2. Group Support

Group support is focused on enabling people to work with others in a supportive and empathetic way, and on creating group cultures which allow everyone to thrive, provide the emotional support that people need, and give people the skills to deal with conflict constructively.

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Overview

What is group support?

This module is focused on enabling people to work with others in a supportive and empathetic way, and to create group cultures which allow everyone to thrive, provide the emotional support that people need, and give them the skills to deal with conflict constructively.

Why is this module important?

When working with others, it is really important that early on you clearly and honestly establish your expectations for yourself, for the team, for each other and for the project you are working on. Doing so can create a healthy working environment, in which people understand and respect boundaries, and work together for the collective success of your defined goals. Having such discussions initially also ensures that your relationships are built on openness and it can help you to deal with conflict constructively, as and when it arises.

Creating a team that emotionally supports those within it is also incredibly important as only does it ensure that people are looking after each other, it also enables the development of genuine connections, which can help to establish trust. Teams composed of individuals who care for each other's well-being and who trust each other are far more likely to succeed and fulfil their aims.

Personal Reflections on Working in Teams

Working with others can be a magical, transformative and inspiring experience; it can help us reach heights that we would not be able to reach alone, and to constantly learn from one another, providing opportunities for growth and reflection. Much of our progress as human animals has come from our ability to work together, and the way we have shaped the world is evidence of this. But it can also be difficult to work in teams: we have to negotiate people's feelings and perspectives, and forge relationships of trust and understanding. Teamwork is a complex plane to navigate and we no doubt all have different experiences of working with others: some of us may have enjoyed the process of connecting and working in teams, whilst others may have found it difficult to thrive in a team setting. We also all will have different levels of experience: whilst some of us may work in teams daily, others may not have done so since school.

Whatever your experience, these short activities are designed to help you connect with yourself, your previous experiences and your hopes for future teamwork.

- What does the word 'team' mean to you? Why?
- Think of a time when you felt comfortable working with others:

1. What was it that made you feel comfortable?
2. Was there anything about the situation that stood out to you?
3. What does this memory tell you about what you need when it comes to teamwork?

- Think of a time when you felt uncomfortable working with others:

1. What was it that made you feel uncomfortable?
2. Was there anything about the situation that stood out to you?
3. What does this memory tell you about what you need when it comes to teamwork?
4. How has this memory impacted your perception of teams and teamwork?

- Think about a behaviour that you find difficult to deal with in others:

1. Why do you think you find that behaviour difficult?
2. Have you had any past experiences connected to people showing such behaviour?
3. What do you think you can do to better understand such behaviour?

- Think about a behaviour that you exhibit that others may find difficult to deal with.

1. Why might they find it difficult to deal with such behaviour?
2. What can you do to check such behaviour?

3. How might people let you know that they find it difficult?

- Imagine that you are working with others to create a dream team:

1. What values do you think should help guide the team?
2. What do you want this team to know about you? How will you share this?
3. If you had to choose three adjectives to capture your dream team, what would they be?
4. Draw an image which represents this dream team.

Getting to Know One Another

If your group is new and you're going to spend some weeks or longer working together, then spend time getting to know one another. You may want to have a meeting, or a section of every meeting, dedicated to this at the start of your team journey. This will lay a strong foundation for the work you will do regarding the remit and operation of the group, like its purpose, goals and roles, and will make your team effective at collaborating, supporting each other and establishing boundaries.

Teams need to be able to work together in adaptable and flexible ways, giving members opportunities to step outside of old habits and established comfort zones to refresh their thinking, and to create new initiatives, and solutions for emerging problems. They need to support people in taking on new responsibilities, whilst enabling them to learn. Such teamwork is vital if we are to respond to, and remain adaptable in the face of the crises we are currently facing. However, it is difficult to build teams like this and to provide the conditions in which all team members can thrive, without first understanding the strengths, vulnerabilities and aspirations of those within the teams. And for this, trust needs to be developed. This guide contains suggestions on how to create a team rooted in trust and connection.

Names

Names are fundamental to identity, to knowing one another. To help people remember each other's names, either provide sticky labels for people to write their names on, if in person, or ask people to display the name they want to be known by on their zoom name display.

Some people have great difficulty in remembering names, or others might have the same name, so using tags can make the process easier. You might ask people to include the following alongside their name:

- Name
- Where you are from
- A personal description to add as a tag, which changes on subsequent weeks e.g. Bethan could name herself as 'Bethan Cardiff pink hair' on week 1 and on week 2, 'Bethan Cardiff wild pony rider'.

If you are using zoom, these are the names that will appear in the chat when people use it, so if people save chat contents at the end of the meeting, there will be distinctive reminders to help them relate comments to people.

Over time, when people know one another the names they choose to use can be playfully altered. You might for example, ask people:

- 'If your name were to match your mood, how would you like to be known today?'
- 'What name would you have given yourself in childhood if you had had a choice?'
- 'What name captures the superhero within?'

Another way to help people connect through their names is by giving them the following prompts and inviting people, in turn, to share what they feel comfortable sharing:

- *I was given my name because . . .*
- *I like / I dislike my name because . . .*
- *My name is / isn't a good fit for my personality because . . .*
- *People assume _____ about me because of my name . . .*

Check-ins and Check-outs

Check-ins and Check-outs are good opportunities for asking questions to help group members get to know one another. The types of questions that you ask in check-in may be different to those you ask in a check-out.

Check-in:

Consider asking questions that will bring the people into the present and help them process any high or lows on their minds. Most people don't get enough attention to process these in their life, so to provide that space will help the group bond.

Consider using questions that bring out the positive and difficulties in people's lives:

Plus:

- What's been good since we last met?
- What's going well in your life?
- Which three words would you use to describe good things in your life right now?
- What's one reason for being pleased to be here today?
- What are you looking forward to in this meeting?

Minus:

- What's been hard recently?
- What are you struggling with in life /right now?
- Which three words would you use to describe tough things in your life right now?

When a group is starting out in its first months, you may want to ask check-in questions like these in the full group. When the members of the group know one another better, these check in questions can be shared in breakout groups of 3-4 to do longer check-ins without taking up more overall time.

Ask the group if members need to know where everyone is at, or whether the group just needs time to arrive, to get into the present. If the former, then do the check in with the entire group. If the latter, then use breakout groups.

Check-out:

Focus the questions on helping people close the meeting and go back out into their lives.

Consider using one or a mix of following questions:

- What did you enjoy about today's meeting?
- What are you taking away with you from today's meeting (an idea, an action, some personal exploration, gratitude)?
- Who are you looking forward to being with next week, and why?
- What are you looking forward to doing next week, and why?
- What interesting challenges do you have ahead or would you like to take on?
- What will you remember to appreciate about yourself as you go about your business next week?

Icebreaker Suggestions

An icebreaker is a game that is literally used 'to break the ice'. They can take any form, but the idea is that they all help to give each other a fuller, more rounded view of the people you're working with. .

Curiosity Questions

- What was one of the best years in your life, and why?

- What type of foods do you like? What's a favourite meal?

- What songs do you like, and when do you sing?

- What's a film that you saw some time ago that had an impact on you?

- What is your favourite colour, and why?

- If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be, and why?

- What's a job that you've had that you really enjoyed, and why?

- What's your favourite city? Use 5 words to describe it

- When did you go on a really interesting walk? Where to? What was interesting?

- What did you love to do as a ten year old?

- What's one skill you're good at and one skill you'd like to develop?

- What's your favourite dance? Show us a few movements

- Who is a living person that you admire and two reasons why?

- What's your favourite animal? Demonstrate the sounds they make

- What's a memorable book from childhood? What enthralled you?

Games

In a virtual setting it's very difficult to do the many kinds of physical games that are possible when people are physically together, but thinking about moving to releasing physical tensions is important for virtual meetings, and when you can combine them with something silly, they can be lighthearted and fun.

Bingo

Someone is selected to start off as the bingo caller. They think of something they've done recently like 'eaten too much sugar' (it's got to be true of them). They ask the team - 'Has anyone eaten too much sugar recently? ' to raise a hand in the zoom REACT selection (bottom bar) if it's true of them too. Notice who hasn't raised their hand and select one of them to be the next bingo caller. If everyone lifts up their hands, then the bingo caller has another turn.

The bingo caller can ask for broad categories:

- Past experiences
- Interests
- Clothing
- Food
- Background / Family
- Dreams

Two Truths and One Lie

Everyone writes 3 statements in the chat, two of them are true and one of them is a lie. Someone keeps a tally and everyone gets to vote on which is the lie. People then reveal in turn what is the lie.

Name - Place - Animal - Thing

Someone starts and chooses the name of a river (they say e.g.Thames), the same person then allocates Place or Animal or Thing to everyone else in the team. They then must come up with a list of whatever they were allotted (Places or Animals or Things) that begin with the letters T H A M E S. show they've completed with the Hand Up REACTION on screen. The person who selected the name decides when everyone has finished whether it is the first or last Hand Up that is the winner.

They then ask the Winner for the name of a e.g flower. The winner then allocates Place or Animal or Thing to everyone else in the team with the letters of that flower. And so the game continues.

Designing Your Own Virtual Ice Breaker

Consider these factors before choosing your virtual ice breaker:

- **Establish a purpose:** Ask yourself, what 'ice' do you want to break? Are you simply introducing people to one another for the first time? Are you bringing people together from different parts of the neighbourhood, or people who have different cultures and backgrounds? You'll need to handle these differences sensitively and make sure that everyone can easily understand and get involved in the ice breaker.

- **Define your goals and objectives:** Do you want people to learn more about one another? Or is your objective more complex? For instance, do you want to encourage people to think creatively or to solve a particular problem?

- **Help people feel comfortable:** Your ice breaker will only be successful if everyone feels able to participate. So think about whether there are any obstacles that could hinder this, such as differences in language or culture. Steer clear of activities that might inadvertently cause offence. Bear in mind that information can often get 'lost in translation' and that jokes and humour don't always travel well.

- **Take time into account:** Do you want your ice breaker to be a quick five-minute activity or something more substantial? Take into account your purpose and objectives, and whether your gathering will have people calling from different time zones.

- **Choose your frequency:** Do you want your ice-breaker to be a quick activity at the start of each meeting immediately after Checkin? Will you change your ice breaker every time you do it? Will the same person always take the lead or will you rotate on who gets to pick and lead the activity each meeting (if you decide on that frequency)?

- **Consider technology:** If doing an ice-breaker on zoom, remember that some people are "camera shy," and/or have poor internet connection or may not have the right technology. If this is the case, you might want to choose an ice-breaker that doesn't rely on people being able to see each other.

- **Taking the lead:** One way to get people involved is to ask them to take lead on choosing the icebreaker/checkin/checkout.

- **Prepare in advance:** Decide how much information you'll need to provide your participants with beforehand. Do they, for example, need to bring a prop to the meeting?

A Note on Group Size and Bonding

Group size makes a difference to bonding and building trust. Breaking into small groups is useful for people to get to know one another in more depth. Once a group has 8 people, then consider splitting it into breakout groups for some activities. This is important for people who find large groups difficult (9 is a large group for some people); sma;er groups can help people build confidence in speaking.

Dividing people into smaller groups regularly will help people to get to know each other faster, especially if the breakout groups are randomly assigned, creating different groups each time. As the group continues to meet you can vary the size of the breakout groups and make them bigger, although bigger than 5 will take up time and be more difficult for people to relate to and learn from each other.

Tips on How to Give and Receive Feedback

Being able to give and to receive feedback is important when working with others, when building relationships based on trust and honesty, and for being able to make progress – without feedback, people may be held back from reaching their full potential. Feedback, however, is not an easy thing to give and the awareness we could be upsetting someone often holds us back from sharing our ideas or feelings; it is also not an easy thing to receive – it can be hard not to take something someone has stated about you or your work personally. It is, therefore, important to focus on how we can give feedback in a constructive and compassionate way and how we can receive feedback without becoming offended. One way to start is by viewing feedback as a means of developing, of building resilience and of connecting with others.

