Tools for relationship building in XR teams and circles

- Listening and Speaking
- Sharing Life Stories
- Communication that Connects
- Short Feedback Loops
- Tension shifting
- Non-Violent Communication(NVC)

Listening and Speaking

When working in pairs or groups these simple measures help us to connect and communicate more effectively

When Listening

- We aim to pay attention carefully when others are speaking, rather than using the time to come up with our own response.
- We aim to use active listening with the intention of trying to understand what the other is sharing, recognising that people can actually think better when they feel listened to.
- We aim to come from a place of trust that everyone is in the Rebellion for the best of reasons and with a shared vision of change.

When speaking

- We aim to be in dialogue with others speaking to, rather than at them.
- We recognise that some people find speaking in groups challenging, so we make space for everyone to speak who wants to.
- We aim to stay aware of what we are saying in meetings, keeping the acronym **WAIT** in mind. **W**hy **Am I T**alking?
- We aim to speak on our own behalf, from our own experience using 'I' statements.

Taking a pause.

- We might invite the meeting to take a brief pause; to take in the impact of something a group member has shared or when it seems that the participants have lost the rhythm of speaking and listening respectfully.

Sharing Life Stories

This approach, developed by Karl Lam and Alima Adams has been shared across XRUK and XRGlobal. It is a simple and profound way for a group to build good relationships between its members. Every group and team within XR will have a slightly different culture even though we have all agreed to the Principles & Values. Local Groups will vary across the country; Arts focussed groups will work in a different way to Data focussed groups. The culture of the team will be influenced by 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. This is a simple way to take some time to connect, to get to know each other and the paths we took to get here.

Format for holding a Sharing Life Stories Session

Introduction

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. **Establish confidentiality boundaries** and freedom for people to share what they wish or not share.

Give everyone space to talk. Preferably this can be done all together as a group or if not in break out rooms of not more than 7 people.

Decide on a period of time to give each participant between 3-10 minutes. You can give participants a sentence starter prompt “I was born ….”

Give participants 2 minutes to reflect and think before they start sharing. It is good to leave some time afterwards for rebels to connect, give some feedback on how they found the process or check out.

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.

A more in-depth description for running this practice as a workshop can be downloaded here: Life Stories (Google doc).

Communication that Connects

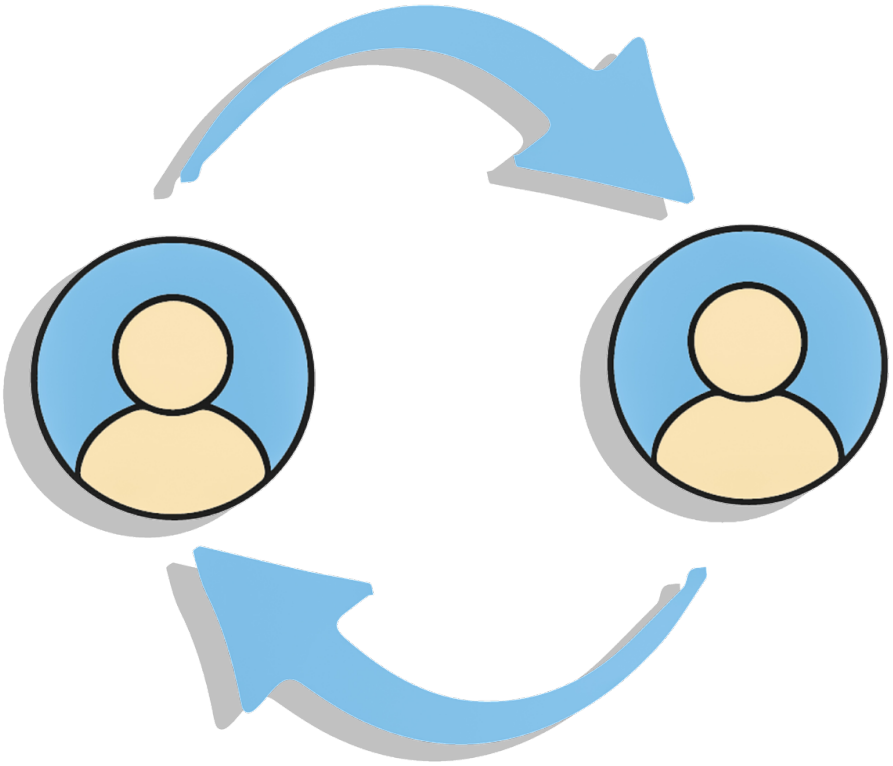
This is statement is taken from the Systems and Cultures Circle and you might find useful if it seems like a chat you are in is getting a bit tense.

