being interconnected, collaborative and communal in how we approach life. Valuing interdependence shows to a belief that anything one does, or faces or experiences is not something that happens to you in isolation from others.
- Interdependence is thus also *not independence*. The end-result of flocking is never to 'stand on your own feet' independently. The end-result of flocking is always to be healthy and well enough to contribute to the collective.

- Interdependence is *not dependence*. Flocking practices therefore require of recipients of social support to make clever plans (in as far as is possible) to not become chronically dependent on the support of others. Beneficiaries are held accountable to demonstrate what they have done to put themselves in positions where they are able to contribute to the pool of social resources again – rather than chronically (only) taking from the collective social resources.
- **Agency** is therefore valued when using resources. Making innovative plans with the social resources you receive from the collective is applauded. Merely receiving and passively waiting for another donation of social resources are frowned upon as this strategy does not lead to interdependence but rather cultivates dependence.

RESILIENCE

We have previously discussed the concept of resilience and let us expand this concept further using this theory of flocking. Resilience is often posited as a set of psychosocial skills residing in an individual. Scales to measure resilience e.g. the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25) tend to focus on mastery of “resilience skills”, and begin with statements beginning with “I” (e.g. I am able to adapt when changes occur, I can deal with whatever comes my way, I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems). Flocking however has as its focus the locus of resilience residing not in the individual but in the community.

Resilience of the type flocking is most interested in is understood as a process of, unpredictably, adapting well to adversity and constitutes interplay between contextual, relational, and *intrapersonal* protective resources and mechanisms (Bowes & Jaffee, 2013; Cicchetti, 2010; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2013; Ungar, 2011).

A socio-ecological view of resilience (Ungar, 2011) suggests that any context provides resources and that individuals opt for particular pathways to gain access and mobilise resources to support their adaptation.

In this way certain resources are resilience-enabling and support positive adjustment.

More and more scholars recognise the significance of culture and context in wellbeing outcomes (Diener & Suh, 2000; Iwasaki, 2008; Masten, 2014; Oishi, 2010). Researchers acknowledge that so-called universal resilience-enabling mechanisms are contextually and culturally relative (Panter-Brick, 2015; Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013).

The theory of flocking can even be said to focus more on the contextual, relational and interpersonal (between people) resilience factors than the intrapersonal (inside of a person) ones.

CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL ORIGINS OF FLOCKING

Flocking possibly emerged and was subsequently strengthened because of the absence of government support. If, over a period of roughly 340 years of colonialism, the majority of a country came to understand that they could not count on people in government to provide equal opportunities to services, development and wellbeing, then flocking may indicate the social innovation of people who refuse apathy.

Flocking has both cultural and structural roots. The cultural origins of flocking lie in the Ubuntu way of life. Flocking is a behaviour manifestation of Ubuntu beliefs and practices. Flocking shows the very best of an Ubuntu-kinship: the communality of being in need and providing help as a given in life. Vigilant flocking structures enable early identification of people in need. Similarly, flocking structures have a no-nonsense awareness of stockpiles of social resources: who has knowledge to assist with vegetable gardening, who has links with suppliers of produce, who can donate time to afterschool care activities, and so forth.

BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY AND TARGETS FOR SUPPORT

Western psychology as a premise generally begins with support to the individual, and if that fails - support to family, and if that fails - support to community. Flocking however begins with community level support.

There have been findings in Southern Africa that it is the immediate family rather than the extended family that matters more as resilience-enabling resources (Ramphele, 2012; Theron, 2017). The prominence of the extended family in capitalising on social resources by means of borrowing, lending and reciprocal donations, however, challenges this notion. Instead this social innovation of flocking depends strongly on extensive kinship ties in order to gain access to multiple resources that are needed (which in a severely resource-constrained context is not generally contained within the folds of only immediate family). As is the case in other studies (Jithoo & Bakker, 2011; Theron & Theron, 2013), it appears that support from the extended family continues to matter as significant resilience-enabling resource in a highly unequal space amongst Afrocentric people.