Imagine that feedback is like having something stuck between your teeth. If no one tells you it's there, you might spend the day wandering around and interacting with people with a piece of spinach announcing itself each time you speak. Many people may have seen it, but everyone has felt awkward enough not to say anything. Most people would rather somebody told them about the spinach. Feedback is like that. It can be difficult to say, but when shared with the right intention and the desire to help, it can be incredibly useful.

The following suggestions are designed to help facilitate the development of honest and open conversation, and the establishment of short feedback loops.

Giving Feedback

Here are some tips on how to give feedback:

- Take responsibility for what you are sharing. Make "I" statements – starting statements with"you" can sound accusatory and make people feel defensive.

- Think about your intention – why are you sharing the feedback? Is it to help someone else progress? Is it to share how you have been affected by something? Whatever your intention, want the best for the other person and for your relationship with them. Feedback is not about undermining someone or scoring a point, it is about strengthening bonds and helping people reach their highest potential self.

- Show appreciation for others if you are giving them feedback that could be received as negative – praise something that they do well. It is much easier to hear feedback if you know that you are valued.

- Give feedback in a one-on-one situation. Bringing something up in front of others can make someone feel exposed or vulnerable.

- Take it slow – if there are several things you want to mention, it is probably not worth bringing them up all at once.

- Think carefully about what you want to say – it could help you to write out your feedback before you give it and read to see how it sounds.

- Be sensitive to the fact that you are talking to someone who is as complex as you and who might have events going on in their life that you may know nothing about.

- Open the floor – see if they have feedback to offer you and ask if you could do anything differently.

Receiving Feedback

Here are some tips on how to receive feedback:

- Take responsibility for your feelings and your response. You can decide how you react in each situation.

- Try not to take the feedback personally. Assume the best of the other person – they are sharing information so that you can improve at something or so that your relationship with them can improve.

- Be aware that it is difficult to give feedback – the fact that someone is taking time to give you feedback shows that they value you and that they feel comfortable enough in your presence to do so.

- Make an effort to understand how something can be done differently – ask for support if you feel that you need it.

- Be honest – if you feel like you have been misinterpreted then say so, but do so sensitively and compassionately.

- Openly ask for feedback from others – getting into the habit of receiving feedback can be incredibly helpful for your growth and it can make receiving feedback less of a big thing.

- If some feedback has upset you, take time to process that feedback independently and think about why it has upset you. Is it related to any previous experiences? Sit with those feelings and give yourself time to work through them.

- View feedback with a growth mindset. Without feedback you might never learn things about yourself, you might not develop as much as you could. Feedback is a tool that can help you reach your potential and that can improve your relationships with others.

A Quick Guide to Holding Effective Meetings

Running meetings that keep to time, enable constructive discussion and give everyone an opportunity to have their voices heard is a difficult thing to achieve, particularly if these meetings are being held on Zoom (or any other video conferencing platform). More often than not, people talk over each other (making it impossible to hear what is being said), and meetings drag on chaotically, leaving those present tired and frustrated.

Using a set structure and hand signals to communicate, however, can resolve such communication issues and can create harmonious, inclusive and even enjoyable meetings. As can using Zoom's breakout room capacity (if you are holding meetings online) as it enables people go off into smaller groups where they can discuss an issue in depth, before sharing their ideas with the larger group.

To have constructive, harmonious and enjoyable meetings that keep to time, it is advisable to use the following components:

- Facilitators
- Note-takers (minute-takers)
- Hand Signals
- Breakout Rooms (on Zoom)

It is also important for each person participating to trust the facilitator and to use the hand signals responsibly (please see the 'note to participants' section at the end of this document for more information).

The rest of this document will explain what is meant by the components listed above (the content has been adapted from Extinction Rebellion's various People's Assembly manuals), and is divided into the following sections for ease of reference:

Facilitators

Every meeting should have a lead facilitator, who is responsible for ensuring that the meeting runs to time and that those present are able to share their ideas without chaos breaking loose. The facilitator does not need to remain the same across consecutive meetings. Indeed, it is more effective if this responsibility is shared out and people take it in turns to take on this role each meeting.

The facilitator's role is to look out for the hand signals, prioritising them appropriately, and to ensure inclusivity – no one person should dominate. If one person is speaking for a long time, the

facilitator can request that the person rounds up, using the appropriate hand signal, or if one person repeatedly wishes to make a point, the facilitator can prioritise those requesting to speak who have not yet spoken. At the start of the meeting, the lead facilitator should request that people put themselves on mute and only unmute when they are speaking – this prevents any background noise interference and also ensures that the meeting is not interrupted with people's exclamations or comments.

Inclusion

The facilitator should moderate participation to ensure that everyone is able to speak, should they want to. The facilitator can engage participants by inviting people to speak and by, conversely, asking people not to speak. If people have not spoken, invite them to engage with a topic by asking for their opinion. If someone has occupied a lot of the airtime, explain that you would like to ensure everyone who would like to speak is able to and/or that you are conscious of the time. Rounds can also be used: after someone has shared an idea or proposal, each person in the group can be invited to share their response and comment in turn. As can timers, so that people contribute for a set amount of time, and the round up signal is used to inform them when that time is up. These approaches can ensure that the meeting stays inclusive and can prevent some voices from dominating.

The facilitator should also be sensitive to people's needs. Give people the opportunity to share whether or not they have specific disabilities, inviting people to do it privately should they wish to). So many disabilities are invisible, so you should never assume that people do not have them.

Using breakout rooms can help maintain inclusion as it gives people a chance to talk in smaller groups, which is particularly useful for those who are shy. If breakout groups are used, then each room needs a facilitator, who will ensure that the discussion keeps to time and that everyone is able to participate, as in the main meeting room.

Pace

The facilitator should be aware of the pace and the fact that many people will not speak English as a first language. Ask anyone speaking too quickly to repeat what they are saying or slow down, and build in time for quiet reflection. Having one minute's silence every 20 minutes, for example, allows people to rest their minds and reflect on or process what they have heard. As can having a short 10-20 second pause after every speaker.

However, it is also the facilitator's role to ensure that what needs to be discussed in the meeting is discussed. Suggest that times be allocated to each agenda item, and have the group prioritise items, so that the pace of the meeting is relaxed and not too rushed, with some items possibly moved to the following meeting or to be settled by email or other means outside of the meeting.

The facilitator should also be aware that people may need concentration breaks. If it feels like concentration is dipping, give people a chance to take a break, to look away from the screen, to dance together to some music, or to play a game. This can help re-energise the group.

Building Trust

Facilitators can build trust into their meetings by giving people space to check-in and check-out at the beginning and end of a meeting. These are not only great ways of entering and closing the space, they are also ways of including everybody, and giving people the chance to learn more about each other. For ideas on types of check-in, see Getting to Know One Another.

It can also be a good idea to read out a regenerative culture reminder, or some kind of statement to capture how the group present can work together, after people have checked-in, but before going through the agenda. If needed, use the example below.

A Reminder: *We are transitioning to a regenerative culture. It is a culture of respect and listening, in which people arrive on time to commitments. And deal with conflicts when they arise, using short feedback loops to talk about disagreements and issues without blaming and shaming. It is a culture in which we cultivate healthy boundaries by slowing down our yeses and returning tasks when we are unable to follow through. It is a culture in which we look after ourselves and others, understanding that it is natural to make mistakes: they are a key part of the learning process and provide opportunities for growth and development. It is a healthy resilient culture built on care and support. We are all crew.*

Minute-Taker / Note-Takers

The lead note-taker is responsible for keeping the minutes and recording what is being said in the main meeting. Again, unless this role is part of someone's job description, it is good to rotate who is the note-taker, so that everyone can have an experience of fully participating in the meeting.

If breakout rooms are used, then each group should appoint a note-taker, who will record the group's discussion and share the key findings back with the main group when the breakout rooms are closed.

Hand Signals

Point (or 'I would like to speak'):

When someone in the group wants to say something, they should point their index finger up and wait for the facilitator to let them have their turn in speaking. It is vital that people do not talk over anyone else and wait for their turn. If someone, who has not yet said anything, puts their finger up to speak, whilst others have spoken a lot, then the facilitator should give that person priority over the 'stack' (the queue or order of speakers based on the order they raised their finger to speak).

Direct Point:

If someone has directly relevant information to what is being said, then they can make the 'direct point' hand signal and the facilitator will let them provide that information immediately after the person speaking has finished. Think of the direct point hand signal as being like brackets, which are used to add critical information that a speaker is not aware of e.g. "the meeting has now been

changed to Wednesday". The direct point signal is not an excuse to jump the queue just to make a point. It is important that people do not abuse this signal as otherwise it can make all present lose trust in the process.

Wavy Hands (I Agree):

The 'wavy hands' signal of approval is used to show agreement or support for something someone has said. It instantly indicates how much consensus there is towards something and can highlight how popular an idea is. If everybody erupts into a forest of waving hands during a breakout session, for example, the note taker can see that this is one of the more popular points made and it will become one of the key bullet points fed back to the main meeting room.

Clarification:

If someone says something that is unclear, people can hold their hand in a 'C' shape as the 'clarification' signal. The facilitator will then pause the discussion giving the person who made the signal the opportunity to ask a question to clear up any confusion. This signal should be given priority above all others as it means that someone does not understand something and it may thus inhibit their ability to engage in the discussion.

Technical point:

If someone has information that is immediately relevant to the running of the meeting, they make a 'technical point' signal by making a 'T' shape with their hands. This is only to be used for concerns external to the discussion that need to be addressed immediately e.g. "We only have ten minutes of this meeting left" or "I am the note taker and I need the loo so can someone else take over?" The facilitator should stop the discussion to address the technical point.

Round Up:

Facilitators need to ensure that no one speaks for more than necessary (two minutes is a suggested maximum amount of time as it encourages people to be concise). If someone has been speaking for two minutes (or whatever the set amount of time is), the facilitator makes the 'round up' hand signal by repeatedly making a circular motion with their hands (as if they are tracing a ball). This must be done sensitively, but firmly as it ensures that no one person dominates the meeting.

Speak up:

If someone is speaking too quietly or they cannot be heard, others can ask them to raise their voice by raising and lowering their hands with palms open and facing up.

Break Out Rooms

To brainstorm ideas or discuss a subject in depth, use the breakout room feature on Zoom, as it will give people space to discuss their ideas in smaller groups. Please note, breakout rooms can only be created by the person who is logged in as the host (though the host can transfer hosting to another

person, if desired).

Whoever is the host must look at the control panel at the bottom of the screen for the button stating Breakout Rooms.

The host should divide the number of participants in total by the number of people wanted in each group, and Zoom will automatically assign people to rooms. Once they have done this, they can look at the lists to check that all rooms have the right number of people.

If certain people need to work together, the host can manually assign people to rooms.

The host can also set the options, such as timings, for the breakout rooms (see the example outline below), and can communicate with all the breakout rooms by using the broadcast button to send messages about timing or other important points to consider.

For each breakout room to run effectively, it will need a facilitator and a note-taker. The note-taker should be responsible for feeding the key ideas back to the rest of the group. If there are several breakout groups then consider having a limited number of ideas to feedback to ensure the meeting keeps to time e.g. each group might be asked to choose three key ideas for their note-taker to feedback.

Note to Participants

You are each responsible for creating a considerate space in which everyone is able to participate. It is, therefore, important to reflect on your own involvement in the meeting.

To create a constructive, harmonious and engaging meeting environment, consider the following points:

- Mute yourself when you are not speaking as it ensures that you don't distract attention away from the speaker.

- Respect the facilitator's role to hold the meeting and to intervene to give everyone a fair chance to speak; it is likely there won't be time for everyone to say everything they want to say, so please allow space to make sure others are heard too.