It can be used by anyone who feels that the tone and language in an online chat needs to be de-escalated to allow everyone to feel they can use the space safely. It’s fine to change the statement to suit the situation but please keep the sense of using communication that connects.

> “Hey everyone, Thanks to all of you who’ve been part of the chat — especially those trying to work things out and find ways forward. It’s clear people really care, and that matters.
>
> Differences of opinion are opportunities for growth. At the same time, it also feels like things are getting a bit tense, which totally makes sense because all of this is really important. Just wondering if we can all try to keep things as kind and constructive as possible in group and individual chats? Even when we’re frustrated or hurt, using language that helps us stay connected can really make a difference.
>
> It feels like some attention needs to be given to what's happening here, so if something’s bothering you, maybe think about chatting to the person directly, asking this group for support or going to Systems and Cultures for guidance — this would help keep this space feeling safe for everyone.
>
> We’re all figuring this out together. Let's remember our commitment to how to work together in the Ways of Working document.
>
> Thanks for being here and being part of it all.

For more info see Ways of Working.

Short Feedback Loops



Short Feedback Loops (SFLs) are commonly mentioned within XR, and are referred to in the regenerative statement as part of developing cultures informed by our Principles and Values. SFLs are one way of enabling positive dialogue and good working relationships.

SFLs are interpersonal dialogues, they are called 'short' for two reasons: the aim is for the feedback to be given as soon as the person giving feedback is ready; in addition the process is to be directly between the people concerned.

SFLs may be useful when something has happened as part of our work in XR that makes us feel uncomfortable or has caused tension. This might include the way we don’t feel listened to or the way we feel someone hasn’t followed through with an agreed action.

Recognising the tensions is important and they can bring valuable learning for all. These tensions might be felt as a physical response, such as a clenching of the stomach; or an emotional response such as agitation or withdrawal. Sometimes we don’t recognise or give enough attention to these feelings especially when people are busy and focused on getting important tasks done.

We encourage ourselves to practice some self care and take responsibility for how we choose to address the feelings that arise e.g. taking a pause to get a sense of the scale of them; talk to a buddy to get a different perspective and some support; check in with yourself regarding your current capacity to self reflect and engage in tricky conversations.

Is a short feedback loop required?

Some things to consider are:

1. Sometimes after considering the tension, or talking with a buddy, we find it shifts on its own and we don't need a SFL conversation.
2. If we feel a further conversation is needed, is the tension best addressed directly with the person through a SFL?
3. Is the tension something that needs to be talked through with the group's Internal Coordinator? For example, it may be about clarity of roles or a group process. If it is, it may be better raised as part of a group tension shifting process.

What might a Short Feedback Loops process look like?

Thinking about having a short feedback loops conversation? Below is a suggested format.

What do we want to say? How could we address this in a way that focuses on connection rather than blaming?

There is an acronym (LASER) that can help you think through this. LASER can support us in the process of working with judgements and tensions that we may have about another person. The idea is to generate empathy and understanding for ourselves and the other person and prepare for a face-to -face conversation.

It is an exercise that can be done individually or with a trusted friendly listener.

Load: Giving time for unfiltered offloading of your judgements of the other person (which could include 'having a rant') to relieve yourself of the emotional load you are carrying.

Action: Describe, as if a neutral observer, what has happened with the other person that has created this load for you.

Self-Empathy: Explore how you feel about this person's actions. What is important to you? Are there needs of yours that aren't being met? Hold your difficult emotions with tenderness and care.

Empathy for other: Explore your empathy for the other person by trying to understand why they did what they did. What is important to them in this situation and what need might they be trying

to meet here? Are there any common values that you might share in this situation?

Reflect: Reflect on how you feel now. Has anything shifted in terms of your perception of the other person? Are there any requests you would like to make to them?

For more information see XRUK TC Transforming Enemy Images with LASER (Google doc).

Arranging the short feedback loop conversation

This may need some careful thought:

How to approach it ? Where? When?

Some suggestions:

- Once there has been time to self reflect (and possibly to try LASER) it’s good to have the conversation as soon as possible.
- Invite the other person to meet, saying we'd like to raise something that has been uncomfortable for us using short feedback loops.
- Share the understanding that SFL is an opportunity for learning, that our intention is for connection rather than blame and for us to understand each other better.

