



NATURE AT WORK

Working with Nature to Improve Organisational Performance

Nature at Work is a model for helping organisations to improve their performance by working more sustainably, in harmony with nature, and drawing on the lessons which nature can teach us. When organisations use the Nature at Work model to improve their performance, they also improve their relationship with nature and become more environmentally and socially responsible.

The aim of **Nature at Work** is to help any company, business, or organisation to become a **Natural Organisation**. The **Natural Organisation** is represented visually by a tree where the branches, roots and trunk are all interdependent and interconnected.



A Natural Organisation is one that is

- 🌿 Purposeful and effective
- 🌿 Resilient and sustainable
- 🌿 Happy and harmonious
- 🌿 Creative and positive



Why Nature?

Throughout our evolution as human beings, our lives have been totally interconnected with the rest of the natural world. Only very recently in our evolutionary history has this changed. Humankind has become increasingly disconnected from nature and our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual connections with nature and our planet are breaking down. Since 2009, more people worldwide live in urban environments than in rural environments. In the west, people spend 90% of their time indoors, and our children are experiencing Nature Deficit Disorder. This disengagement between people and nature has profound implications, both for the health and wellbeing of future generations and for the future health of planet Earth. When people are disconnected from nature they

- Are less healthy and happy
- Are less creative and productive
- Care less about nature and wildlife
- Are less likely to value or conserve the environment
- Are less committed to protecting the future of the planet

We have a deep-seated human need to affiliate with nature, known as Biophilia. Nature is good for our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and extensive research into the effects of nature has shown that being connected to nature benefits individuals, organisations, communities and the planet.

Effects of nature

- Flowers and plants in a workplace increase cognitive functioning and can create a 15% rise in innovative ideas and more creative, flexible problem-solving (Ulrich, 2009)
- Connection with nature has a significant positive effect on autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life (Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2011)
- When people relate to nature they experience greater feelings of vitality, regardless of levels of exercise and social activity (Ryan et al., 2010)
- People who spend 15 minutes each day in nature developed a more positive outlook than those in urban conditions (Mayer et al., 2009)
- Plants in classrooms made school children feel more comfortable, relaxed, sociable and friendly than in classrooms with no plants (Han, 2009)
- Using nature analogies and embedding experiences in a larger natural context helps people to find meaning when experiencing change (Berger & McLeod, 2006)
- People who affiliate with nature derive a greater sense of meaningful existence which in turn boosts well-being (Howell, Passmore, & Buro, 2012)
- When immersed in a natural environment, people report feeling more connected to others and to the world around them (Terhaar, 2009)
- Walking in nature improves memory by up to 20% (Berman et al.)
- People are more considerate and generous when exposed to nature (Ryan, Weinstein)
- Exposure to nature leads to improved cognitive functioning and mental well-being (Kaplan, 1993, 200)

The **Nature at Work** framework is a tool to help business leaders to lead the way in helping people to re-establish their connection with nature, and by doing so, generate significant business benefits as well as helping to secure a better future for mankind and the natural world.

Benefits of using Nature at Work

By acknowledging and nurturing our connection with nature and by looking to nature for solutions, inspiration and ideas, we can improve the way organisations work and create real and lasting benefits.

When individual employees are connected with nature, they experience:

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Increased energy, creativity, concentration, and insight
- The ability to reflect and learn
- Improved problem-solving and decision-making abilities
- More harmonious relationships

These benefits lead to improved performance for organisations through:

- Better Leadership – visionary, courageous leaders who have a greater purpose
- Increased productivity
- Lower staff turnover and reduced recruitment and training costs
- Better relationships, collaboration and teamwork
- Increased engagement – people give over and above what is required of them
- Greater levels of commitment, trust and loyalty
- Improved external reputation as an employer of choice
- Greater customer satisfaction
- More effective, integrated systems and processes
- More creativity, innovation and better problem-solving

When organisations and their staff are connected with nature and make changes to the way they live and work, they create benefits to the environment and to future generations which include:

- Respect for and understanding of nature
- More ethical and sustainable actions and behaviour
- Improvements to the local community and local environment
- Decision-making based on long-term impact rather than short-term gain
- Increased sustainability and reduced negative impact on the planet



The Bigger Picture – why is this so important?

Our planet is at breaking point. Climate change, habitat destruction, mass extinction, population growth, and over-consumption threaten, and are all fuelled by individual and corporate greed, disregard for the future of our planet and its people, and unwillingness to change.

Protecting our planet and creating a safe and healthy home for future generations means we must all make changes. While governments wrangle over who is responsible and avoid making decisions through fear of losing power, the damage continues. As individuals we must take personal responsibility for our own impact on the planet and the future by changing the way we live our lives. As businesses or organisations, we must generate changes among our employees, customers, suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders to help create a sustainable long-term future – for our people, for our businesses, for the communities and environment around us, and for our planet.