- Please think before you speak and consider whether what you are saying is vital or not. Ask yourself: "Why am I talking? Do I really need to add my view in here? Is what I am saying necessary, or do I just want to speak?" You don't need to repeat what someone else has said, that's what the jazz hands are for.

- If someone has said your point, put your hand down so the facilitator knows that you are giving up your place in the queue stack, otherwise keep it up.

- Let someone who hasn't spoken in awhile go ahead of you. So when it's your turn, say "X hasn't spoken in a while, take their point ahead of mine".

Building Healthy & Empowered Teams

Introduction

This workshop and guide were developed because "there's no such thing as a structureless group",

as explained by Jo Freeman in her text, The Tyranny of Structureless. Often people think that when there is no explicit power structure or hierarchy, that everyone is equal. However, this is not the case. There are always implicit power dynamics at play. The vast majority of people have grown up in hierarchical societies from family, to family, to workplaces, there's someone in charge and someone who has to listen to them. These are explicit hierarchies. But there are also implicit hierarchies, such as the cool kids at school who call the shots and get the back seat of the bus. Those kids don't have any official titles that give them that power, they have it because others want to be seen and liked by them. This is one example, but implicit power can mean an advantage for one person over another due to their sex, age, race, class, abilities, etc. These injustices are present in society and will be present in our team unless we do something about it. By proactively deciding how we organise, we can reflect our values and leave behind ways of working that reproduce the injustices in society.

Building teams is an important part of community building because just as you want a good culture in the community, it grows from the people who are organising and how they relate to each other. When we build a team, the culture we create sets the tone for the community project that grows from it. Do you want the culture to be one where everyone turns to you and is lost without you? Or one where people are willing to step up and use their own judgement, especially when you need to take a break from the project?

Trust is essential to working as a team. By having a clear structure of how you organise, you can be clear about what to expect from each other and where your boundaries lie. This will enable you to build trust which is essential for a healthy, productive team and in order to create an experimental culture. See more on Building a Culture of Trust & Support.

Most importantly, teams stick together when the going gets tough because people don't want to bail on their friends. Generally, people join community projects and activist groups because they are interested in the activities or they want to change their community or world. However, people stay for friendship. These means teams in volunteer contexts should make room for getting to know each other and having a laugh outside of a meeting context. Cups of tea at each other's house, potluck dinners, pints in the beer garden, or just spending part of the meeting chatting is an important part of being a team and should not be underestimated.

What is a team?

A team is a group of people who are dependent on each other in order to achieve a shared purpose. Creating a team is important because otherwise you're a random bunch of people pulling in different directions and prone to distrust. A team has a sense of unity in achieving their shared purpose and they collaborate and support each other

We recommend a team is a maximum of 6 - 8 people. Why not more than 8 people? Because as you can see in this picture, the number of connections you have to maintain dramatically increases after 6 - 8 people. 6 - 8 is manageable. After 8 your team can create subteams, e.g., one person working on the newsletter, then it expands to 2 and then maybe 3.

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When the team becomes more than 8 people, you may want to start thinking about creating off-shoot teams, as shown in the diagram below.

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What makes a good team?

There are 5 key elements that make up a good team:

Feeling safe (Trust)
This is by far the most important. It determines how easily members can take risks, make mistakes and ask for help without fear of retribution from the rest of the team.

Dependability
Effective teams are ones where members can rely on each other to deliver work when agreed.

Structure & Clarity
How are decisions made? Who is doing which role? Do I know exactly how our work is structured?

Meaning
Is the work personally meaningful to people in the team?

Impact
Do people feel like their contribution is having a significant impact on the overall purpose of the team or organisation?

Here are some questions you can ask yourself as a team:

1. Can we, as a team, take a risk without feeling insecure or embarrassed?
2. Can we count on each other to deliver high-quality results on time?
3. Are our goals, roles, and execution plans clear?
4. Are we working on something that is personally meaningful to each of us?
5. Do we fundamentally believe that the work that we're doing matters?

Volunteer team structures

Team structure matters more than the amount of free-time people have to give:

- If teams are interdependent, it encourages people to get shit done as people are waiting for them
- Equal division of labour encourages people to give more time. We need equal workloads in teams - more important than free time.
- Spending less time in meetings! Do meetings for relationship building or coordination, not doing the actual work. Less time in collective meetings.

The difference is 4 hours/volunteer/month vs 40 hours! 10x difference. Also, people who receive more training are more committed time-wise.

What do we want to do?

Shared Purpose

What is a shared purpose and why do we need one?

Teams need a purpose that engages their commitment and orients them in a shared direction. They need something that gives them meaning and to work towards! The purpose needs to be shared because it needs to be something that each person buys into — that's why it can be really useful to create the purpose together.

Teams should have 3 elements in a shared purpose:

1. Clear: What exactly are we trying to achieve?
2. Challenging: A challenge can be motivating and can encourage dreaming big.
3. Consequential: Where does it fit into the bigger picture? A shared purpose in a volunteer team should tie back to how it fits into the overall purpose of the organisation or the wider group you're working with.

How to create a shared purpose

What do we want to achieve? What does the world look like when your team has finished their work? This should be written like the outcome you want to see, e.g., complete the sentence... 'If our team fulfilled its purpose, there would be...' or 'We imagine a world where...'. For example, if your team If the Aylesbury 'Reclaiming your Local Council' team fulfilled its purpose, there would be participatory democracy at the local council level, independent of party politics. A useful facilitation tool for helping a team to create a shared purpose is pyramiding.

1. Solo reflection: Everyone writes down their understanding of the team's purpose - 5 mins
2. Pair share: Share your statement with another person & combine - 15 mins
3. Pair the pairs: Each pair shares and combines their statement with another pair - 15 mins
4. Each group shares with the whole group - 10 mins

5. Create one statement that captures the all key points - 15 mins

If one statement cannot be reached within the meeting time. You can ask one person to take the final statement from each of the groups and then present it to the team at the next meeting. The team can then decide whether this reflects their shared purpose and adjust it as necessary.

Projects

What projects do we need to reach to achieve our purpose?

Now let's consider what we need to do to achieve our purpose: what milestones do we want to set? Projects & milestones are important to set out as it provides valuable evidence of when a team is making progress towards their purpose. When projects are completed and milestones achieved, teams should celebrate each other for making meaningful progress! Celebrating others and recognising achievement is an important part of building a healthy culture of trust & support.

First, we're going to do some divergent thinking. That means thinking about all the possible things we could do or goals we could set. Then we'll narrow it down with some convergent thinking.

Divergent Thinking - 12 mins

1. Solo brainstorm all goals on post-its - 7 mins
2. Write down the opposite of a goal you'd want to set - 5 mins
3. Then try switch that opposite-goal to something positive, a goal you would want to set - 5 mins

Convergent Thinking

1. Map them on scale of winnable (achievable) and worthwhile (impactful)
2. Consider whether it's better that some happen before others (maybe number the order they need to happen in)
3. Consider which ones would be the most enjoyable to do, that suit your interests best
4. On the basis of either of the previous criteria, prioritise which one you're team will work towards first

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Then take those one or two milestones you want to work towards. Brainstorm how you would achieve them- what steps and activities need to be taken in order to achieve that milestone. If you discover that one isn't so feasible, then you can pick another milestone.

Roles

Why do we need roles?

We need roles because it's really useful to:

- Know what decisions you can make without having to check with others
- Have someone bottomlining a task or set of tasks/activities
  - (that means one person is going to make sure it gets done, not that they have to do it themselves and that no one else can do it)
- Know who to talk to about specific activities

What roles do we need?

So you've talked about the milestones your team needs to achieve and some activities to get there. Now let's group those activities into roles. Roles should be based on outcomes you want to achieve, e.g., finding a venue for a fundraiser.

There may be some roles that will need to be done on an ongoing and relevant to the team generally (e.g., newsletter writer). And there may be other roles that will be project based (finding a venue for the fundraiser).

1. Brainstorm all the tasks or activities that need to be done to achieve your milestones or in a project.
2. Group the tasks you think make sense together.
3. Discuss any disagreements.
4. Decide on the wording of the roles... (more on decision making later).

Nominating people to roles

This is an alternative to a more formal process outlined here. Given the activities we've outlined, what roles do people see for themselves? What interests align with the activities we've prioritised? Do a 'go-around' which is where everyone in the team gets a chance to speak.

This may not be the most speedy way to decide roles, but it's important to get to know each other. You can either let people speak freely or time each other so that everyone has 3 minutes each, for example.

Each person states...

- What tasks they like doing, what gives them energy
- The role/area that they're interested in
- Their level of commitment in terms of hours of week and whether they have other projects on the go

It's perfectly fine to share roles if that suits best. You can withdraw your consent and make changes to these at any time, so go with something that's good enough to try and make changes later. This allows you to make decisions and move forwards and change things when you have more info based on your experience.

The Dark Side of Roles

Roles can tend to emphasise an individualistic perspective, which undermines team effort. They can lead to team mates focusing on their role (I'm just doing what's in my mandate), above achieving the purpose of the team. Individual roles become more salient because they're written down. This could be counteracted by consenting to group agreements which emphasise the team's cultural values.

More important than roles are projects. Projects within a team can be a group of 2 - 4 people working on a specific task or towards a specific goal. Project teams are small enough that roles are not as important and people can keep track of who's doing what within the team. Projects like this can feel more collaborative than the idea of roles.

Roles can be good for clarity of who is doing what and structure of teams. This clarity means psychological safety!

How do we want to work together?

This section is about helping your team figure out how you want to communicate, make decisions, and give feedback and set boundaries.

Decision Making

Why should we decide how to make decisions?

A mutually agreed decision making process creates clarity and clarity can prevent some types of conflict. People need to know that proposals and ideas they bring forward are going to be handled in a fair & democratic way. This encourages people to bring more ideas and take risks when they are confident the group will respect an agreed decision-making process. (They feel their ideas will be assessed on its merits rather than them having to fight for space to be heard in the group). And so a clear decision making process can help to create psychological safety amongst team members. Also, having a say in how the team functions is empowering - it models the democracy we want to see.

Group vs Role Decisions

Group decisions are great to get input from everyone. But they can take a long time so we suggest you only do them when necessary. Most decisions should be made by someone in a role. If a decision is recurring delegate it to a role by adding it to an existing one or creating a new role.

People can still input into a decision if the role holder uses the advice process. This is where you ask advice from those most affected by the decision and/or those with expertise (including lived experience). The role holder doesn't have to follow the advice, they consider it and weigh it against all considerations.

Who should make decisions when?

One guideline of how often to use each process can be seen below:

- 90% of decisions made by individuals from their role (smaller & reversible decisions).
- 9% by a group decision making process (e.g. consent) when a decision is more important)
- 1% by individuals deciding for groups (advice process when a group can't decide).

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Individuals: If a decision has a smaller impact or can be corrected easily, that is an indicator that an individual could make it alone. An example of this would be writing a single social media post for a shared page (as each individual social media post isn't that important).

Group: For more important and irreversible decisions, that is a time to seek consent from the group rather than deciding individually. An example of this might be moving office. Moving office would have quite a large impact and is largely irreversible so it's best to seek consent from the group before deciding this yourself!

Individuals deciding for groups: If the group cannot reach consent, then it is best the group delegates and trusts one person to make the decision, who has the responsibility to consult the relevant people and gather advice before doing so. For example, when the group cannot decide who goes to meet the local councillor, you could pick one person who takes all of the considerations (what is the meeting about, who has knowledge in that area) into account and accept whatever decision they make.

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Teams can decide what decisions they're happy for team members to make themselves, and what ones they want to make as a group.

Group Decision Making Processes

There are many ways to make decisions and many different types of decisions. Here are some different decision making processes:

- **Informal consensus:** This is a very common approach to decision making. It happens when someone presents an idea and no decision making process is explicitly made clear, but it is assumed that everyone must agree with the idea and so there is a pressure to conform.

