Social Landscape

Session #3 within "Self-in-Context" Unit

Training Materials:

- Whiteboard and pens or flipchart and pens.

- Paper and pen for all participants.

- Images of "The Flamingos" by Henri Rousseau and also "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" by Caspar David Friedrich that can be seen by participants.

- Print outs or links to access self-assessment questionnaires:

  o Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) [can be accessed at https://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/interpersonal_support_evaluation_list_and_scoring_isel.pdf]

  Social Network Index (SNI) [can be accessed at https://www.midss.org/content/social-network-index-sni]

Learning Objectives:

1. To define the term "social landscape" and to name and describe four features of a social landscape.

2. To describe Social Support Theory and to name and describe the four common functions of Social Support.

3. To assess and evaluate our own Social Landscapes and where and how we might access Social Support.

4. To consider challenges faced in accessing Social Support and responses to such challenges.

Training Script

Hello everyone, how are you today? My name is _____. I am going to be your tutor today for this training module on Social Landscape.

This module will take between 90 and 120 minutes to complete.

You will need a pen and paper to jot down your own ideas and thoughts in response to some of the tasks.

Today's session focuses on Social Landscape. It follows on from and is very much connected to the last session on identity, and forms one of the sessions within the unit called "Self-in-Context".

Before we look at today's learning objectives, I'd like to briefly review the learning from last session. I gave you questionnaires to take away to have a go at, with the aim of developing your self-awareness.

If you recall you had a choice of 3 different questionnaires to choose from:

- o Masculine Behavioural Scale (MBS) [can be accessed at https://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/mbs.pdf]

- o Attitude Toward Self (ATS) scale [can be accessed at https://www.midss.org/content/attitudes-toward-self-ats]

- o Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS-R) [can be accessed at https://www.midss.org/content/self-consciousness-scale-scs-r

We also covered lots of practical steps and techniques you could take to develop your self-awareness. I wanted to ask how you got on with these? Did you manage to do the questionnaire, and do you have any observations or comments you can share with us? If you used any of the techniques, do you have any feedback about those?

[Allow up to 10 minutes to discuss any points arising from previous session].

Let's take a look now at today's learning objectives

I very much hope that by the end of the session, you will be able to feel confident and be able to:

1. To define the term "social landscape" and to name and describe four features of a social landscape.

2. To describe Social Support Theory and to name and describe the four common functions of Social Support.

3. To assess and evaluate our own Social Landscapes and where and how we mioght access Social Support.

4. To consider challenges faced in accessing Social Support and responses to such challenges.

So, we will begin with learning objective **1: To define the term "social landscape" and to name and describe four features of a social landscape**.

Task:

Take a look at this landscape scene, painted in 1907 by French Post-Impressionist painter, **Henri Rousseau** (see figure 1).

It's called "the Flamingos".

The Flamingos - Henri Rousseau

Figure 1

Make a note of all the things you can see if this painting.

[Ask the group to name the things they can see].

When painters paint a landscape, they often base it on the things they see around them. In this case, it is thought that Rousseau may have got inspiration from his French army service to Mexico. He also spoke to other soldiers who had served in foreign climates. People he personally knew, and people

within the military community. He is thought to also have taken inspiration from pictures of in children's books and from plants and stuffed animals on display at museums and parks in Paris, visiting institutions and organisations to do so.   He made use of the range of resources and things he observed around him. These things made up the Social Landscape" around him, and he made use of these by combining them into his landscape painting.

This helps us to get a sense of what we mean by a Social Landscape.

Let's look at what "Social" means first.

Social means relating to society. And the dictionary defines society as:

"A large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done. All the people in a country, or in several similar countries, can be referred to as a society"[1].

A Social Landscape, then is the important features and relationships within a society that impact the people within the society. We can make use of these features within the Social Landscape to benefit ourselves and others.

There are 4 important features of a Social Landscape (see figure 2). We can consider that, if we are a member of society, we have some form of a relationship with each of these features.

The four features are:

- Personal relationships
- Professional relationships
- Organisational relationships
- Community relationships

