What can help make a team healthy within XR?

Introduction

It is often hard to put your finger on what exactly your team culture is or isn't. We say **we are transitioning to regenerative cultures, but what does that mean in practice?** Here we will outline some activities you could bring into your teams to help you develop sustainable and healthy cultures.

We would identify a healthy team as one where the following working conditions are prioritised:

- High levels of trust
- Intentional choices are made to work in regenerative ways
- Members of the team feel safe, valued and have a sense of belonging;
- There are clear roles and responsibilities
- Connections are strong with the parent circle and sub circles

By giving attention to the following aspects, these working conditions can be developed.

1. Connecting with each other

Who is in the Room - Life Stories. Every group and team within XR will have a slightly different culture even though we have all agreed to the P&Vs. Local Groups will vary across the country, arts-focused groups will work in a different way to data-focused groups, and the culture of a team can often come down to the people in it.

We have all come from different backgrounds and different experiences. We have arrived here for a variety of reasons on a whole range of paths, there is no single route to becoming a rebel. So take some time to get to know each other and the paths we took to get here; not just to Extinction Rebellion but specifically to this team.

Think about the series of events that have taken place in your life, from your childhood all the way to the present day. How have your experiences shaped you and contributed to the decisions which have brought you here? You can go as deep or as broad as you feel comfortable doing in the moment.

Give everyone space to talk. This can be done all together as a group or in break out rooms of 2-4 people. It can take anything from 3-10 minutes, so decide on a length of time that fits the space you have. When setting up this activity give participants 2 mins to reflect and think before they start sharing. And set aside some time afterwards for folk to connect before moving to anything new.

The sharing of life experiences helps people come together, to see each other as full and complete individuals, as well as illuminating the reasons they may have for being here. Better understanding of each other as individuals can help a team pull together! As new members join it is a great opportunity to recap life stories too.

2. Celebrating success, gratitude and appreciation

It may be beneficial to your team to spend some time noticing the things you are doing well, which can include appreciating the work of individuals in your circle.

- Make a list of all of the things you and individuals in your team have done well in the last month.
- Give space for gratitude at the end of your agenda or as part of your check-outs.
- Appreciate those that leave the circle or step back from a role.
- Accept the possibility of feeling some discomfort as others appreciate you.

3. Aligning through the Principles and Values

Working in your circle will be a great opportunity to bring the P&Vs to life and as such it is worth spending time checking-in to to get a shared understanding of them and to ensure they underpin how you are working.

Read the P&Vs in full here

Some of the P&Vs underpin the general direction of the movement (eg 1, 2 and 4) and it might be difficult to see them specifically in action in your circle. But the others are all about how we work together, the processes and the spirit. One P&V that is highlighted in our everyday working is 10; the self organizing system (SOS) is XR's way of bringing this P&V to life and it influences all we do in XRUK. For more details go to SOS - making it work for you.

Other aspects of the P&Vs can be explored further by following these links:

- Our ways of working
- Our meetings
- Our cultures
- Accessibility
- Mental health and wellbeing

4. Aligning with the circle mandate

The reason for doing the work you do is contained in the purpose of the circle, which is clearly described in the circle mandate and everyone’s alignment with this is essential for the work you do to be meaningful. It is worth going back to the mandate to ensure you're not losing sight of what the purpose is.

More information about mandates and how they fit within the SOS process can be found here

5. Connecting across the movement

To work in a healthy way, circles need to have strong and effective connections with various other parts of the movement (some may not be relevant to your particular team)

- Your broader circle
- Any sub circles you may have
- The XRUK Strategy

6. Maintaining a balance between task and maintenance

Each team is made up of the individuals in it. Each person brings their own skills and experience and will naturally fall into different roles in the group dynamic. These roles usually aren't specifically mandated but functions in group dynamics, for example:

Task Focussed	Maintenance Focused
Bringing in new project ideas	Checking in with team members
Keeping track of progress on tasks	Setting group boundaries to preserve capacity
Consulting other teams for input	Unblocking tensions when they arise
Clarifying success criteria	Ensuring everyone’s voice is heard in meetings

You can probably see from this that “Task” roles focus on the work of pushing projects forward and meeting goals, whereas “Maintenance” roles focus on the work of keeping the team together, preserving capacity and creating a team that can continue to function well together. This split can be likened to “long term vs short term” thinking and a healthy team needs a balance of these roles fulfilled at any one time.

Ask yourselves:

- Does your team as a whole feel like it is always pushing towards goals and never has time to breathe? Or...
- Does it feel like you have long meetings but never seem to get any concrete outcomes?

If either of these feel accurate then maybe you need to intentionally bring your team back into a balance of task and maintenance.

You might want to consider how your team is doing around these particular aspects of maintenance:

7. Welcoming new people

Here is a broad range of tools for recruiting and onboarding new members.

In the spirit of working in a healthy way, we encourage circles treat new members with high levels of respect by; Give space to hear their stories, explaining the terms and processes that are part of the team's work and giving them opportunities to ask questions and grow into the role. Using a buddy system might be a good way of doing this.

8. Dealing with personality clashes and group tensions

Short Feedback Loops

Here is some comprehensive guidance around using short feedback loops to encourage prompt and direct conversations when tensions arise between individual members. Short feedback loops guidance In a nutshell, these conversations are best held using the model of nonviolent communication, focusing on observations, feelings, needs and requests.

Embed a culture of airing and moving through difficulties in your team.

Here is some guidance for incorporating tension shifting as part of your circle’s meeting schedule. It is recommended to hold these sessions on a regular basis to ensure the tension shifting ‘muscle’ is developed.