- **Formal consensus:** In consensus based decision making, the group is asked "Do you agree with this proposal? Do you approve?" Though not everyone needs to agree with the proposal, it can make work slow as not everyone might agree.

- **Majority vote:** everyone can vote for one option and the option with over 51% wins. You can also have a supermajority of 60% or 80% (this level would be decided beforehand).

- **Consent:** In consent-based decision making, the group is asked "Is this safe enough to try or will this proposal cause harm?" This allows the group to improve the proposal so that it

doesn't cause harm, but means we don't have to wait till proposals are perfect, we can try things out and adjust or stop if it's not working well. It's easier to find something that everyone can tolerate, rather than something everyone loves.

There are many more decision making processes. The Decider app helps you determine what decision method suits the decision you're trying to make. All of these methods have pros and cons which you can see if you click on the buttons at the bottom of the Decider app homepage. Next, we will describe consent based decision making in more detail, since it's the process we recommend.

Consent Based Decision Making

A key thing about consent is that it can be withdrawn at any time. You would then bring a new proposal and bring it to the weekly meeting.

3 Levels of agreement:

1. Support: Enthusiastic to lukewarm support
2. Support with concerns: Would like to share some concerns but OK with proposal going ahead
3. Objection: Veto the proposal going ahead until the proposal is changed

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Objections:

- Objections must be principled or grounded in evidence, rather than a personal opinion or preference.
- Concerns (e.g., this proposal is incomplete) need to be addressed but are not a reason to stop the proposal going ahead.
- We pass a proposal when it's safe enough to try, not perfect.
- Objections should be welcome because addressing them will make the proposal stronger.

Whatever decision making process you decide to use in your team, it's important that you DO decide on one. Not having a clear decision making process can lead to stagnation. Consent allows you to try things and change them when they don't work - this keeps us experimenting.

Sample Decision Making Agreements

1. We want to make decisions in a way that is inclusive and effective.
2. We use group decision making when it's important to do so, not by default.
3. If a decision is recurring, we delegate it to someone in a role unless it's important that that decision is made by the team.
4. We use consent based decision making for group decisions. We recognise that consent can be withdrawn at any time (and the person withdrawing consent is encouraged to bring a new proposal).
5. We pass a proposal when it's safe enough to try, not perfect.

6. Someone making a decision seeks the advice of those affected by the decision beforehand. They take the advice into consideration, but do not have to follow it.
7. If a decision creates greater workload, the decision is made by the person who would take on that workload.

How to decide how to decide?

You can use the most inclusive decision making method to make the decision to use a different method. For example, the team could use formal consensus to agree on the decision making agreements (which could include consent based decision making which would be used from then on).

Group Agreements

Why do we need group agreements?

Group agreements are about understanding each other's values around working, how you'd like to work together as a team and agreeing on things you can hold each other to. Group agreements are about understanding each other's values around working, how you'd like to work together as a team and agreeing on things you can hold each other to. This is extremely important in building a healthy culture of psychological safety within teams, as now each person knows what other people in the team cares about. Psychological safety and trust are some of the most important things in determining the effectiveness in a team.

There are many different types of group agreements we're going to talk about here, e.g., ones around decision making to guidelines for meetings and giving feedback.

You don't have to decide all group agreements within the same meeting. They can be spaced out, but it's better to do them sooner rather than later because group agreements help set up the culture and help you keep each other to account. You can also copy the sample group agreement we have here and then change them as the need arises.

Brainstorming Your Agreements

Now let's make some group agreements and agree to them! Use the pyradming process described above to ask the team…

- What's important to you about decision making? What agreements around decision making would you need to make this team a safe and respectful place for us to work in?

1. Try to make them practical.
2. Take for example "*it's alright to disagree*" - how would this work practically? You could add "*… by challenging what a person says, not talking the person themselves.*"
3. Another example is *Confidentiality*. This is also quite vague and you will need to discuss what people understand by it and what level of confidentiality they expect from the group.
   - Solo: reflect on the question and write out your ideas for agreements
   - Pairs: people get into pairs and combine any similar proposed agreements

- Round: As a group, each person shares what's important to them and not to repeat any that have already been mentioned (Arrange them into clusters of post-its on the wall if possible)
4. This should be captured in a place everyone can see.

Consenting to Your Agreements

After you've captured each of the agreements somewhere everyone can see, you're ready to use consent based decision making! Here are a series of steps… Remember they don't have to be perfect, you can change and update them at any time.

- **Questions Round:** anyone can ask questions to make sure they understand what the proposed agreement means
- **Reaction Round:** everyone gets an opportunity to say whether they have concerns (whether they are quite mild or very serious ones that would prevent them from supporting the proposal)
  1. It's ok to be indifferent to some of the proposed agreements, they should be included if they're important to someone.
  2. Controversial agreements could be taken out at this time, and rephrased/worked on by those with strong opinions and then proposed as an additional agreement at the next meeting.
- **Consent round:** each person states whether they support the proposal or object to it. If there's an objection, ask the person to explain more. If the objection is valid (see above), amend the proposal until there are no more objections.

It's important to explain the process to your team before diving in and to be strict with keeping them to questions during the question round. Otherwise, some people will start reacting when they may not fully understand the proposal which causes a lot of confusion. When new people join the team, they are asked to read the group agreements and consent to them.

Feedback

How to give feedback?
It's important to have a way of addressing issues if something isn't working. We encourage you to be open and honest about when something isn't working for you by giving feedback. Honesty is essential for building trust, and trust is essential for healthy teams.

Feedback is a really important part of organising as a volunteer team where no one person is in charge. It will help the team work better or help you participate more fully, or both, so we can think of it like a gift to the team. The purpose of feedback is to help each other reach their full potential and also to help us as a group to move towards our shared purpose. It's important to note that you should give positive feedback when things are working well. This helps build trust within the team and lets people know they are appreciated. It makes it so much easier to give other feedback later on so it is not just a tool when things are going wrong!

What to give feedback on?

Feedback can be useful when you feel a difference between how things currently are and a better way in which things could be.

Feedback can be about small things that your team mates might do that piss you off, little things you appreciate or major things about the direction of the team's work. We want to encourage a culture of valuing each other, raising concerns and being honest, so we can work together as best we can.

Example: I want to chat about people arriving late for meetings. I make an effort to arrive on time for commitments and I feel disappointed & let-down when people arrive late. It means we get less done overall and this work is something I really care about and is close to my heart. My request is that people arrive a few minutes early for a meeting so we can start on time and even have a social chat beforehand!

When to give feedback?

We suggest that feedback is welcome at any meeting. If the feedback is primarily relevant to one person, we suggest you share it with them outside of the meeting. If it's relevant to the whole group, the weekly meeting is the most appropriate place to share it.

Giving feedback to a team/in a meeting:

The person describes their feedback and if they have an idea on how to resolve it, they write it down as a proposal or they share it with their teammates ahead of the meeting. (Remember not all work has to happen in the meeting, the more that can happen outside of it, the better.) If the person with the feedback doesn't know how to resolve it, the team could try to work it out together in the meeting, or a small group could work on it outside the meeting and make a proposal for the following week.

Framework for giving feedback to an individual:

- **Situation:** What was the context? Be specific of where and when
- **Action:** What specific action or behaviour did you observe? Don't interpret their actions or make assumptions of their motives.
- **Impact:** What was the impact of their actions? How did it make you feel? Do they understand/see that?
- **Request/Appreciation:** State requests for future behaviour or express appreciation if positive.

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Tips for giving feedback:

- **What is the intention?** Is it to help someone else progress? Is it to share how you have been affected by something? Whatever your intention, it should be to support the other person and for your relationship with them.
- **Timely:** Give the feedback as soon as possible after the situation. But it's best to wait until any emotional energy has settled down so that you can give the feedback in a calm,

clear-headed way.

- **Is this the right time?** Ask the person whether they are able to hear some feedback from you at that time? They may be having a difficult day and it may be better to rearrange another time to speak.
- **Give it in private:** Bringing something up in front of others can make someone feel exposed or vulnerable. Give feedback in private if possible.
- **Why it matters:** Explain why it's important to you or the team. People will be more willing to engage if they understand where it's coming from.
- **Be specific:** What exactly are you giving feedback on and can you provide an example of the behaviour?
- **Avoid making assumptions:** Avoid interpreting someone's behaviour and guessing their motives. It's best to ask questions and inquire what their motives/intentions were.
- **Double check:** Make sure the person you're giving feedback to has understood your concerns. Ask them to summarise what they heard or ask open questions.
- **Openness to dialogue:** Be open to hearing the person's side of the story and listen to their needs so they feel their wellbeing matters. **Action plan:** Develop an action plan going forward, so that both parties can move forward together.
- **Vocab:** Avoid words like "always" and "never"

Tips for receiving feedback:

- **Be receptive and listen.** You may want to clarify your intentions or something that you did, but try not to jump to defending yourself.
- **Trust in the person giving you feedback:** They are sharing something that is important to them, and may be useful to help you grow as a person or for your relationship to grow.
- **Clarify:** Make sure you have understood fully by repeating back and checking you've understood what they are saying.
- **This is an opportunity for growth!** Ask for suggestions and how to improve.

Resources for reading more about feedback: Tips on How to Give and Receive Feedback

Use the *Consenting to Your Agreements process* above to help your team decide what's important to them about giving feedback. Here are some sample agreements that include giving feedback, meetings and general ways of working.

Sample Group Agreements for Meetings & General Ways of Working

- Everyone is able to contribute
  1. more talkative people: show a little restraint
  2. quieter people: your contributions are very welcome
- Only one person speaks at a time
  1. put up your hand if you want to speak and wait for your turn
- Respect each others' opinions, especially if you don't agree with them
- Confidentiality - personal details and stories should not be repeated outside of the space in which they were shared without permission

- Be conscious of time - help stick to it, or negotiate for more (e.g., we've given 15 minutes for this decision but …)
- Mobile phones off to minimise disruptions
- Regular breaks - acknowledge that concentrating for long periods of time is difficult
- Communicate via email or Mattermost (Whatsapp is only for very urgent things)
- Respect that the facilitator may need to interrupt at times
- We acknowledge when we have broken a commitment (this prevents a culture of in which breaking commitments is normal)
- Feedback is welcome because we recognise that processing tensions is part of becoming a healthy team and keeping team mates fully engaged.
- When someone brings a tension, we collectively take it on and try to resolve it.

How to help your team along

Leadership

What do you think of when you think of a leader? Who do you imagine? Usually we think of leaders as someone, usually a man, a CEO type figure, who has a vision and tells people what to do and lead s the team to victory. This is one style of leadership - a style that will probably not be that helpful if you want a team that can manage itself, a team where anyone can step up when they see the need for something to be done - a collaborative team.

There are many different styles of leadership, such as visionary, mentoring, facilitation and thought leadership. We're going to focus on facilitation leadership because it is the most appropriate approach when creating an empowered team. **Facilitation leadership is helping the team achieve their purpose and ensuring everyone can contribute so the team can harness its collective wisdom.**

Different styles of leadership may be useful for different aspects of a team. For example, someone may have an idea for a specific action that they take the lead on organising in a more traditional way. But generally, we recommend facilitative leadership for helping the team achieve it's shared purpose.

There are many different types of facilitation as there are different types of leadership, for example, some facilitators just prefer to be the referee and help the team stick to the agreed process. However, facilitation can also be more than keeping track of the order in which people have their hand up! Facilitators can set the tone of a meeting and so influence the culture.

The purpose of facilitation is to help the group move towards their shared purpose. A facilitator is there to ensure that everyone in the group has equal opportunities to bring their individual gifts to the table, which in turn makes the whole group better off. Good facilitation helps us harness the collective wisdom of the entire group, by making sure that everyone participates fully & equitably in the group environment.

Facilitative Leadership Skills

Here are some key skills for facilitative leaders that spell CARES:

C: **Celebrate** people's contributions and achievements!