[1] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/society
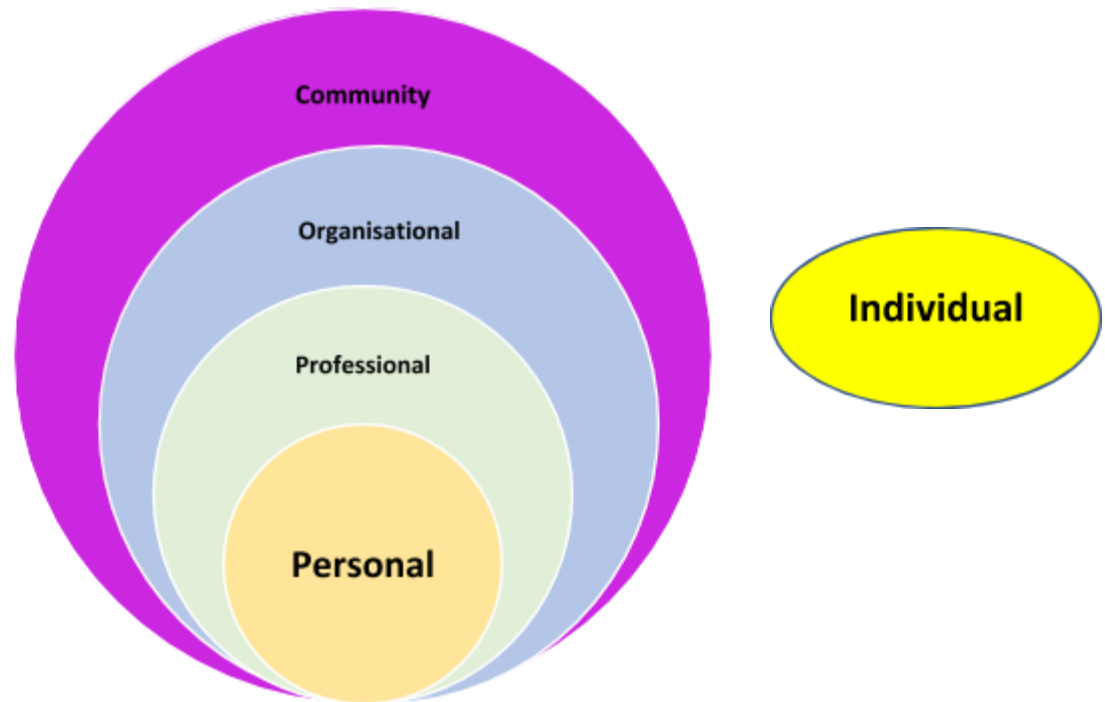
- Personal relationships include the people we personally feel close to and share our lives with, e.g. family and friends. They are part of our Social Landscape.
- Professional relationships include people we relate to at a professional level through work, business, or health care, e.g. our boss, line manager, bank manager, dentist. They are part of our Social Landscape.
- Organisational relationships include the services and organisations that we may or may not interact with, e.g. a health care system. They are part of our Social Landscape.
- Community relationships include the various communities that are within a society, e.g. a church or religious community, LGBT+ community. Differing communities are part of our Social Landscape.

Task:

Using 4 important features of a Social Landscape, describe the Social Landscape of the military as you understand it.

For example - Personal relationships: who would you list or describe as part of your Personal Social Landscape within the military? E.g. people you share your mess quarters with.

[Allow 5 – 10 minutes, then include a chance for participants to share their responses].

In our first session on Identity, we talked about MCT – Military to Civilian Transition. Just as within the military, within civilian life, there is a Social Landscape made up of the 4 features. However, this landscape may look a little different to the military Social Landscape. Whilst it may look different, it can be helpful to recognise that the same 4 essential features will be present.

Having now covered, learning objective **1:   To define the term "social landscape" and to name and describe four features of a social landscape**,

We can now move onto learning objective **2:   To describe Social Support Theory and to name and describe the four common functions of Social Support.**