How to receive the request for a short feedback loop

Here are some tips on how to receive feedback adapted from Trust the People:

1. We can remember that we can take responsibility for our feelings and response. We can choose how to react in each situation.
2. We can try not to take the feedback personally. Assuming the best of the other person – they are sharing information so that we can improve at something or so that our relationship with them can improve.
3. Recognising that it is difficult to give feedback and the fact that someone is taking time to do so can show that they value us and feel comfortable enough in our presence to address the difficulty..
4. It can help if we make an effort to understand how something can be done differently – we might find it beneficial to get support with this.
5. It’s important to be honest – we can say if we feel like we have been misinterpreted but we can take care to do so sensitively.

6. If we are upset by some feedback, it’s important to take time to process it independently and think about why it is so upsetting. It might be that it’s related to a previous experience. We can do our best to sit with our feelings and, with kindness, spend some time working through them. Often it helps to get support with this.
7. We can learn to view feedback with a growth mindset. We can learn useful things about ourselves. We may start to welcome the feedback process as a way to improve our relationships with others.

Downloadable Tips on How to Give and Receive Feedback (Google doc).

The short feedback loop conversation format

Here is a possible structure for your conversation that you might find helpful as a starting point.

1. **Preparation:** start with sharing a gratitude for each other and your intentions for the conversation.
2. **Having the Conversation:** the person requesting the conversation - the Requester (R) speaks first and Co-participant (CP) listens using Active Listening.
3. **Response:** the Co-participant responds to the request, with Requester listening.
4. **Dialogue:** When both feel ready, begin a dialogue. Examples of what can be useful to explore-
   What do we need to do to keep our interactions positive going forward?
   Are there any actions that need to be taken or agreements made?
   Did anything arise that relates to a structural issue that needs to be taken to the circle?
5. **Completion:** clarify any agreements made and share an appreciation of each other.

R: Describes the specific moment(s) where they felt the tension, objectively and in detail, (imagine you were witnessing the situation from outside) using ‘I’ statements. Express what was difficult for you at that moment, how you felt and why it matters to you. Identify any needs or values Basic feelings and needs

CP: Reflects back what they heard was important to that person, checking that they have understood correctly. And asking for clarifications if something isn’t clear.

R: Responds to whatever needs clarifying and adds anything if needed.

CP: Continues to reflect back until R says they feel understood.

R: Thanks the other person for listening and makes any requests they have to the other person (would you be willing to….?) They then ask how the other person feels about that?

CP: Responds to request, giving thier point of view.

R: Reflects back what they have heard from the other person and checks for accuracy.

CP: Responds and when they feel they have also been heard, thank the Requester for listening.

R: May want to respond to what has been said in which case the Active Listening continues until both are ready to enter into dialogue.

R & CP: Discuss steps moving forward and conclude once satisfied.

NB: Checking in with yourself afterwards is important (for both requester and co-participant). Show appreciation to yourself for engaging in the process. How did you feel during the conversation? How do you feel now? The conversation may bring feelings to the surface so you might want to plan how to take care of yourself afterwards. What kind of support do you think you might need and how can you arrange it so it's available to you after the meeting?

Tension shifting

Below is a description of what a tension shifting process might look like. Generally this is a facilitated space and aims to address tensions between two individual rebels or two (or more) groups of rebels.

Check-ins (5 mins)

Could be one thing you're grateful for, how are you feeling, and what would make it easier for you to be present in this meeting today.

Regenerative cultures Reminder

Ask if someone wants to share something that has been moving them recently. If no one is moved to share something then go with a Regenerative Cultures reminder.

Updates

Before diving into the tension shifting meeting, ask if there are mission critical updates for the group. Facilitation Tip: don't let it become a discussion about each project. This is just for essential updates only!

Feedback & Tension Shifting

Facilitation Tip: explain the importance of feedback to learning how we can do our work better.