A: **Aligned** with the purpose

R: Encouraging taking action points/**responsibility**

E: Creating an **environment** in which everyone can contribute fully

S: **Synthesising** what's being said & making requests explicit. Sometimes people don't

Rotate the facilitator and the leader

People learn by doing and so there's no better way to become a good facilitator than trying it out. Encourage your teammates to give it a go and let them find their own way even if it's not how you would do it. Check out the feedback section to learn more about how to ask if people want feedback and then give good feedback.

Facilitative leadership can be done separate from facilitating a meeting. People often assume there can only be one leader, however, teams can be **leaderful**. That means anyone can step up when they see the need for leadership. Explicitly changing the leader can also be really useful. Being a leader can be tiring, so just as geese flying in a V rotate the leader, empowered teams should too.

Facilitation Leadership Resources

Facilitation as a Leadership Style

Facilitation is a Leadership Skill

The Art of Facilitative Leadership

General Facilitation Resources Meeting structure A Quick Guide to Holding Effective Meetings

Facilitation Tools

Here are some different ways of running a meeting that can help your teammates contribute to the fullest. Some processes can draw people out and make the task a lot more fun.

Process Tools

- 1,2,4 all
  1. Described above
- Pair Share

1. People pair up and share their thoughts, feelings and stories. This can be very useful after some solo reflection time.
- Negative Brainstorm
    1. Take the question you want answered and flip it so it is framed negatively. For example, if I want to know 'how can we build trust in our team?' I could turn that question into 'how can we build mistrust/destroy trust in our team?'
    2. Spend some time brainstorming around this question
    3. Then take each of those suggestions, e.g., 'insult each other every time we see each other' and flip it again, e.g., 'compliment each other every time we see each other'.
    4. It's a really fun technique that gets a few laughs and helps people think more freely.
- Double diamond
- Starhawk visioning:
    1. imagine your perfect world, how do people communicate, what does it look/smell like, what are the group norms? Can be a prelude to brainstorming. Put top 3 on post-its.
- Appreciative enquiry:
    1. Think back to when you were in a good team, how many people, what about that team was good? How did you meet? What did you do? What were the norms? How did make decisions? How often did you meet? What was the gender balance? Feel like you have autonomy?
- Turn-based contribution:
    1. Ask a question & people solo brainstorm
    2. Pick 3 people at random
    3. Ask a different question & people solo brainstorm
    4. Then pick a new
    5. Ask a different question & people solo brainstorm
    6. Then another 3
    7. So everyone gets a chance to speak. Works for related questions, each with multiple answers.

- Use post it notes & stars from Training for Change

Tools: (e.g., double diamond, need lots of different methods for different things)

- **Pyramiding:**
    - Pyramiding is a common technique used to avoid anchoring. Anchoring is the process when one person's idea can cause the rest of the group to become "anchored" on that particular proposal, rather than exploring the rest of the available possibilities. Pyramiding, sometimes called 1-2-4-all, is a process where everyone in the group is given time to brainstorm individually before comparing ideas with other people. This means that we have the widest possible range of ideas, which we then choose to converge on.
    - The process starts with an individual brainstorm (a few minutes is usually enough), before going into pairs and comparing ideas. If you want a smaller number of ideas at the end or just the best ideas, you could ask the pairs to pick their top five favourite ideas. In the next step, two pairs come together to form a 4 and between

them they share ideas and select their collective favourite six ideas (as an example). Then this 4 can share their top six ideas with the rest of the group when it becomes time to present back.

- **Rounds:**
  - A round (or go-around) is a tool when everyone in the group is asked to give their thoughts or reaction to something, going one after another in a seated or online arrangement e.g. clockwise around a circle. This is a great tool in making sure that everyone in the group has an equal opportunity to speak and should be used often. It can also be used by the facilitator when they are not sure how to proceed and would like support from the group, for example if there is a controversial proposal. An example might be: "Okay everyone so Linda raised a good objection and I'm not sure how to integrate that into our current proposal. Can I ask everyone to have a round so we can try to think of ways we could make this work?"
- **Popcorn:**
  - If you don't want to do a round or you think that not everyone needs to contribute at a certain stage, you can ask people to do it "Popcorn-style". This just means people speak when they are ready to contribute, in no particular order of seating. The idea is that it's like popcorn popping in a microwave without any direction or pattern!
- **Prioritisation/voting**
- **Reflect back**
- **Energisers**

Building a Culture of Trust & Support

A study by Google found that building psychological safety is really important for effective and healthy teams. What is psychological safety? It's the shared belief that teammates have that they can throw out ideas without fear of judgement, they can take interpersonal risks and know they will not be rejected or embarrassed for speaking up, it's a feeling of being comfortable enough to be yourself - your full self. So although the context of a professional working environment such as Google, is quite different from that of community organising, this sounds like a feeling we want to create in our teams. One of the researchers on the project said 'If only one person or a small group spoke all the time, the collective intelligence declined.'' (more here).

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Here are the key aspects of building psychological safety according to Google's study. Just remember: CACCOW

C: Celebration - Recognise people and their efforts. Make your teammates feel valued and make the work fun.

A: Autonomy: Allow people to do work as they see fit. Generally, if someone is doing the work, e.g., designing and printing the flyer, they should be the one who gets to have decision making power over it.

C: Caring: Don't just meet for work, invest in personal relationships!

C: Clarity: How do we decide and do we know who's doing what? The sections on decision making and group agreements are really relevant here.

O: Openness: Share information broadly and honestly. Transparency is a really important aspect of building trust.

W: Wholeness - Encourage people to bring their full selves and role model this through vulnerability. People generally don't open up unless you open up to them, so be brave and share a personal story.

Resources on Building Psychological Safety

- Re:work Guide: Understand team effectiveness
- What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

Relevant Reading

- The Tyranny of Structureless
- Act Build Change
- Leadership, Organising and Action
- Group Agreements
- Sample Group Agreements
- 11 Practical Steps Towards Healthy Power Dynamics at Work
- How to foster psychological safety in your team
- Where's the Psychological Safety for Speaking Truth to Power in Self-Organisation?
- Reinventing Organisations (video)
- Consensus, consent, advice, mandate
- Formal consensus
- 1, 2, 4, all
- Processing tensions
- Fierce Vulnerability Agreements
- Sociocracy for All
- Feedback without Criticism

How to deal with conflict in your groups

Every group and relationship experiences conflict, regardless of whether we are trying to bring about a revolution or play dominoes on the street. It's simply part of being human, it's also a particular feature of living in a world which is more mobile. Humans used to live in largely homogeneous groups, whereas today many different world-views and cultures are present in our communities.

So, it's no surprise that so many of us struggle to collaborate with each other and then have difficulties finding a healthy way through conflict. Conflict is bound to happen while we unlearn old habits and develop new skills and awareness to work cooperatively and challenge oppression.

This guide is aimed at people and groups working for social change who want to develop an understanding of conflict and how to deal with it. There are sections on what conflict is, the benefits of addressing it, and tools to work through conflict and maintain healthy and effective social change groups.

What is conflict?

Conflict often be signalling:

- That some needs are unmet
- The power and/or trust to care for all the needs involved is not currently within reach
- Change is emerging
- Our relationships, agreements, understanding of what we are trying to do, ways of sharing power, and social systems, may need to evolve.

Conflicts are often painful, distressing, frustrating and destructive. Our personal, social and historical experiences of it are usually negative and traumatic. And so, we want to find a better way of navigating tension, conflict and disagreement because how we respond to it shapes whether conflict will tear us apart, or change, evolve and strengthen us.

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5 Stages of Conflict:

1 - Discomfort
A little niggle that tells you a conflict might be brewing.

2 - Incident
A minor clue that acts as evidence of the growing conflict.

3 - Misunderstanding
The situation has escalated to a degree that one or both parties have developed false assumptions about the other.

4 - Tension
The clues here are much more obvious. This could be an argument, an emotional outburst, or out-of-character behaviour.

5 - Crisis
Breaking point for the relationship. By this stage all communication will focus on the conflict.

Why deal with it?

> *Conflict isn't a problem - it's an opportunity*

Conflict can help us grow - in ourselves, in our relationships with others and in how we work together, in our groups and systems, and in getting clearer on the purpose that we share. We see a lot of conflict as offering an opportunity to evolve and build our collective power.

Understanding our conflicts and working through them can be a deeply empowering process for everyone involved. It can be hugely energising to find a way to connect with people you have a conflict with, and find a way through the conflict that everyone can live with instead of pretending it's not there. Imagine you're part of a group where people communicate honestly with each other, where everyone knows their own feelings, where there is a sincere desire to understand differences between people in the group, and to find solutions that are genuinely satisfactory for everyone.

Groups with a healthy approach to conflict will be better prepared to go the long haul together, and are better able to effectively bring about social change. Clear communication and trust for each other enable groups to make better decisions which takes into account more points of view. It also saves the time and energy that is sometimes spent on avoiding conflict.

Methods of Handling Conflict

Good communication

In this section, we'll explore what we can do to minimise conflict with others and deal with it effectively before it escalates. We will be looking at tools and skills to improve communication that will help to de-escalate a conflict.

Empathy Circles

An **Empathy Circle** is a structured dialogue process based on mutual active listening. The process increases constructive dialogue and mutual understanding by ensuring that each person feels fully heard to their satisfaction.

Process:

1. The first person selects who they will speak to
2. They speak about whatever comes up for them for a set time (3-5mins)
3. The listener reflects back what they are hearing until the speaker feels heard and understood to their satisfaction
4. Then it is the listeners turn to select who they will speak to and for that new listener to reflect back what they are hearing
5. Everyone helps hold the circle process by monitoring and sticking to the steps.

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication can help process tensions in a way that supports honesty with care and creates conditions for connection and better collaboration.

A simple way to do this is to:

1. State the issue you observe
2. Highlight how it made you feel
3. Say what you need to be able to work well
4. Make a request of the other person

Here is a good resource to learn more about how to do this: Guide to 4 part NVC Process (PDF)

Active Listening

Active listening is about suspending our own thought processes and making a conscious effort to understand another person's perspective.

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Try this exercise for practice:

Practice in threes. You'll need two people to practice this. Each take a role - speaker, listener or observer.

1. The speaker speaks for about 2 minutes on a topic of their choice, the more controversial the better!
2. The listener actively listens and then summarises the key ideas and any emotions they observed, as succinctly as possible (1 minute).
3. The observer also actively listens and gives constructive feedback to the listener on their summary and anything they missed.
4. The speaker then has a chance to say how it felt and to comment on the listening.

5. Keep switching roles until everyone has had a chance to try each role.

Practical Steps

Creating Group Agreements

Creating Conflict Group Agreements will help to figure out how the group will handle conflicts and tensions when they inevitably arise.

These could include:

- An intention to 'lean into conflict', treating it as potentially transformative rather than something to run away from.
- An agreement of a clear method and space for raising and processing tensions within your group.
- A shared understanding about what to do if a conflict occurs and where to go for help.
- An intention to use Nonviolent Communication and short feedback loops to process tensions quickly and non-judgmentally. (Short feedback Loops are when you tell someone that you have a tension with their role or their behaviour quickly after the tension occurs).

Conflict Mapping

Use this tool when your group wants to get a clearer picture of the issues that are underlying the conflict situation. It helps your group to map out the underlying needs and fears of each person involved in the conflict and to find common ground. It's a structured way of moving forward in a conflict that is much easier to facilitate than an open discussion.

This tool could be facilitated by someone in your group, including someone directly involved in the conflict (as long as they feel able to stay neutral when encouraging others contributions), by a neutral friend or external facilitator.

Materials: a large piece of paper e.g. flip chart or a roll of wallpaper and some marker pens.

Step 1: What's the issue?

In the middle of the paper write down what the issue is. Aim for neutral and unemotional language and try to keep it an open-ended statement.

Step 2: Who's involved?