This is important. Let's look at another famous landscape painting to get us started (see figure 3). This was painted in 1818 by the German Artist, Caspar David Friedrich.
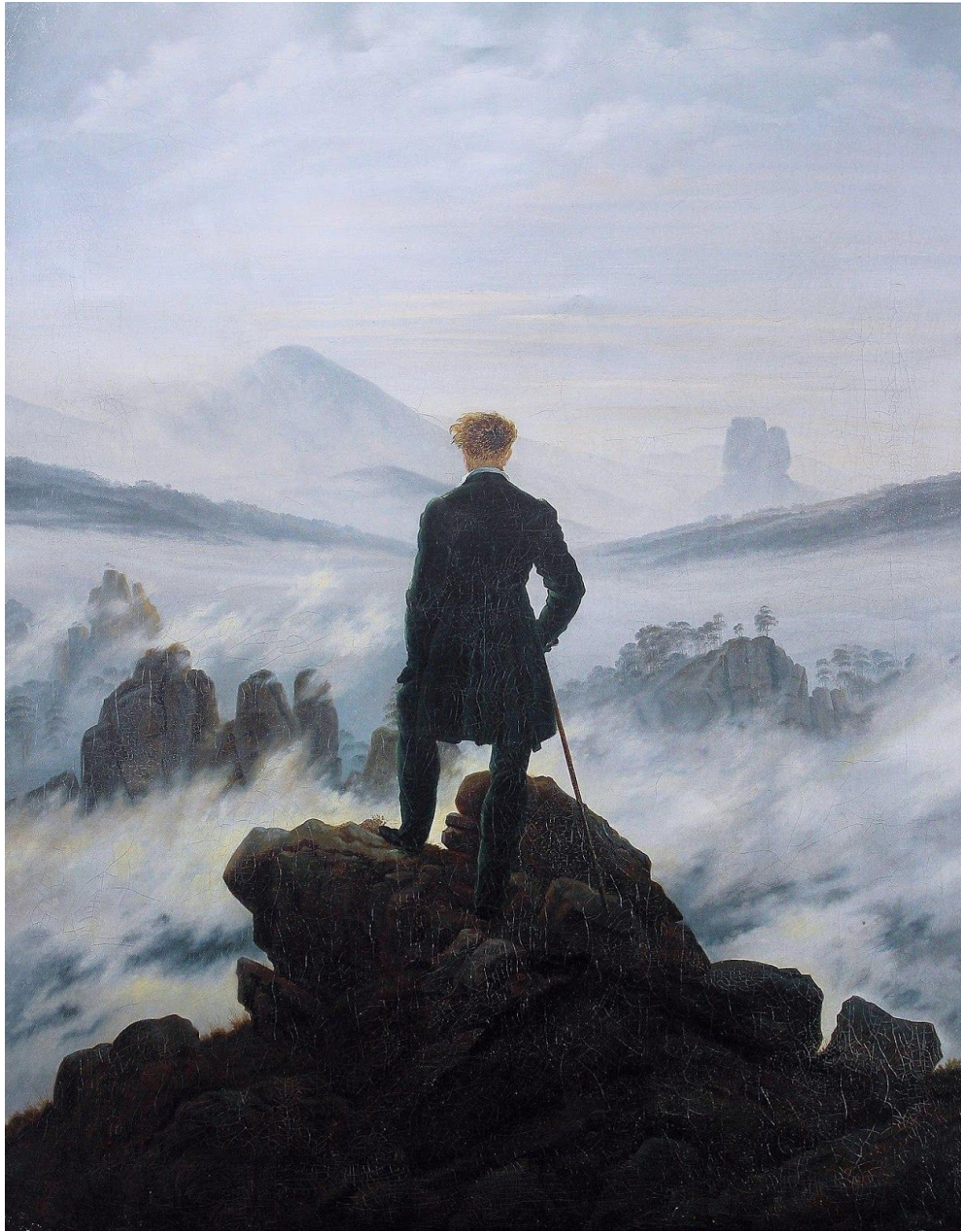
Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (1818) – Caspar David Friedrich

Figure 3

In this painting, the man wanders into a landscape. He stands alone as he looks out. There is the sense that this is a strange and mysterious landscape. Some people consider the painting to be symbolic for what it is like to enter a new or unknown place.

This image can be a helpful one when we think about MCT. Remember MCT has been described as a "reverse culture shock". Therefore, having adequate Social Support can help with MCT (or indeed, any

major transitions in life). It can help people to feel less alone and less confused by a new or changed Social Landscape.

Let's consider what Social Support is, and what we mean by Social Support Theory.

Social Support is the perception and also the actuality that you are cared for and have assistance available from other people. These people can come from any of the four aspects of the Social Landscape (personal relationships, professional relationships, organisational relationships and community relationships).

There are four common functions of social support[2]:

1. **Emotional support** - the offering of empathy, concern, affection, love, trust, acceptance, intimacy, encouragement, or caring.

2. **Tangible support** – practical support through the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services.

3. **Informational support** - the provision of advice, guidance, suggestions, or useful information.

4. **Companionship support** - the type of support that gives someone a sense of social belonging and connection to combat isolation and loneliness.

Social Support Theory includes the distinction between **perceived support** and **received support**[3].

Perceived support is the feeling of confidence that you will receive help during times of need if required.   Simply knowing there is support out there if we are in need can be a great support.

Received support refers to specific supportive actions that a person has received in times of need.

We can also distinguish between **structural support** and **functional support**[4].

Structural support is the number of people, or relationships, we have around us or are connected to that can provide social support.

Functional support is the different functions that people, or relationships can offer us by way of support.

[2] *Wills, T.A. (1991). Margaret, Clark (ed.). "Social support and interpersonal relationships". Prosocial Behavior, Review of Personality and Social Psychology. **12**: 265–289.*
[3] *Taylor, S.E. (2011). "Social support: A Review". In M.S. Friedman (ed.). The Handbook of Health Psychology. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 189–214.*
[4] *Barrera, M (1986). "Distinctions between social support concepts, measures, and models". American Journal of Community Psychology. **14** (4): 413–445.*

Someone who has lots of connections with people may have a high level of structural support. However, if none of these people can offer anything other than informational support, a person is therefore limited by the functional support they can access and may not have adequate Social Support.