FLOCKING IS ABOUT SHARING SOCIAL RESOURCES, NOT JUST MONEY

- **Cultural resources** are the shared values and beliefs that a group have – as explained in a previous section. Flocking practices are cultural resources that can be used to support in times of shared hardship.
- **Collective resources** are structures or networks organised to provide assistance. These collective networks are crucial to flocking. Examples are self-help groups, credit unions and community safety schemes, parent groups, church-groups, home-based care groups, youth groups.
- **Social resources** are informal agreements between family, friends and neighbours. Emotional support is an example of an implicit social resource: listening to each other, counselling each other, comforting and advising each other. Explicit social resources include bartering, borrowing and lending practices, donations, as well as shared savings.
- Economic resources include opportunities for income generation, employment and livelihood strategies. Economic resources do not mean giving money. Rather it is about including neighbours, friends and families in ventures that generate income.

BEING OUTSIDE OF THE SOCIAL NET: EXCLUSION

Not being part of the social fabric of people you know implies that individuals in dire need of support exist out of reach of the social support which citizens might offer. To be considered for social support from friends and family is conditional. It rests on the obligation to conform to collectivist norms and standards.

A young woman Swaziland, explains:

“The kind of help we give to a good neighbour... you can only tell if one is a good neighbour through their actions (Swaziland, Younger Women: 108–109).

In order to “qualify” for social support and to be the recipient of flocking one has to adhere to collective socially sanctioned practices. So for example, a man who spends whatever money he has on alcohol, is abusive to women and children in his household, and who gives nothing back to the community, might well find himself outside of the web of support extended to other “better behaved neighbours.”

Living on the outside of such social connectedness however excludes and isolates individuals, families and communities from being beneficiaries of social support. The consequences of limited social adeptness are dire if social support is the only recourse given unequally distributed services and resources.

Consequently, considering what would be culturally appropriate socio-emotional competence becomes a crucial survival commodity. Thus we see flocking operating

as a force for (pro-social) behavioural change as people in order to be accepted and supported build social adeptness by participating in community activities.

It is possible that one can live in a community but be excluded from the benefits of flocking. The point above, on not conforming to group norms and standards, describes one scenario of exclusion. Sometimes it may be necessary not to conform on ideas held by a group. For example, not agreeing on views of gender privileges and discrimination. Taking a stand to oppose group-values may then exclude you from social support. Another may be if you are newcomer in a community, a displaced person, a refugee or an immigrant. This may mean that you are not yet a member of a group who flock to support one another. You may not yet have been able to show that you have similar values and engage in similar practices of a group who support each other via flocking.

FLOCKING AS AN AFRICAN PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY

Liesel Ebersohn, the author of the theory of flocking, states:

“I write the relationship-resourced resilience theory as it was communicated to me by the people who live the theory. Although I am telling this story of a resilience pathway, it is not my story. It is a story told by many and heard by many throughout a 15-year time frame. During this time a group of us partnered with men and women in Southern Africa to hear from them how they resile. The relationship-resourced resilience theory is how I made sense of what I heard and saw in the data.

Given the crisis of representation (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000) and because I am the storyteller, I acknowledge that this is a partial theory, a fractional construction of an indigenous psychology theory. I write it through the lens of an educational psychologist. My intent to signify the relationship-resourced resilience theory as an indigenous psychology theory is deliberate. I intentionally position it as a contextual and sociocultural complement to mainstream psychology theory which tends towards perspectives of the west and north.”

She adds:

“As indigenous psychology theory, the relationship-resourced resilience theory adds pluralism to the mix of dominant Global North discourses on resilience. The theory offers a Global South perspective on that which is resilience-enabling from an interdependent, and specifically Afrocentric, stance nested in spaces of atrocious inequality where not only are the majority vulnerable, but where customarily, given geopolitical trajectories, the heritage of a majority is often suppressed.”

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL ABOUT THE THEORY OF FLOCKING?

Madoerin and Clacherty (REPSSI, 2010) have developed 13 indicators of psychosocial wellbeing which can be used to answer this question with respect to people joining and feeling part of support groups, savings schemes or food gardening projects, or other flocking units.