Prepare for shifting

- Check openness for feedback (1 min)
  - Show of fingers 1-5, how available are you to receive feedback?
- Journal any tensions since the last tension shifting session individually (4 min)
  - Identify any that emerge as most significant.
  - People to put their 1 major tension on a shared google doc (as a record of tensions emerging)
- Read through each other's tensions (2min)
- Internal mood checker - supported by the facilitator (5 min)
- Sort the priorities (4 min) - The facilitator sorts tensions in order of significance (example of categories below):
  - Emergency / High Intensity
  - Regarding group functioning & relationship with whole group
  - Individualised & Interpersonal Tensions
  - -> Check Consent to agree on priorities

Shift Tension

- Understand and hear the person’s tension
  - Ask person to share more
  - Practice Active Listening (mirroring what has been heard)
  - Give space for clarifying questions
  - Try to hear the person
- Explore possibilities for shifting
  - Brainstorm: What ideas might meet the needs?
  - Variety of possibilities
- Decide next steps with your normal decision making process
- Check whether tension feels shifted

Facilitation Tip: Repeat if there is time for a second or third tension

Recap conclusions & celebrate

- Review APs & Agreements
- Move any leftover tensions to the next Tension Shifting session (agree when this will be)
- Does anyone need any support?
- Celebrate

Check Out (5 mins)

Round of: How everyone is feeling at the end of the meeting

Benefits: recalling occasions when the team did well brings gratitude, joy and hope and increases motivation to work together.

Issues

What has not gone so well? No team is perfect. It’s normal to have some slips and failings. If they are noted here, everyone can learn from them.

Give everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings citing specific examples and using the framework:

- I observed or I noticed...
- I felt...
- I needed...

This is not a time (yet) for answering or problem solving.

Responses are noted

Benefits: everyone is listened to equally, gives an opportunity for any disappointment or dissatisfaction to be voiced in a non-violent way and acknowledged without blaming.

Identifying the roots of issues and next steps

Discussion: Think about what these issues mean about the way the team works. Are there themes or common threads?

Looking at the successes and issues, the Principles and Values and the documented purpose of the team, where are the strengths and where are the gaps, blind-spots or weaknesses?

- What does the team need to work on?
- Think about what you might do differently as a result of the learning from this workshop.
- How will you go about making this shift?
- What help and support do you need and where will you find it?

Next steps: who will take the lead in moving forward? When? How?

Closing

Check-out go round

Non-Violent Communication(NVC)

> All that has been integrated into NVC has been known for centuries about consciousness, language, communication skills, and use of power that enable us to maintain a perspective of empathy for ourselves and others, even under trying conditions.
>
> — Marshall B. Rosenberg, Developer of NVC.

Marshall Rosenberg drew on the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and the nonviolence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King in the development of NVC.

The practice seeks to help us connect from the heart with ourselves and others and encourages us to find the humanity in everyone. Compassion for ourselves and others is key.

Rather than approaching a disagreement focussed on who is right or wrong, or with the aim of “winning” or avoiding blame, the practice of NVC supports us towards a deeper understanding of ourselves and others that leads to connection rather than conflict.

- Moving beyond blame and judgement.
- Aiming to talk from our direct experience using “I” (or ‘a part of me’) rather than speaking about others.
- Listening before speaking. Rather than rehearsing our counter arguments when someone else is speaking, doing our best, to properly listen to how things are for them.

Some Core Elements of NVC

- Practising to communicate from observations rather than the assumptions we readily make for ourselves. If we were simply looking at the situation from the outside, perhaps like a martian, what would we observe? For example instead of saying “when you said that to make me feel small” we might say “when you spoke in a louder voice”. It begins to change the story we have made for ourselves about the situation.
- Talk in terms of what feelings arose in you when you heard what someone said or when you saw what they did rather than what you think that says about them. “When you raised your voice I believed/I felt..."
- If and when you feel safe enough to do so you might notice what is alive in you. We can begin to recognise sensations and emotions that are moving through the body. In these

ways we are staying in connection with the changes within us and from that we may be more open to emotions and sensations that may be happening within the people we are communicating with. This can begin to create some openness, curiosity and understanding for ourselves and others. We can also start to see how these emotions are connected to values we hold dear or needs we have, e.g. for communication, or to be heard, or to feel safe.
- We can then communicate our requests to others in a clear way, sharing what we would like to happen rather than demanding they meet our needs.

This is a thumbnail sketch of NVC, see Marshall Rosenbergs' book on Non-Violent Communication for more information and practice exercises. A fuller explanation of NVC is coming **here** soon!

Some of the reasons that people have not, up to now, felt that they can begin working in this way in XR is that the language is new to them and they feel they will 'get it wrong', or be asked to be open when they do not feel it is safe to do so or that someone else will tell them how they feel... perhaps not meeting needs for safety, privacy, understanding or learning? As with all approaches NVC can be used rigidly and without the care and intention to connect that is at the heart of this practice.

In writing this toolkit page we invite rebels to continue to explore this NVC practice together within XR so that we can see how this approach might support our work together.