There is evidence to suggest that when a range of functional support is not available, that emotional support may play a more significant role in protecting individuals stress[5].

Task:

Using your understanding of the four forms of functional support, the difference between perceived and received support and also the difference between structural and functional support, reflect on the Social Support available to you at present.

1. How and where can you access emotional, tangible, informational and companionship support?
2. What difference does having a sense of perceived support make for you at present?
3. List the places or people you can currently rely on to offer support (i.e. your structural support).

[Allow 10 mins for this task, and then facilitate discussion about the responses of the group].

With that task we have just completed, we have now begun to move into the territory of learning objective 3, which is:

3. To assess and evaluate our own Social Landscapes and where and how we might access Social Support.

That task got us to apply our learning on what we mean by Social Support to the Social Landscape we find ourselves in.

To give us a broader sense of our own Social Landscape and the Social Support available to us, we are going to have a go at another of the questionnaires designed by psychologists to help assess a person's situation and setting. As with questionnaires we've looked at in other sessions, we are doing this today to help develop our self-awareness. I have 2 different questionnaires, and I'd like you to choose one of them to attempt now.

[Offer participants a choice of either the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) or the Social Network Index (SNI).

Allow 10 mins for completion and brief discussion.

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[5] *Kessler, R. C.; McLeod, J. D. (1984). "Sex differences in vulnerability to undesirable life events". American Sociological Review.* **49** *(5): 620–631.*

Note – the scoring on these questionnaires is complicated. For the purposes of self-awareness, it is not essential that scoring is completed. Simply filling in the questionnaire can support developing self-awareness].

Our final objective for today is:

> 4. To consider challenges faced in accessing Social Support and responses to such challenges.

So, having acknowledged that in any Social Landscape, there will usually be at least some level of Social Support that can take the form of four functions, I want us to also recognise that people in need or difficulty do not always access Social Support. Within the military, some personnel do not access Social Support. Within civilian life, some people do not access Social Support. With MCT being a challenging time for some, in that it is a time of major transition, we know that many veterans do access Social Support. Some do not.

Task:

I'd like us to consider why you think people may not access Social Support. What factors might prevent them from doing so?

[Lead participants in a discussion and make a note of their suggestions, which are likely to include embarrassment, wanting to be independent, lack of information among others].

So, with these challenges in mind, let's look at two things that can be of help when people face challenges about accessing Social Support.

1. **Use the tool of Self-Compassion**. This idea draws on the work of Dr. Kirsten Neff (Associate Professor Human Development and Culture at the University of Texas) who has researched the concept of self-compassion[6]. She discovered that self-compassion is a powerful tool supporting mental wellbeing and health. One of the elements of self-compassion is to remember at times of difficulty, all humans have problems and require support. She calls this the tension between "Common humanity vs. Isolation". Self-compassionate people recognize that all humans experience suffering and pain, and make mistakes. This helps them to feel connected to others and more able to access Social Support rather than feeling alone and isolated because of their pain.

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[6] https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B01LP3TJN4/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i12

2. **Information can be an important step towards perceived support**. Simply knowing there is support out there if we need it is a form of support itself (perceived support). It can help to get some information to hand about the Social Support you can access if needed in the future. This can be personal, professional, organisational and community based. For example, having telephone numbers of Veterans support helplines can be an important form of perceived support and can make it easier to access received support when needed.

Task:

Take 5 minutes to come up with two more tips that can be of help when people face challenges about accessing Social Support.

[Allow 5 minutes for the task, and then 5 minutes to share responses with the group].

We have covered all of our objectives for today. So, we are going to reflect and evaluate our learning now:

Using a simple traffic light system, I'd like you to evaluate your own learning today. For each objective, you are going to decide whether you feel you are:
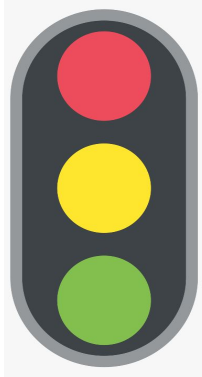
	RED / STOP	You have made no progress in learning this and are still at a "standstill."
	AMBER	You have some understanding but aren't quite ready to apply it yet.
	GREEN / GO	You have a good grasp of this objective and are ready to go and apply this learning in the real world.

1. To define the term "social landscape" and to name and describe four features of a social landscape.

   RED   AMBER   GREEN

2. To describe Social Support Theory and to name and describe the four common functions of Social Support.

   RED   AMBER   GREEN

3. To assess and evaluate our own Social Landscapes and where and how we might access Social Support.

   RED   AMBER   GREEN

4. To consider challenges faced in accessing Social Support and responses to such challenges.

RED   AMBER   GREEN

What do you want to do as a result of your learning today?

Thank you to everyone for your engagement and participation in the session. I hope you have learnt some useful ideas that can be applied in your daily life.