<p>Indicator 1: Emotional self-awareness</p>	<p>People hold up “mirrors” to each other and become more emotionally self-aware and more emotionally intelligent</p>
<p>Indicator 2: Independence</p>	<p>The aim of flocking is not to make people more and more dependent on community support but to give them a hand up towards more independence. Flocking aims to build pride and agency, and to lessen dependence.</p>
<p>Indicator 3: Self-worth</p>	<p>Participation in a social network helps them develop a positive group identity and sense of worth (for example I am part of a community who care about each other) as well as an individual identity (I am a person who cares and who is cared for). At the heart of Ubuntu lies an understanding of self worth and identity as they emerge through relationships, that is, the principle of interconnectedness’.</p>
<p>Indicator 4: Social network</p>	<p>Flocking strengthens a person’s social network in obvious ways. For example, flocking structures have a no-nonsense awareness of stockpiles of social resources: who has knowledge to assist with vegetable gardening, who has links with suppliers of produce, who can donate time to afterschool care activities, and so forth.</p>
<p>Indicator 5: Empathy</p>	<p>Through these support structures, people have the opportunity to receive, learn and display empathy.</p>
<p>Indicator 6: Integration into local activities in the community</p>	<p>Flocking holds interdependence, reciprocity, and associated agency in the highest regard and promotes pro-social action. Flocking requires culturally salient socio-emotional competence and emotion regulation to maintain culturally valued relationships and retain access to this pathway to resilience.</p>
<p>Indicator 7: Flexibility</p>	<p>Flocking may well help people change direction and get out of impassivity and stuck habits</p>

Indicator 8: Problem solving	Central to associating in groups and the democratic ethos is joint problem solving
Indicator 9: Contribute to their own basic needs	Flocking is explicit in its efforts to support people in need with a hand up towards becoming more independent
Indicator 10: Normalisation	Meeting others with similar problems helps people feel more normal and less alone
Indicator 11: Skills, knowledge and information	Via face to face social networks people are exposed to new skills, knowledge and information
Indicator 12: General state of feelings	As a result of flocking, people are expected to feel less depressed and happier. There is emotional comfort in being the recipients of psychosocial support and for example to be socially included during home visits.
Indicator 13: Optimism and the future orientation	As a result of flocking, people are expected to feel more hopeful

PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF FLOCKING

Ebersöhn's theory of Relationship-Resourced-Resilience is rooted in an Africanist Ubuntu philosophy. The focus here is away from individualistic ways of adapting and is on the collective and collective identities.

The nature of life—the ontological puzzle—begins with the profound existential insight that 'a person is needed when they are born...'. In terms of this perspective, people come into the world to be with others. Being in need is not, therefore, an existential universal of 'being in despair' and interdependence is a good.

Ebersöhn brings to our attention, competence is not reduced to what an individual gains mastery over. It is what exists, as a resource, in the broader social environment. Out of it comes what she describes as 'relationship-resourced resilience'. Collective self-esteem rather than individuated senses of worth is what matters. This resilience is social rather than individual.



ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF FLOCKING

When social support incentivises agency rather than dependency, citizens engage in economic activity. So the feared danger of social welfare that will encourage individuals to lose the incentive to produce (with accompanying negative effects on a nation’s productivity and income) (Garrison, 2017; Mankiw, 2013) is countered by a narrative that the social convention is that of agency (given opportunity structures). In addition, the economic activity in citizen-directed social support is mostly in the informal market system of social entrepreneurship (Mair & Marti, 2006). Thus, as more workers produce more goods in an informal economy of bartering, lending, and smart partnerships, the economic output of a society increases.

Flocking is about forging “smart partnerships” to generate income. What is smart about these partnerships is that they do not just amount to a handout but are an investment into the body of social capital and as a result investors and their partners can expect sustainable returns. A school-based vegetable garden is an example of the socioeconomic reciprocity of a smart partnership. It capitalises on available resources (time, labour, agricultural knowledge and tools). It provides added nutrition as well as opportunities for income generation to children and their families and — most significantly — it shies away from chronic dependence on support.

The flocking practice of a smart partnership (Ebersöhn et al., 2014) signifies the use of available resources in social support to create capacity rather than dependency. Smart partnerships often indicate flocking practices that emphasise agency and target income generation or securing livelihood.

FLOCKING OUTCOMES

Positive subjective health and wellbeing outcomes are not predicted when there are such common instances of long-term illness, and later death in families, that keep caregivers bedridden and unable to perform household duties for their loved ones, and when anxiety and sadness, given a life of hardship, leads to helplessness and despair.

But flocking is a citizen-level resilience-enabling social innovation. Because of flocking, children are better able to attend, be attentive and learn at school, people with illness can use health services and receive home-based support and food, and unemployed friends can benefit from ingenious mechanisms to generate household level income.