Everyone in our organisations and businesses (from sole traders to public sector bodies and from charities to powerful multi-national corporations) has a role to play and a responsibility to take action. Business and organisational leaders must be visionary enough to see a different future – one that they can help to create, and bold and courageous enough to do business differently. Organisations need to be run in a way that provides the best possible outcome for people and the planet in the long term, with decision-making based on the legacy for generations to come. Business success should be measured in terms of how it has improved people's lives, the natural environment, and the future of our planet, rather than purely economic terms.

Making such changes requires enormous time, commitment, energy, and resilience, as well as lots of ideas, guidance and practical tools. The **Nature at Work** model provides a framework and a set of tools to help those in business and organisations to begin making these changes.



Using Nature at Work

Every organisation is different so we begin with a diagnostic process to assess the extent to which it is a **Natural Organisation** and how strong its roots and branches are. We then we work in partnership with the organisation's people to identify what changes and improvements need to be made, develop an action plan to achieve these aims, and facilitate a range of activities which help generate these changes.

The elements which make up the **Nature at Work** model are outlined below, along with some of the key tools, techniques, and facilitated activities which may be used to implement **Nature at Work** within an organisation.



The ROOTS

These are the fundamental principles, beliefs and behaviours that underpin and support a Natural Organisation. The four roots of a Natural Organisation are **Connect**, **Respect**, **Enrich**, and **Learn**.

CONNECT: The organisation is *connected* to Nature

- 🌿 People understand that they and their organisation are part of the interconnected, interdependent web of life.
- 🌿 People see their organisation as a living system which is part of a greater ecosystem.
- 🌿 The organisation considers the implications for the planet and for future generations when making decisions.
- 🌿 People are committed to improving the lives and circumstances of other people, organisations, and the world around them through their own actions.

RESPECT: The organisation *respects* nature

- 🌿 People in the organisation care about the environment and the natural world.
- 🌿 The organisation encourages activities which support and promote natural life and reduce damage to the planet.
- 🌿 People are committed to changing their thinking and habits in order to work more sustainably.
- 🌿 The organisation develops and promotes policies, procedures and practices which reduce damage to the planet and improve the natural environment.

ENRICH: The organisation is *enriched* by nature

- 🌿 People recognise the benefits of nature to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing.
- 🌿 The organisation actively encourages people to spend time in or near nature to increase their wellbeing, creativity, and job performance.
- 🌿 The organisation values working in nature as a valuable and positive business tool for strategic development, planning, relationship building, and problem solving.
- 🌿 The organisation strives to create a more natural working environment.

LEARN: The organisation *learns* from Nature

- 🌿 People understand the value of nature as a teacher, mentor, and mirror and use it to help them make sense of their organisation and its challenges.
- 🌿 People look to nature for ideas, inspiration and solutions to problems.
- 🌿 People use nature as a metaphor to help them understand complex issues and ideas.
- 🌿 The organisation uses nature to help it find appropriate ways to adapt, develop, thrive and grow.



The BRANCHES

The branches of a Natural Organisation represent the four key elements of its operations. The branches of a Natural Organisation are **Natural Leadership**, **Natural Systems**, **Natural People** and **Natural Creativity**.

NATURAL LEADERSHIP:

- 🌱 Leaders are self-aware, understand their impact and influence on others, and manage their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies successfully in order to inspire, motivate and engage people.
- 🌱 Leaders have a strong sense of purpose, are passionate, visionary, and courageous, and consider the moral and ethical consequences of their actions and decisions in all their activities.
- 🌱 Leaders create a culture in which people are valued and trusted and given space to breathe and grow. Everyone is empowered and engaged and takes part in developing and implementing a powerful collective vision.
- 🌱 Everyone in the organisation is encouraged and supported to develop their leadership capabilities regardless of hierarchy, and their capacity to improve the organisation and the world around it is recognised, valued and nurtured.

NATURAL SYSTEMS:

- 🌱 Systems-thinking is used in order to understand all the different elements of the organisation in relation to the whole and to view the organisation holistically.
- 🌱 Problems and challenges are looked at in the context of relationships with each other and with other systems, and new practices or processes are considered in terms of their impact on the health of the organisation as a whole, rather than the individual parts.
- 🌱 People recognise the adaptive cycles and evolutionary processes which occur in any system and understand the fact that chaos is a natural and necessary part of any successful system.
- 🌱 The organisation ensures that systems and processes work effectively by engaging people and capturing their hearts and minds rather than through command and control mechanisms.

NATURAL PEOPLE:

- 🌱 People are free to be their true selves and express their thoughts, emotions, views and ideas without fear or risk of consequences.
- 🌱 People's differences in experience, background, values, knowledge, views and perspectives are respected, diversity is valued, and different skills and strengths are utilised.
- 🌱 People are physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually fulfilled in their work and are happy and healthy.
- 🌱 People show empathy, compassion, love and trust towards each other, build strong relationships, work collaboratively, and feel a sense of belonging.