Decide who the people involved in the conflict are and draw lines on the paper so that each of them has a segment of the paper. (E.g. if the conflict seems to be between two members of the household, then give each of these people a segment of the paper). Also give one segment to the other members of the coop together, provided they have substantially the same needs in this situation.

Step 3: What do they need? What do they fear?

Ask each person in turn what their wants, needs and fears are. Discourage others from interrupting. Write the wants, needs and fears down on their segment of the paper.

Try asking questions like: "Your solution to the problem is to do... What needs of yours will this meet?" to help people get to these underlying interests and needs. The list of needs will be more helpful if the words or phrases are specific, so words like "respect" or "understanding".

Fears are concerns, anxieties or worries that someone has that are relevant to the problem e.g. being judged or criticised, fear of failure, doing the wrong thing, loss of face.

Step 4: Reading the map

Invite everyone to look at the map and consider others' wants, needs and fears that they hadn't taken into account before. Mapping the needs helps us to see what it's like to be in another person's shoes. C ommon ground -The map may also show where the common ground is within the group with some values and needs showing up in each segment. The map can also help start a conversation to build new areas of common ground, for example where one person has mentioned a need that others have not mentioned during the mapping, but can also share,

Step 5: Looking for new solutions

You've created the map and seen everyone's needs, now comes the creative part, looking for solutions that meet those needs. After the more analytical mapping phase you might want to play a game or move to a new room or change seats before you start this step. Use an ideastorm to collect ideas. This is a quickfire creative thinking activity designed to gather as many ideas as possible. It also allows people to spark off each other in an uncritical environment.

How to run the exercise:

1. Give people a few minutes to reflect on their own. Ask them to think of potential solutions that would meet everyone's needs.
2. Ask people to say their ideas for solutions that will meet everyone's needs. Let them know that all ideas are welcome, however silly they may seem.
3. Write all the ideas on a large sheet of paper (flipchart, wallpaper etc).
4. Remind people that this isn't the space for critiquing the ideas – you're just gathering them now, and assessing them will happen later.
5. If the group runs out of steam, rephrase what you're looking for and give them a chance to come up with more ideas – there's often a second wind, so don't be afraid to ride out the silence.

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Step 6: Choosing the most suitable option

When you have some possible solutions, bring the ideastorm to a close. Help the group find the best solution. It may already be clear that one solution fits the bill.

If not, see if it helps to rate each of the solutions using this scale: 1. very useful; 2. lacking some elements; 3. not practicable.

Other questions to explore might be: Is it feasible? Is it enough to solve the problem? Does it satisfy everyone's needs adequately? Is it fair? Do you think you can live with it? Sometimes if the problem seems huge, you might not be able to find a solution for the whole thing, but you can solve parts of it. It doesn't fix it, but it helps make it more manageable.

Step 7: Implementing the plan

It can be easy to come to a decision and then forget to work out how you will make it happen. Questions to ask include: What has to be done? Who will do what? When will each task be completed? Maybe timetable a review to check that it's all happening.

Holding Emotional Spaces

It is important to welcome emotions in your group. Reaching out to people in your communities and focusing energy on connecting with them is difficult work and requires ongoing attention, so it is important to create space and time to share how you are feeling with others. Not only can this help you connect with yourself, it can also help you avoid burnout.

In your groups, consider creating opportunities for deep check-ins, so that you can support one another and overcome any hurdles you might be facing. Deep check-ins function as emotional spaces, in which everyone is able to share what they are feeling, what they are struggling with, and what brings them joy. When we can express ourselves openly, without shame, it enables us to fully process and reflect on our emotions. This is not therapy. Instead, it is a tool we can use to help build networks of mutual caring. If we make space for our own emotions and those of others, we can create a culture of support and model the society we wish to live in.

Emotional spaces are so important because we are not generally encouraged to express our emotions in our daily lives in a healthy way. We all feel, but we aren't able to let those feelings out and we aren't taught how to seek help for them. We are not raised to be comfortable with emotion. We see powerful feelings as shameful or even dangerous things. It is not socially acceptable, for example, to cry in public; unless we perceive that the person crying has a 'good reason' to cry we may consider them weak or unstable; even if we are sympathetic, our instinct is to shut it down, through fussing and fixing or even through force.

Can you remember being a child and your caregiver becoming angry because you were expressing sadness or frustration? Indeed, much of the advice around childhood tantrums – an ordinary stage of human development – centres around how parents/carers can best snuff them out. Very little, if any, is said about the right of the child to have their emotions, and to express the strength of their feelings in a non-violent way. When parents/carers respond to tantrums or crying or whining in an angry, adversarial way, the child learns that their feelings are not welcome. They do not learn how to deal with their feelings, only that they should distance themselves from them. Children may subsequently come to fear their emotions, to ignore them and/or to bury them. These childhood wounds carry through to adulthood and have big repercussions both for our health and wellbeing, and for our relationships with others.

You can't selectively numb emotions, they are all natural. Pain and grief come from the same place as joy and pleasure, so when we suppress the 'negative' emotions in an effort to protect ourselves, we also tamper our ability to share happiness and to be at peace. And how can we possibly hope to form meaningful connections if we are so busy protecting ourselves? Intimacy cannot be achieved without vulnerability; it is only when we stop feeling shame about our natural feelings that we are able to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to others.

Your ability to hold an effective emotional space will depend on your group's trust for one another, how far you have set the foundation of mutual respect and fellowship.

Resources

Try to find a quiet, comfortable space where people can talk without being overheard. It may be a good idea to have a timer so that you can ensure everyone has the same amount of time to speak. Tissues as well will be useful – we are welcoming people's feelings and there might be tears! Tea, coffee and biscuits are good resources too.

Be sure to allow time for decompression after the sharing, and a space where the group can reconvene in a casual way after an intensive shared experience. It may also be a good idea, especially if you have a big group, to have a gathering time 10-15 minutes before the 'starting in earnest' time, to give people opportunity to arrive at a leisurely pace and get into the right headspace beforehand.

If it feels right, and you have the time, a period of group meditation, or just listening to calming music together, doing some yoga or stretching can be an effective exercise in mental alignment. This will depend on the preferences of the group, and their level of comfort with each other.

Remember, as with any meeting, to consider the time of day and the venue to ensure it is accessible to everyone. Incorporating technology (Zoom conferencing etc.) may be a useful way to include those who cannot necessarily be there in person.

Roles

Facilitator

The facilitators role is to 'hold the space' and guide the session: introduce the deep check-in, kick it off and support participants where needed. You are not in charge, you are managing the space not the people in it.

The facilitator always takes a turn in the group – you are part of the group. It can be useful to take your turn first as sometimes you can model being open about your feelings, and this helps the rest of the group.

When it's someone's turn to speak, the others generally don't say anything. However, on rare occasions some gentle words of encouragement from the facilitator may be useful (e.g. "it's OK to cry"). Though be aware that if a lot of people offer such verbal support, it can 'take over' the person's turn.

Before deep check-in, ensure that you have practised facilitating group spaces and are comfortable with the responsibility of holding a safe emotional space. It can help to have a co-facilitator, whose job is to provide reassurance to you, handle timings, and generally help with making the group work well.

Buddies

For some groups, it might work well to create a buddy system. This sort of system works effectively if people are sitting close together and allows each person in the group to have someone offering them additional emotional support if it is needed - if, for example, they become upset, their buddy can offer them tissue or a hand to hold / an arm around the shoulder. If this approach is being taken, it can be discussed at the beginning during the facilitator's introductory talk. Please note, it is important to ensure people have the opportunity to express whether or not they are comfortable with physical contact.

Conflict resolution point person

It is important to decide on a clear process to resolve conflicts, which is agreed upon by the group. The facilitator or co-facilitator can handle conflicts, or you may prefer another member of the group be there for conflict resolution responsibilities. It may be that someone who has experience with non-violent communication or de-escalation is well suited to this role.

Meeting structure

You will want to keep things open, but a loose structure will help to enable sharing.

This is an example meeting based on 8 people with 90 minutes active time

1. **Check in:** Each person says something about how they are feeling right now, or something they are grateful for, or similar. You can be creative. This should be quite short, say 30 seconds per person.

~5 minutes total

2. **Talk:** The facilitator gives a talk about emotional debriefing and how the meeting will work. (See the suggested talk notes below.)

~10 minutes

3. **Timed Turns:** Each person in the group gets a chance to talk for an equal amount of time. The facilitator is timing them. In our example there are 70 minutes available for this part. For 8 people this gives about 7 minutes each, if we assume about 1 minute to switch between people.

You might want to include a stretch/toilet break halfway through this section so people aren't sitting and listening continuously for a long period of time.

4. **Checkout:** It's good to end on a positive note here. One way is for each person to say something that they liked about being in the group. If some have talked about difficult things in their turns it can be useful to have a go-round at the end of the group where each person in turn talks briefly [one sentence] about something good that they've noticed in their life, or in the world, even if it's a small thing.

~30 seconds per person.

~5 minutes total.

Total: 84 minutes.

Facilitator's talk

Here is where you introduce a topic or question that is relevant to all the people in the group. You may have talked about this beforehand. It is also where you introduce the process and purpose.

Here is an example (please note, this is one way to run an emotional debrief session – there are many other ways to do it):

Reaching out to others in our communities can be difficult, tiring and emotional work. And that is OK. We are taking steps to work and connect with others, and in so doing are stepping out of our comfort zones and making ourselves vulnerable. This can not only trigger emotional pain from our past that has not been resolved, it can also leave us open to pain in the encounters we might have, or in our reflections on the state of society.

It is important to acknowledge these emotions and start to process them, so that they don't impact your well-being and/or your community work. Example feelings might be fear or guilt, or feeling like people don't like you, or you don't like others…

Whatever they are, it is important to address them and push past the desire to ignore how we are feeling. Most of us have been conditioned to hide the full depth of our feelings, but here we are aiming to create a space where we can show them and support each other.

Being listened to with loving attention helps people to release painful emotions:

The undivided, loving attention of other human beings is a valuable resource. It can allow deep healing to occur. This kind of attention tends not to happen in normal conversations or discussions because a lot of our attention can be taken up with looking for a space to start talking. When a clear space is organised for each person to speak everyone can relax a bit. The person speaking knows they have time to explore and express what's in their mind. Whilst the listeners know that they don't have to fight for the space to speak or think about what they want to say next – they can relax and pay full attention to the person who's turn it is to talk.

This provides an enormous boost to the level of attention each person gets from the group.

We will each have a turn to speak without interruption from others. In your turn, you can talk about whatever you need to, without judgement from anyone. This frees up your mind to do the work you need to do. It's important that we all allow space for the person talking to feel their full feelings – we don't need to stop that happening.

Our job as listeners is to direct 100% of our care and attention onto the person whose turn it is to talk. Emotional release is welcome and encouraged, for example, crying, laughing, sweating, trembling, expressing indignation, yawning, and other things. Don't interrupt someone else's turn to talk about your own thoughts.

It's good to show that you care about them, but if you are not careful how you express that you can end up intruding into that person's space. It has become all about you! Just smiling and keeping your loving attention on them is mostly all that is needed.

We will divide up the remaining time between the people present, leaving some time for a check out. In general, we encourage people to take the whole of their allotted time, even if they can't think of what to say. The silence may feel uncomfortable for everyone, but it's useful to sit with this discomfort. (One reason why humanity is in crisis is because a lot of the important things we need to do are on the other side of some discomfort, and we find it hard to stay with that discomfort.)

This text can (and should!) be adapted.

Group agreements

It's important to have group agreements to make the participants feel safe and ensure everything runs smoothly. You can decide together what is important to you to enable openness. Introduce the agreements to the group during your talk, explain their purpose and request agreement from each participant. This is a chance, as well, to pre-empt any conflicts.