ROMANTICISATION

The question has to be asked: Is flocking a romanticisation of a harsher less supportive social reality and a naïve representation of non-structural support in Southern African communities?

The answer is both yes and no. Such support does exist and the case study draws on real examples of research conducted by amongst others Ebersöhn et al. However, there are many still falling through the net or who are excluded from non-structural community driven social support. What is thus needed are efforts to bolster and extend this age old, sustainable variant of PSS which has more chance of enduring and succeeding than many models of vertical PSS programming, especially those where the interventions are implemented by outsiders to the community.

It can also be asked how does flocking address conflict, domestic violence, gender based violence, and abuse?

Perhaps an answer to this question is this. When people flock (for example meet in Savings Groups which are also support groups), they identify social problems in the community and discuss possible solutions which are then actioned.

Flocking should not however be seen to exist completely in parallel and without intersections with government services. Regarding child protection, even with their limitations, government services especially the police and social workers have a key role to play. An extreme example of flocking working independently of state services is that of kangaroo courts where a community take justice into their own hands and administer punishment (often a death sentence) to offenders or those believed to be offenders.

QUOTES FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO ILLUSTRATE FLOCKING

Here are some examples of flocking described by community members involved in Ebersöhn's studies:

He was a good person. He helped a lot of people in the community... To give them money for school. He was the man who started the project of bricks to the village where he was staying... He was sponsoring youths by buying soccer kits for the club of S [ac]cross [the] bridge. He was a good man who was living in harmony with people. All people around him know him by what he has done to the community (Limpopo, younger men)

We start by visiting her. When we visit her we check her living environment to see if it's clean. Then we clean by making sure that her blankets are clean. And truly, we see that she's short of some items. We now see that she has no food. (Lesotho, older women)

We take turns to help each other when it is needed, poverty is curbed by you offering your neighbour support and they return the favour when the time comes (Namibia, younger men)

You have to listen. You must be a good listener and listen to other people's views. You respect their views. I think that is the basic of a good relationship: understanding and respect (Mpumalanga, male high school teacher)





Your problem is my problem' (North West, older women)

People should help each other. When you see struggling, even if they did not call you, you go to them to help. Illness that is in the family, you come and offer support. That is why we say people should help each other. If we are united we have more than one set of hands (Eastern Cape, older women)

In African tradition, whatever happens to your neighbour – death, marriage, sickness – even if it's problems with [the] children[']s] behaviour – it's also your problem. Because tomorrow it can also happen in your house (North West, older women)

We want to share. Share information. Share pain. Share everything. That is why we must have a relationship (Eastern Cape, female primary school teacher)

We don't hide anything from each other. We share our feelings. We talk to one another. Whenever everyone has a problem. So then we look at ways of helping one another (Gauteng, female primary school teacher)

In a relationship there are the ups and downs and how people help each other to get through whatever hurdles they have in life (Mpumalanga, female high school teacher)

For as long as structural support remains unreliable, it can be expected that Southern Africans will continue to flock. As we socialise each other into democracy in Southern Africa it is plausible that flocking may become less of a tool of acquiescing to structural disparity and more of a pathway for civic engagement to disrupt unevenness.

Positive health and well-being outcomes are not usually expected when hospitals and clinics are sparsely available, when public transport is few and far between and costly, or when literacy levels are too low to complete forms or read labels on medication. There is, however, evidence that flocking is resilience-enabling to support unexpected, positive objective health and wellbeing experiences.

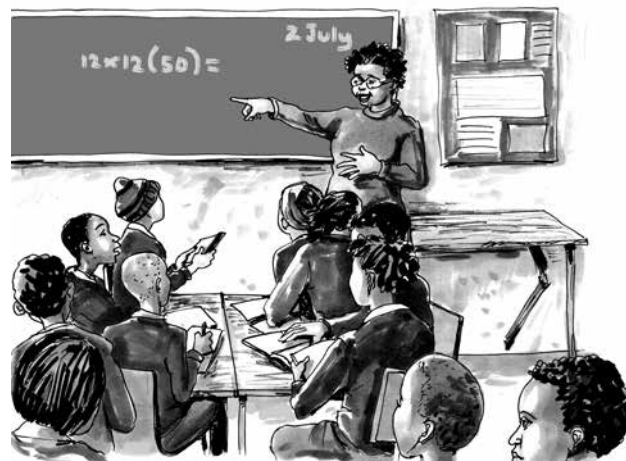
Flocking is knowledge from Africa for Africa and to share with others in corners of the world with similar challenges, similar cultural beliefs and practise, and similar aspirations for well-being, social innovation and not succumbing to ongoing and extreme disturbances.



