How to work things out (and help the movement work better)

Every tension is a learning opportunity

We talk about XR as an organism. Like all living organisms, it is changing to adapt to its environment and new challenges all the time. Cells die and are replaced. Tensions build up in its muscles and limbs and need to be loosened. From time to time its digestive and respiratory systems get infected. This all requires treatment and adaptation.

We notice things that ought to be improved within the organism all the time. We call these ‘tensions’ because the idea of a tension stretches from:

- a mild sense of unease — for example, I have some information that I think others need to be aware of, to
- a risk that something really important to our strategy will not get done, or from
- an opportunity that hasn’t yet been taken to make the movement more effective, to
- the work of one team is about to undermine another team’s ability to do what they need to do.

This page is about how to process and ease different tensions, whether they are problems or opportunities, or both. And, in the process, maybe help the organism adapt to avoid or mitigate similar tensions in the future.

By addressing personal and local needs, we help the whole organism learn, and bring about movement-wide evolution.

Surface and define your tension

Notice the tension. You may start from a general unease and a feeling that something's not quite right. Or it may not be a negative feeling: it could be a sense of good news that hasn't been properly shared and appreciated. Can you remember when and where you first noticed this tension? What was happening then?

To help notice what tensions you may be feeling, try these

thirteen questions to surface tensions

- Is there something I need help with?
- Is any of my work stuck and could anyone here help me get it unstuck?
- Is there anything I'd like to brainstorm that could use a few more brains?
- Am I regularly doing work that is not captured in the mandates of my roles?
- Am I having trouble with any stakeholders?
- Is there anything upsetting or frustrating me?
- Do I intend to make a decision that might impact another role soon?
- Do I have any news/successes/announcements to share "for the good of the whole"?
- Are there any opportunities I'm excited about that I want to see movement around?
- Is someone else waiting on me for something and would an update from me help them?
- Is there anyone I'd like to recognise for doing something great or would I like to be recognised for doing something great?
- Do I have any questions about anything shared during team updates or meetings?
- Is there anything I'm holding inside that would feel better if others were holding it with me?

Give the tension a name. No need to spend too much time on this — you can change it later.

Work out where it starts from. Ask yourself, 'What would need to change for my tension to disappear?' Sometimes the answer may appear simple or straightforward — 'give me that resource, or this information'. And often it may indeed be that simple. But if your answer is, 'Person X leaves the team' or 'this part of the strategy is rewritten', you may need to think a little more.

To help explore sources of your tension, try these

seven questions to map tensions.

1. What, if anything, is standing in the way of me taking action to ease my tension?
2. Is this a one-off situation, or is it something that also happens at other times, to other people and teams, in other circumstances?
3. If it happens at other times/to other people/in other situations, what are the common factors?

4. If it happens to other people, how do they experience it and what do they do about it?
5. Is what I need something that someone else is accountable for (so it is covered by their mandate)?
6. If not, should there be someone who is accountable for this kind of thing?
7. Can I describe or specify the behaviour/information that I want to see, and the circumstances (who/what/when) when I want to see it?

Explore pathways to ease your tension

First work out who has the power to decide on the changes you want to see. And whose advice should they seek (in line with the Advice Process)? Power to decide is distributed through the movement in the form of mandates, so find the role or team with the mandate to address your tension.

Please click any of these pathways that looks like it might be worth exploring.

Request another role to take action, or do it yourself.

If the source of the tension falls within someone else's mandate, ask them to do what they are accountable for to resolve the tension. If they agree and do it, that may be the end of the matter. Discuss options with them as necessary: it's their decision how they go about their accountabilities, so share some ideas for the kinds of things that might work for both of you.

If they don't agree, try one of the other paths.

If the source of the issue is not in anyone's mandate, then can you take action yourself to resolve it?

Change your mandate.

If the tension stems from decisions that you'd like to take but don't have authority to take, consider taking this path.

Would it help you achieve the purpose of your role if you had extra authority to decide and to act? If so, could you propose adding an accountability to your mandate, to give you this authority?

Or perhaps it would help if you gave up some authority and made it available to another role? For example, if the other role has access to information that you don't.

You can make a proposal to change your mandate and take it to your team to seek consent. Make sure that the proposal does not give you decision making power that already begins to another role. If so, that role can object to your proposal on the grounds that it harms their mandate.

Change another role's mandate, or create a new role.

Do you want to be able to expect something from another role that they are not currently accountable for? If so, propose adding something to an existing mandate — or perhaps creating a new role.

Is the target role in your team? If so, take the proposal to your team meeting, where it can be decided on, with any objections integrated into a revised proposal.

Is it in another team? If so, it's a little more complicated, because the other team has the power to decide. Speak to the role holder themselves (or possibly the Internal Coordinator of their team) and see if you can persuade them of your case. Then they can take the proposal to their team.

Alternatively ask the External Coordinator (EC) of your team to bring your proposal to the wider circle that your team is part of. Depending on where the other role is, this may have to be passed through other ECs… that's why getting the role holder on side is often simpler.

Notes:

- If you want to change the mandate of another team, rather than just a role, the process is exactly the same, but the decision is made in the wider circle of which the team is part.
- The process is also very similar if you want to create a new role where there was none before. This is almost always done in your own team, not another one (it's a basic principle of autonomy and self-organising that teams decide their own roles).

Define how something is done.

Do you want to specify how something — a process, activity, project — is done, whichever roles are involving in doing it? If so, define it in a policy.

You still have to work out who has the power to decide on this policy. It could be that many roles and mandates are involved, across many teams. Locate the broader circle that all these

roles and teams are in. For example, for an action, it might be the Actions Team; for something on the website, it might be Media and Messaging, or Digital — or if both these are involved, it may have to go out to the Hive.

As with role mandates, you need someone in the relevant team to propose the policy in a governance meeting of that team.

'How to write a policy' is a whole other guidance page, not yet written. In the meantime, here are some examples of different kinds of policies.

Protect access to something.

Is there something that needs coordinated control? Perhaps a PA System that must not be booked in two places at once, or a social media channel where it's important to avoid competing or inconsistent messaging. If something like this is identified as a 'domain', then it can be added to a mandate, giving exclusive authority to the team or role with the mandate.

Do you want your role to be granted a domain? If so

- Check that the wider circle has a claim on the domain within its own mandate (it cannot assign authority to your role that it doesn't have itself).
- Write a short proposal to the circle that explains the tension you have identified: "as things stand, my role is at significant risk of harm, because I cannot control…" the thing you want to control.
- Present the proposal to a governance meeting of the relevant circle. Be ready to integrate any valid objections that may arise.

Embed the adaptation

Hopefully one of those pathways leads to your tension being resolved.

In the first pathway, nothing changes beyond one task being completed at your request or instigation.

All the other pathways lead to changes in the way our movement operates, and these changes persist until someone else senses a tension about how they work, and proposes further incremental changes (or, in theory, a reversal — but that is very rare in practice).

You have worked something out to help your role be more effective. But there is also legacy that your proposal is leaving behind.

‘We value reflecting and learning,’ as Principle and Value #5 says. By updating our teams, their roles, mandates and policies, our movement is learning, improving what we do and avoiding getting stuck in repetitive behaviour.

‘We actively mitigate power,’ as Principle and Value #7 says. By recording mandates, policies and how we continuously adapt them, we make transparent how power is distributed through the movement, and how its flow is regulated. This helps us see and address any instances in which authority gets centralised in a small number of people or positions.