[Example talk:]

These agreements can help to make the group feel safer:

1. *Confidentiality: what someone says in their turn in the group should not be repeated to anyone else, not even the person who said it, unless they give permission. It's easy to give specific or general permission, for example "you can ask me about this afterwards", or "Do we all agree that we can talk about what was said today in this group amongst ourselves?".*
2. *Treat people with kindness and respect. We all struggle and make mistakes. Give each person the space to speak what's in their mind, as it sits in their mind. We all need the space to say exactly what's in our minds as this allows us to review our thoughts, and perhaps change our minds. Confidentiality helps to create this space.*
3. *People might talk about other people in their turn. Don't believe anything that anyone says about another person. Even though we are creating the space for people to express what's in their minds, it's good to avoid criticizing other people in your turn to talk as this tends to make the group feel less safe for everyone. Instead it is good to try to identify and talk about your own difficulties. Use 'I' statements to avoid this.*

Can I get a temperature check from everyone please, that we agree to these;

[End of talk]

It may also be an idea to go over the hand signals, if anyone is unfamiliar with them. You can talk through any disagreements here, time allowing.

Things to consider

This kind of group works best with around four to eight people. It can work with fewer, but it may become less useful with more than eight. If there are more than eight people present then it may be best to divide into two groups if there is someone else who is willing to facilitate.

When dividing up the time for turns, if you have six people and 30 minutes, then giving five minutes each will overrun as there is often significant 'turnaround time' between each person. About one minute of turnaround time is usually enough, so 30 minutes between six people gives about four minutes each.

Make sure you budget time for checkouts. These are for everyone to 'sum up' what they have gained from the session or something they are grateful for from the session.

If people don't have anything else to say they could be gently prompted to tell their life story – how they got from being born to this point in time. It's a challenge to do this in a short amount of time, but often an interesting challenge. You can tell your life story many times and each time it's different. This has proven to be a great format for increasing connection and understanding within a group of people.

We are aiming to create a special, safe space in these emotional debrief groups. Often after deep check-ins, people feel more deeply connected to people in the group, that's good and is part of the purpose of the group. However, if you meet someone for the first time in a group like this then you may make the mistake of thinking that how you see them in the group is how they will be outside the group. This is unrealistic and can lead to disappointment. It's important to temper our experience with the understanding that our wider culture does not support this kind of radical vulnerability, and that it can and will be emotionally draining, so a deep check-in does not mean deep bonds beyond the check-in. Be patient with one another.

This is about 'holding space' for emotions; for love, reflection, tears, laughter, processing, overcoming, ruminating and whatever else we need to sort through. It's not about dumping our problems on others, it's about being able to empty that emotional rucksack that's been full for so long, it's about letting others support us as we do the same for them.

> *"In every community, there is work to be done.*
> *In every nation, there are wounds to heal.*
> *In every heart, there is the power to do it."*
> -- **Marianne Williamson**

Reflecting on and Tending Grief

Within the ancient tradition of Yoga, it is taught that humans carry trauma buried under deep layers at our heart centre. This corroborates with the western tradition of wholeheartedness, in which we are tasked to investigate, and ultimately begin to remove the layers of protection around our heart, in order to allow ourselves the freedom to feel all joys and all sorrows.

The sorrows are hard to bear. Humans may be unequipped to tend to the grief that comes from brokenheartedness in early childhood experiences. Instead, the untended grief becomes grievance. Grievance may surface over and over again, triggered in all manner of situations, by all manner of people. This could be seen as the heart's way of asking for attention, asking for deep attention, in order to heal the original heartbreak.

Willingness to be Vulnerable

Whether welcomed or not, we all are vulnerable, as is every living organism in the known universe. An intrinsic characteristic of aliveness is vulnerability. There are ideal conditions for life to thrive, then there are hostile conditions in which life must adapt or meet its demise. The cellular programming which instructs a living thing to live is what enables the magic of adaptation, survival, and ultimately evolution. To fully connect with others and ourselves, we must be willing to be vulnerable.

Trauma

The human experience begins in trauma: the trauma of birth. This unremembered trauma remains in the body of a full grown adult as perhaps the inability to draw breath easily, a compression in the bones of the skull, or irregularity in the pelvis. Assisted births over the centuries have decreased mortality rates in both babies and mothers (forceps, ventouse, episiotomy, cesarean section). However in the normalisation of assisted births (cesarean section rate 44% in Latin American countries), mothers have lost the knowledge and confidence in their bodies to birth with ease and without fear. The preparation for birth may instead be cloaked in fear, with negative and traumatic birth stories shared more readily than positive or pleasurable birth stories. The cortisol levels (stress hormone) in mothers sets the levels for their unborn baby. Which means, in very real terms, that trauma begins in-utero. The unborn baby experiences her mother's emotions and is already adapting. Trauma is not only something which we experience early on, but it is something which can be created through difficult experiences throughout life. We carry this trauma with us and it impacts our interactions with others and ourselves. To address and overcome such trauma, we must investigate it and be willing to be vulnerable.

Crying

Weeping and wailing are wonderfully efficient ways of processing and moving trauma out of the body. However, some human cultures are more welcoming of weeping and wailing than others. The rejection of crying begins at infancy, when babies are shushed. Babies have well developed modes of communication, cues for hunger, for discomfort, for fear, and when a responsive adult looks carefully for these cues, the baby is understood and a relationship of communication develops. There are times when a baby must cry. The crying may be the most efficient way to urgently communicate hunger, a wet nappy, fear, a fever, pain, and also to process trauma. When adults receive the crying communication as failing to do their part as responsive carers, they may shush the infant, and do all they can to stop the cries (pacifiers, feeding, playing, distracting) when in fact sometimes the crying is absolutely necessary, and the infant needs to be held and feel safe as they cry out their trauma.

Men are particularly susceptible to being raised to believe that crying is an unacceptable behaviour. The trauma, when not released through weeping and wailing, looks for another avenue of expression. A common substitute is the expression of anger. Imagine a relationship between a man and a woman, into which both adults bring with them their individual traumas. The man gets angry about something trivial, at which the woman begins to cry, seeing the tears as unacceptable the man gets angrier at what he sees to be an overreaction, and the woman cries even more. And so they become stuck in a cycle of past trauma brought into the present, neither one understanding the other.

If they were able to process their traumas together they might find out that both of them came from families in which father was often angry, and mother would often cry. Unable as children to understand the family scenes they witnessed, they learned the behaviours, and the roles played out by their parents. The woman grew up to be terrified of angry outbursts, suppressing her own, and identifying with her mother. The man grew up to believe that men don't cry, and that crying is an irrational response in any given situation, and that anger was an acceptable male character trait, identifying with his father.

Connecting with our Grief

Grief can become deeply and securely buried for very good reasons. There may be no safe space available to tend to our grief, so it is repressed, as connecting to it could be too difficult to bear. The other side of grief is love, they are two sides of the same coin. We grieve because we love. We grieve when that which we love has gone. We grieve for an imagined future that will never come to pass. We grieve for the death of ancestors we have never met. We grieve for future generations that may not have life. We grieve for the taking of innocence. We grieve for missed opportunities. The deeper we go into compassion and empathy, the deeper we grieve. Grieving expands our capacity to feel, the capacity of our hearts to connect, because it expands our capacity to love.

How to Grieve

There are innumerable ways to grieve. If you have experienced the death of a loved one, you will know that the grieving never ends, it changes, and becomes part of who we are in our daily lives.

We don't move on from grief, it moves forward with us into the rest of our lives. Grief can be described by giving names akin to seas and oceans: deep and dark, hits in waves, pulling under, crashing and smashing against the rocks. Thinking of oceans now, the power, the wildness, also the beauty, biodiversity, and unexplored depths, this could be a helpful metaphor of grief, for many more reasons than the darkness and fear. Grief is also what fertilises hope, nourishing new life. There are no rules, there is no manual, no correct or incorrect way to grieve. However, there is a way to feel safe enough to let grief surface. Connecting with other people who want to share or explore their grief can help. Finding a grief counsellor, or a co-counselling group can help. Or finding ways to make a record of your emotions: journaling, audio or video recordings of yourself. Sometimes knowing it's there, but being unable to connect to the grief, will be the difficulty. A strong and trusted support network is vital when working through grief, however you do it, make sure you are not alone.

Moving Forward alongside Grief

Perhaps grief becomes a companion, and a friend. Perhaps the grief in our life lets us see a deeper level of existence and connection in the everyday. Perhaps grief lets us savour the sweetness, tenderness, and frailty of life. Perhaps grief is the acknowledgement of the inconvenient truth: that all life has an end, and within its decay, nourishes the next generation. Perhaps grief gives us strength to live bravely. Perhaps grief is a window to knowing our purpose. Perhaps grief gives meaning to why we are alive.

Listening Circles: Supporting Grief Online

The challenges of our current times are revealing an uncomfortable and ever-present companion much more clearly among us: Grief. It is in the air, shimmering in the socially-distanced spaces between us.

We have come into connection with Grief through our daily lived experiences during the Covid-19 crisis. The slower pace of life, which has given us time to reflect, has been coupled with:

- An awareness of many people falling ill and dying among us and around the world;
- Separation from those we love and feel concern for – we have not been able to meet people, to hug, cry and process grief together;
- The loss of touch and connection;
- The restrictions on choice and freedom;
- An awareness our planet has been and continues to be horrifically exploited, so much so that a pandemic was unleashed upon our species;
- An awareness that it has taken an enormous crisis to put a halt to our continued exploitation of the earth and other creatures.

For generations, Grief has been deeply othered by the death-phobic culture most of us have grown up within and as a consequence people have not been able to engage with Grief or process what it is they are feeling. In the absence of Grief what appears instead is grievance; something to be "gotten through", "gotten over", "gotten on the other side of". Grief asks of us, requires us to give of ourselves, whilst grievance whispers in our ears that we deserve better than we're getting. For us to connect with our Grief, it is vital for us to slow down and to cultivate a sense of welcome and gratitude for the ways that life is living itself through us.

For the moment, however, we are driven to online connections. Though a shadowy substitute for the comfort of solid physical presence, it is for now all many of us have access to.

How to hold online spaces which allow people to process Grief can bring up many thoughts and feelings: fear of the unknown, thoughts that there might be a "right way" or a "wrong way" to share or respond when Grief appears. This document has drawn on the experience and wisdom of many to offer suggestions on how to support those who are stepping forward to hold spaces in which people can address Grief and be heard.

Prepare to Welcome

- Ensure you are familiar with zoom beforehand. Advice and tutorials can be accessed here.

- Give yourself 15 minutes or so to create a sense of welcome before the call begins. If you are pairing with another to help facilitate, connect in with your partner at this point and share how you are preparing for the call.
- Turn off all other distractions and devices. The quality of attention you bring to the call has an impact on those who join the room.
- Ground yourself into calm with breathing practice and any other techniques which you know support you.
- Have fresh water and comfy seating.
- Check the Zoom link is working and have all you need to hand.
- Look at a poem or reading which speaks to Grief. (Link here)
- If possible, light a candle – a restorative flame to stay lit for the call duration, and be blown out at the end.

Recognise that you have stopped travelling the regular, beaten path and have turned off into the overgrown thickets that are rarely visited. You are lighting a fire to welcome in all of the beings, seen and unseen, who bring themselves into the space you will host. The quality of the welcome you create before the call begins is the quality of welcome that will be experienced by those who join. Create a space filled with the quality of beauty you would want for your most beloved ancestors to come to, that they might hear the call.

Check-in

- Open the zoom room a few minutes early if you can.

- Welcome people as they arrive. Notice how many are arriving by phone and be clear how you will engage them in discussions – by raising their hands in the chat window, or voicing their desire to talk with a word, such as stack or queue.

- If desired, have some music playing as people arrive, or ask people to share where they are from or something memorable that has happened that day.

- When you have given time for people to arrive or you have reached the comfortable number of participants (suggesting 12 for one facilitator/24 for 2), close the room. This is important as it can be uncomfortable to have new people arrive past a certain point, especially if there is vulnerability and Grief in the room.