NATURAL CREATIVITY:

- 🌿 The organisation actively creates the physical and psychological conditions in which creativity and innovation flourish.
- 🌿 People are actively involved in decision making and problem-solving and are given support, tools, and encouragement to collaborate, generate fresh thinking, and make changes.
- 🌿 People are encouraged to experiment and to take risks in a no-blame culture where failures are considered an essential vital part of learning, growing, and developing.
- 🌿 The organisation constantly adapts and evolves and there is a continual cycle of learning where experimentation, questioning, reflection and adapting take place.



The TOOLS

Nature at Work uses a range of tools and techniques to evaluate the organisation, identify areas for action, raise awareness, develop skills, engage people, implement change, and celebrate success.

Where possible, all the tools are used in a natural environment, or if this is impossible, nature is brought into the space where the activities are being conducted. Many of the tools incorporate the use of techniques such as story-telling, visualisations, creative arts, metaphors and relaxation techniques as well as engaging facilitation techniques so that people feel safe and relaxed, have open hearts and minds, and participate actively in the process.

Some of the key tools are outlined below.

- 🌿 **Nature at Workshop:** This workshop is used to introduce the Nature at Work model, the concept of a Natural Organisation, and the different elements represented by the roots and branches of a Natural Organisation. The workshop introduces the concept of interdependence in living and organisational systems, before moving on to look at their own organisation as a living system, how using this approach will help individuals, the organisation and the world around them, and what the next steps are.
- 🌿 **Soil Test:** This audit process uses the soil as a metaphor to assess the current state of the organisation and identify what action is needed in order to become a Natural Organisation. It involves people from across the organisation at all levels as well as external stakeholders such as suppliers, customers and partners in a combination of facilitated group discussions and one-to-one interviews in order to identify the extent to which the roots and branches of a natural organisation are in place and what areas need to be improved or developed.
- 🌿 **Business Ecosystem:** This tool introduces the concept of the organisation as living system or ecosystem and creates a visual “map” of that system. This is then used to look at the overall

health of the ecosystem (business) as a whole and then to look at how improvements can be made by increasing connections, diversity and resilience.

- 🌿 **TetraMap:** [TetraMap®](#) is a profiling tool which uses nature as a metaphor to enable people to understand themselves and others, to look at situations and challenges from different perspectives, and to make the most of the diversity with their team or organisation. It is a framework for looking at ourselves, our colleagues, our workplaces and the world around us in order to live and work more sustainably.
- 🌿 **SpiderWeb Leadership Programme:** The SpiderWeb Programme is a journey of self-awareness, personal development and self-mastery which develops people as inspired and inspiring leaders. A spider's web is gossamer thin yet stronger than steel and its strength comes from the interconnectedness of all its elements. The SpiderWeb Programme develops the 8 essential threads of inspiring leadership and the connections between them through practical activities, self-reflection, group discussions and individual coaching within a natural environment.
- 🌿 **Watering Hole:** The Watering Hole is a facilitated group workshop which brings together diverse people from different parts of the organisation to identify issues, explore options and generate answers. It maximises the benefits of diversity to develop mutual understanding, cross-pollination of ideas and creative solutions.
- 🌿 **Nature @ work cards:** These packs of cards with diverse images from nature can be used in many ways and are a powerful and safe way to engage the whole brain, open conversations, go deeper into an area of interest, and explore similarities and differences.
- 🌿 **Walk and Talk:** These are structured, facilitated walks in a natural environment which promote free and open discussion and unlock creativity in order to explore and address challenges and facilitate change.
- 🌿 **Inspiration Days** A facilitated day designed to help people relax their bodies, awaken their senses, stimulate their minds, look at things in new ways, make the most of others' views and perspectives, explore unlock their creative potential and generate new, inspiring ideas. The day involves a range of enjoyable activities include walking, relaxation techniques, mandala-making, and exploring the natural world, as well as using various creative thinking techniques to solve problems, generate ideas and make decisions.
- 🌿 **Nature Works:** These may be full days, or shorter sessions, where people are taken to a natural environment where they seek out natural items, materials or processes which act as metaphors for various individual, team or organisational challenges. These metaphors are then used as a basis for observing and celebrating what works well and identifying and developing ideas and solutions for the areas which need improvement.

- 🍃 **Spaceship Earth:** Inspired by Buckminster Fuller's work, this activity helps people to stand right back and see the bigger picture by moving themselves out from a particular problem or issue into space and viewing it from there, then moving back in until they reach the farthest reaches of what is relevant to that issue before beginning to address it from that position.
- 🍃 **Drift Away:** This tool is a facilitated process to help people identify and let go of unhelpful ideas, practices, habits or views which are holding back either the individual, team or organisation by watching them float away in a river. The facilitation helps people to look at how this feels, what it means, and how to move forwards.
- 🍃 **Training programmes:** During the Natural Organisation process, training and development needs are often identified, usually in areas such as creative thinking, team-building, personal resilience, and building relationships. The customised training courses, workshops, or individual coaching programmes which are developed to meet these needs incorporate opportunities for learners to learn in, with, and from nature (see [Using Nature to Help People Learn](#)).

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