Learning activity: Analysing flocking

Divide yourselves into groups of 7 and follow these steps below:

- In groups read or have read to the case study of village X, the definition of flocking, the elements of flocking and the discussion (don't rush, allow time for discussion)
- Develop your own role play of interconnected community – based on “community case study” above. Make sure that you each highlight 5 different elements of flocking to highlight in your role play (divide the list of elements of flocking amongst the 7 groups so that they are all covered)



ASSESSING COMMUNITY-BASED PSS

Applying the theory of flocking, the following questions help us to assess the strengths and gaps relating to community-level PSS:

ASSESSING COMMUNITY-BASED PSS

Domain of PSS	Question
Participation and social connectedness	<p>-Are there opportunities for all people in the community and all groups to participate in community life including groups and individuals who are often marginalised e.g., people living with disability, LGBT, etc?</p> <p>-Does the community feel connected to other communities?</p>
Patriarchy and gender equality	Is there gender equality in the community or is it patriarchal (dominated and favouring males)?
Safety and violence	Is the community safe especially for children, girls and women?
Alcohol and substance abuse	Are alcohol and substances abused in the community with negative ripple effects for other community members?
Celebration	Does the community publicly celebrate the successes of its members as well as important national or religious holidays?
Sharing of resources	Does the community share important resources e.g., land and water?
Community meeting spaces	Does the community have a place, e.g., a building, or a house of worship where the community can gather for important meetings and events?
Environment	Is the awareness and action around environmental issues in the community high (e.g., litter, pollution, sustainable energy etc.)?
Emergency preparedness	Is the community prepared for emergencies, e.g. fires, droughts, floods etc.?

Referral networks and procedures	Does the community have a functional referral network in place, e.g. if a child is abused, he or she can be referred to a social worker, the police and for medical attention?
HIV	Does the community have a high level of awareness around HIV?
Child marriage	Does the community have a high level of awareness around child marriage?
Culture	Does the community value and respect cultural diversity and create opportunities for cultural expression and preservation?
Supporting the most vulnerable	Does the community look out for and support the most vulnerable individuals, households and groups?
Give and take	Are there opportunities for community members to both give and take, for example to receive nutritional support and to clean someone else's home or to work in the communal vegetable garden.
Presence of saving schemes, self-help groups, societies	Does the community have a culture of saving schemes, self-help groups?

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED PSS

PSS coming from one's own family and community is more powerful than professional outside support. Remember that the MHPSS pyramid recommends strengthening community-based PSS to help all children and youth affected by adversity. Using these same domains, here are some ideas about how we can strengthen community-based PSS:

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED PSS

We can use these same domains for strengthening community-based PSS:

Domain	Strengthening community-based PSS
<p>Participation and social connectedness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build or strengthen community participation platforms, like child and youth committees, child safety initiatives, women’s empowerment initiatives, platforms for the elderly or differently abled to raise their needs • Connect local structures and encourage collaboration, including multi-disciplinary platforms for regular meeting to address local issues collectively • Strengthen and connect existing community-based structures rather than creating new initiatives • Encourage community-based initiatives to consciously include the most marginalised members of the community
<p>Patriarchy and gender equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate and raise awareness on the community economic benefits of educating girls • Raise awareness in schools about gender equality • Ensure female representation on all community platforms and structures • Support local female-owned business development • Facilitate projects to address gender attitudes, including negative models of masculinity • Promote healthy education, youth-friendly services and accessible, preventive supplies for sexual and reproductive health
<p>Safety and violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectively assess the main dangers in the community, especially towards children and youth and regarding gender-based violence • Encourage community safety and prevention of violence initiatives, such as developing safe spaces for after school care, clubs where women and girls walk and travel together, addressing high risk areas such as providing lighting at night • Strengthen reporting, referral, accountability and justice for all forms of violence • Raise awareness on the unacceptability of all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation • Raise awareness that all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation are a point of public concern, not ‘a private family matter’ • Provide early psychosocial and practical support and promote support groups for survivors of violence