- If the group is large and are two facilitators, then create two breakout rooms so that each facilitator can create a Grief space.

- Request people mute themselves when not speaking.

- Request people make a visual sign if they wish to speak, and agree a way for callers on the phone to let you know when they have something to say.

- Check to see if anyone has any accessibility needs to ensure inclusion (they may for example need visual or written prompts, or might be hard of hearing and need people to

speak clearly, loudly and slowly).

- Begin with a breathing practice to help people become present in their bodies. You can also use some of this quiet breathing time to introduce some agreements with participants that make it easier to be in full presence.

- Welcome all the emotions that come up: the tender, the temper and the tears (especially the tears).

- Make silence welcome also - offer the practice of a restorative pause for anyone who would like the whole group to take some deep breaths together in silence.

- Let people know how you might hold space and what the structure of the circle will be – will people be invited to share and you will all listen? Will you be reflecting back what people have said by saying what you understood back to them? If so, model what this is like so people understand.

- Explain how others will interact with what is shared. How might others offer reflections or curiosities – is this invited?

- Think about how you might feel steady in the space you are holding and offer this – there is no 'right' way...it is a gift to bear witness to what is and not many places to sit with things. Share if you feel uncertain or unsure and if you would welcome people to ask for a pause etc.

- Invite people to check into the room. Begin yourself. Share name and prefered pronoun, where you are calling from and a little of the situation you are living with, or what brought you here. You might also choose to ask people to share a gratitude or a moment of awe or joy from their day. This is where you can begin to listen for meaning. Check in with people about the meaning you have understood from what you heard, in your own words.

- Thank people when they have finished and invite them to choose to pass the check-in on to someone else, or do it yourself if they cannot see the other participants.

- You might ask people to also connect with a physical sensation alive in their body at that moment. If doing this, you create time to reconnect with this later in the call, to check if things have shifted.

Weave the Basket of Empathy for Grief to Show Up

- Once everyone has checked in, it can be powerful to share a poem or reading. This could be something that is relevant to what is alive in you at that moment.

- This reading can then become the beginning of a wondering aloud, that you might bring to the group to begin an empathetic dialogue. The following questions can help support this dialogue:

1. What truths are proving too hard to talk about with those around you?
2. What sort of anxieties are arising in people?
3. Who have been the rocks in people's lives – where are they now and what arises when you think of them?

- These kinds of courageous conversations almost sustain themselves. As people start to engage with the dialogue, the facilitator can step back, thanking people when they have finished speaking and calling in the next person.

- Sometimes, if there is more than one person waiting, you might invite Z and then T to share to help the conversation flow.

- Welcome pauses between people speaking. This allows for people to breathe and lets what has been said land fully.

- Pay attention to the conversation, and also, have some attention to others either waiting to speak or who are very quiet. If you see people being moved to tears you can call a restorative pause.

- You might want to invite people to return to some breaths together in honour and validation. In this pause, remember to remind people that tears are normal and needed. They are a sign of life and emotions shifting and flowing, and are a very human communion with the element of water.

- When all those who are willing to speak up, have had some time, create space for the quiet participants to have an opportunity to bring something to the conversation. Do not assume that because they have not indicated they want to talk, that they have nothing to say, but always make sure that saying nothing is welcome too.

- Numbness also shows up in these spaces and it is ok to acknowledge and be with the numbness that may be appearing in participants. Numbness is as equally and valuable as Grief or any other emotional state. This may also be recognised as "not knowing" how I feel about something.

Keep an Eye on the Time

- Around half way through the call, begin to listen out for a moment to connect with what's next. Perhaps it is an invite for people to share the type of self care they are finding supports them, or perhaps it is an invite for people to connect to what matters to them most in these times – something they might wish to maintain when the restrictions of this crisis are lifted.

- You might also listen out for gratitude – What are the positives people are experiencing from the chance to foster deeper connections with themselves, the communities and the natural world? Often participants will share a song or a painting or some other beauty making – always find time for these. These are gifts that weave us into empathy and

connection, and are greatly needed in these times of distancing and loneliness.

Closing the Call with Care

- About 10 mins before the call ends, look for the opportunity to bring time to the attention of participants and see if anyone has a burning need to speak up to something before we begin check-outs.

- For the check outs, invite people to share a gratitude about something on the call which has had an impact on them.

- Try to be available for another fifteen mins after the call, in case, a participant has a need for more listening time before leaving the call. If someone on the call still looks very emotional or withdrawn, then you could send them a private chat message, offering for them to stay on the call with you after check outs.

- Have a support call lined up for yourself after the call. Seek a supportive ear to help you deal with the impact of what you have held space for. This facilitation will have had very little time for what you think and feel, as the participants fill the space with dialogue. It is important to create time to connect to what has arisen for you during the call and after.

Deep Gratitude

To all those stepping up to hold these support calls in your community, we give a deep bow of gratitude and respect.

What Next?

Before you hold a Grief listening circle, we recommend that you consider some or all of the following, to deepen your practice and self-holding:

- Take some time to ask yourself "why am I really considering offering to hold a listening space for others? In what ways does this serve my needs?". Listen carefully to what comes up in you and share this with another person who can hear you non-judgmentally, to support your widening insight into what you are stepping in to and why.

- Attend other listening circles to both support yourself and experience others holding them.

- Speak with others who are holding listening circles, to gain further insights.

- Ask others who are holding listening circles if you can support them when they hold a circle (i.e. being the second not first person holding the circle / the shallow rather than deep end first).

- Ask another who you have supported to hold a circle to then come to support you when you hold your first circles.

- Attend regular 'Holding the Holders' group sessions. These run each week and are offered as spaces for you to decompress, debrief with each other, learn and feel held. To find out more information contact _____

Supporting Information Around Trauma

It is important to have an awareness of how trauma can affect people. The conditions for psychological trauma are rife at the moment, so underlying traumatic events may break through much more easily. Many have lost access to their normal support networks, resources etc.

One person expressing anger/rage may trigger another person's trauma history of being raged at. A person triggered into primal screams of pain/anguish may trigger other people's early experiences of terror by, for example, witnessing domestic abuse as a powerless child.

Here is a chart about the stages of hyper-arousal in the nervous system that happen when one is in trauma and the dangers associated with it.

Please make sure you have lists of national helplines that you can put in the chat, and any other XR Grief/ Sharing circle offerings, including:

- The Samaritans : Support line for people to call.

- Mind : Charity focused on mental health.

- Cruse : Support for dealing with bereavement and grief (Hope Again is their website for young people).

- New Pathways : Rape crisis and sexual abuse support.

- In the Rooms : Free online recovery platform for those dealing with addiction.

- Centre for Anxiety Disorders and Trauma

- National Suicide Prevention Support

- International Association for Suicide Prevention : Provides a list of helplines in different countries.

- Sudden Death : Supports people bereaved by sudden death.

- Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

- Sands : Support for those affected by stillbirth or death

- Good Thinking : Tools and resources for anxiety, sleep, low mood and stress.

Making a Strong Working Group

Aim: to make life easier and less stressful for coordinators. For working groups to grow and do more.

This is a live document. There is no right way of doing things, but we should share what has worked. This note has an element of idealism - in practice we must adapt. Integration WGs are here to listen to you and help you make a strong working group, any questions about this page message @dbrenig or xr.welcome.bristol@protonmail.com

1. Split up the tasks Tension: People turn up to the working group, but don't contribute much. Working group doesn't grow in size.

Try: Split up your working group's tasks into a small number of work areas. See rough example for Media & Messaging.

Each work area has a mandate and can be run as a mini-working group if necessary. Someone is responsible for each work area and they hold the mandate. This person can be considered a mini-coordinator if the work requires a team.

Working group members are assigned to, or lean towards, a work area. This gives them freedom and responsibility to deliver. Mini-working groups enable the whole working group to grow as mini-coordinators can share out more tasks.

2. Have a focus Tension: Communities WG Coords have previously said their mandate felt so broad that it was overwhelming. Making it hard to perform in any area, so people left as they felt in-effective.

Try: If you are under resourced pick a single work area and stick to it until it is strong. When more people join you can open up new work areas. For example Communities could focus purely on Movement of Movements until more people join.

3. Growing a rebel in your working group Tension: Eager new rebels join a working group meeting, but they leave because they are overwhelmed or can't work out how to contribute.

Try: Look after, hold onto and grow rebels using the pathway below. Create roles within your working group and encourage rebels to take on roles once ready. Roles cement a rebel into a working group, and gives them the power to deliver without seeking your confirmation. It is important to ask rebels to step up and take on a role. This is a hook. Note: a working group may

hold roles that don't fit this pathway, e.g. a pool of stewards.

4. Rotate coordination Tension: The coordinator has been in place a long time and no-one else appears capable of replacing them. Power is more entrenched, and it limits the knowledge & personal growth of rebels

Try: Ideally a coordinator will do minimal WG tasks, instead focusing on empowering rebels to take on roles, fulfill mandates and check they are not burning out. If roles are filled, the time requirements on the coordinator will reduce.

The coordinator should educate and encourage rebels to become the next coordinator, to replace themselves. Playing down the 'high and mighty' impression of coordinating. Ideally the coordination role would slowly rotate amongst those willing. A working group with many ex-coordinators is very strong, as overall knowledge is high and rebels feel confident to deliver.

5. Recruitment Consider two types of eager rebels: Some rebels want to be told what to do. They respond well to specific role descriptions/adverts Some rebels want to explore before finding their place. These rebels respond to exciting invitations to join a working group

Ways to recruit (contact Integration for help, xr.bristol.welcome@protonmail.com)

Use the XR Volunteer website to advertise specific roles, and also post a general advert for your working group.

Call out for specific team members at events and rebel meetings e.g. "We need 3 more people to help organise wellbeing for upcoming actions and you'll love it because..."

Work with M&M to issue adverts for your working group on social media

New rebels may visit XR Bristol's webpage on working groups to find out more and then email the coordinators to get involved.

Integration host weekly 'Getting More Involved' sessions to identify what new rebels are interested in, and pass on their phone number to relevant coordinators.

Please respond to everyone who said they want to help - if they emailed in, or if you wrote down their phone number. Not getting back de-motivates an eager rebel.

6. Wellbeing & communication Hold socials to bond together. Rebels who care for each other, work for each other. Avoid burnout by accepting that your working group cannot do everything. Keep tabs on how many responsibilities each rebel holds, avoid overburdening someone. Have a wellbeing advocate

Rebels have previously left Working Groups because Signal/Mattermost chats are overwhelming.

The traffic light system helps. Every message should start with one of the following:

🛑 Red stop sign means 'Stop and read right now! Action required'

🔶 Orange diamond means 'This is important to note, but not an emergency. A response would be helpful when possible (if relevant)'

💚 Green heart means 'not that important'. This is general chatter or for responses. This gives rebels permission to not read everything. But highlights must see items.

7. Facilitating working group meetings Build the agenda before a working group meeting and avoid getting distracted A trained facilitator should facilitate the working group meeting. Attend a facilitation training course, to gain brilliant skills at running effective meetings Record Action Points each week and follow them up in the next meeting

Mandated roles allow most working group activity to happen without a specific action point (e.g. I didn't tell the integration WG that I was going to write this document, it was within my mandate, so I just did it). Instead each work area or rebel should share updates each week, so everyone knows what everyone else is doing. This also encourages ownership (pride) for mini-coordinators over their work.

Have food at working group meetings

Get to know other coordinators and chat to them, everyone is lovely lovely lovely :D

8. Mentoring chat with coord before first meeting explaining what we're working on and hearing what they're interested in end of first meeting match them up with an old hand who is doing something close to their interests.

Swap contacts mentor contacts with them post first meeting to talk them through tech and onboard them into their subgroup if that's a thing, newbie can contact mentor with questions, mentor tries to check in now and again and invite them to WG meetings for the first few weeks (or set up a Buddy programme :D)