<p>Alcohol and substance abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess and raise awareness regarding the root causes of alcohol and substance abuse, then design projects addressing these, relevant to the community (e.g. youth unemployment or lack of education or career development opportunities) • Set limits on the use of substances and enforce these limits in the community • Establish referral systems for children, youth or anyone in danger when a family member is abusing substances (houses of safety, neighbour connections and monitoring etc.) • Have referrals to PSS and rehabilitation centres for those who wish to recover from substance abuse • Challenge negative attitudes and discrimination of substance abusers to rather focus on underlying causes
<p>Celebration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that there are safe places where people of all different religions, cultures, ethnicities etc. can celebrate special occasions • Encourage inclusivity and attendance of all community members to different celebrations
<p>Sharing of resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop community principles on sharing of resources • Encourage developing equality in salaries and sharing of all community resources • Do not allow any particular group to be excluded from using community resources and public spaces
<p>Community meeting spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that there are safe, well-maintained spaces for community meetings • Have regular spaces where different groups can present their needs • Develop multi-disciplinary platforms to address social challenges and strengthen PSS
<p>Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness on environmental care • Protect and grow natural spaces • Engage community members in caring for their environment in locally appropriate ways • Have recycling facilities and initiatives to encourage careful use of resources

<p>Emergency preparedness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a leadership team and protocols for emergencies • Ensure that there is a budget available to access in emergencies • Have relevant equipment available and maintained for emergencies (e.g. fire equipment, first aid kits) • Assess and address infrastructural risks, for example improving drainage against flooding and water retention for droughts • Ensure that all community members have the relevant identity documents are know to keep these safe in case of emergencies
<p>Referral networks and procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop platforms for service providers to connect regularly to assess risks, work on prevention collectively and refer people in need to one another • Have well-established pathways of care and case management systems for early support (for example in cases of violence or emergencies) • Strengthen internal PSS services and have well-established links to external PSS service providers in times of high need
<p>Illness like HIV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess and understand local health risks • Raise awareness and educated community members of local health risks • Engage high risk populations (e.g. youth) in educating one another and promoting healthy behaviour • Have health services, equipment and medicines available locally, for both prevention (e.g. free access to quality condoms) and treatment (e.g. free access to ARVs) • Strengthen referral systems for specialised support, ensuring accessibility and availability of all health services
<p>Child marriage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess vulnerable groups and risks for the local community • Engage leaders, stakeholders, proponents and vulnerable populations in discussing prevention of child marriage • Facilitate locally appropriate prevention campaigns • Strengthen support for those being drawn into child marriage or needing assistance after child marriage

<p>Culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess and discuss local cultural practices and beliefs in terms of their ability to strengthen PSS or undermine PSS • Engage local stakeholders in discussing the impact of cultural practices on PSS • Facilitate local campaigns to raise awareness on potentially helpful and harmful cultural practices • Encourage cultural groups to include the most marginalised community members in helpful practices, such as dancing and music • Encourage diversity and tolerance of different cultural heritage, a sense of belonging and helpful practices
<p>Supporting the most vulnerable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess if there are leadership and community platforms or organisations which assesses who is the most vulnerable, marginalise (excluded) in the community • Strengthen or develop these structures to provide support to include and integrate the most vulnerable individuals, households and groups
<p>Give and take</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen opportunities for community members to both give and take, for example to receive nutritional support and to clean someone else's home or to work in the communal vegetable garden
<p>Presence of saving schemes, self-help groups, societies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess if the community has a culture of saving schemes, self-help groups, societies? • Strengthen or develop self-help and savings schemes



Remember also to focus on prevention of exposure to suffering, not only strengthening PSS for those who have already been exposed to harm.



Learning activity: Assess your community's psychosocial wellbeing

Think about the community where you live or a community where you work. Complete the table below to assess your community's strengths regarding psychosocial support and their areas of risk or weakness for further strengthening. Include actual examples in your descriptions of the strengths and areas for strengthening for each domain.

Domain	Strengths	Areas needing further strengthening
Participation and social connectedness		
Patriarchy and gender equality		
Safety and violence		
Alcohol and substance abuse		
Celebration		
Sharing of resources		
Community meeting spaces		
Environment		
Emergency preparedness		
Referral networks and procedures		
Illness like HIV		
Child marriage		
Culture		
Supporting the most vulnerable		
Give and take		
Presence of saving schemes, self-help groups, societies		

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