**Team Dynamics & Tension Shifting Meeting**

*This meeting happens once every 1.5 months.*

*Time: 2-2.5hrs*

*This document outlines the process for team dynamics meetings and summarises the discussions, reflections and actions from the meetings.*

**Aims**

* To create a time to appreciate each other and celebrate what’s going well.
* To provide a regular dedicated space where tensions can be aired and the collective can work together to resolve them.
* For everyone to have the experience of having their biggest tension being heard, understood and tackled by the team.
* To give and receive constructive feedback.
* Through practicing processing tensions, to become more adept at dealing with tensions as they arise and using them as a guidance system for adapting and improving our vision, practices and ways of working.

# **Session outline (**Rough suggested structure …)

Allocate minute-taker.

**Check in**

**Check in round (2 mins each)**: How are you feeling, generally and about this meeting? How comfortable do you feel at this moment to receive feedback? (this could be on a level from 1-10).

**Celebration & Appreciation**

**Go-round 2 (2 mins each)**: Two things about the collective that have made you feel good / empowered / supported / appreciated recently / since the last team dynamics meeting - two things you want to celebrate and/or appreciate.

**Appreciation round (1 min each) –** One good thing about each team member that you’ve appreciated recently / since the last team dynamics meeting. This can be something they’ve done/achieved and/or one quality they’ve brought into the team.

*[Popcorn style, one minute for each team member– not everyone needs to speak]*

**Tension Shifting**

**About tensions:** A tension can be seen as the *feeling* you get when you sense a gap between what is and what could be, for example when you feel that something is not working well in the collective. The longer we leave tensions unaddressed the more likely they are to become more and more painful and disruptive - processing things regularly often means the tensions can remain quite small. (See examples at the bottom of this document).

**Individual reflection**

Give 5 minutes for everyone to journal any tensions that have come up recently.

**Sharing Tensions - about 75 minutes**

* Go to each person in turn to share in brief their *one biggest tension*, that feels important to address collectively. Sometimes tensions are felt by the whole group or brought by several people so in these cases the facilitator can group them together and try to process them all in one go.
* After making sure whoever brought up the tension is fully heard and understood, facilitator asks for proposals and ideas from the team that could resolve the tension and run it through an (informal) consensus process, to come to agreements.

The following questions can be helpful prompts:

1. How do we currently do this? (i.e. What actions / systems are in place to make sure we do this thing, i.e. show appreciation, don’t work too much etc.).
2. Is this enough or could we do more? If so, what?
3. How can we make that happen?

Together come to agreements to resolve the tensions that are **S.M.A.R.T**. i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound. Also decide when you’ll check back in whether the agreements are working.

**Agreements** can include:

* Making changes to the roles or accountabilities of the team;
* Making changes to how the team is working
* Any follow-up meetings that need scheduling

You can decide to explore the issue further at a later date if you run out of time or to seek external support if it seems impossible to resolve it within the team.

**Check-out**

**Check out round (1-2 mins each):** How do you feel? What did you appreciate about this meeting and/or anyone’s specific contributions? What feels unresolved / resolved?

**Set next meeting’s facilitator and check in on dates.**

**After the meeting:**

* Minute taker saves minutes in Gdrive and also lists any action points and agreements by email/Slack

**Some things to be aware of in the process:**

* If you’re noticing that anyone does not seem to feel supported enough to bring a tension, try breaking up into pairs first to talk through a tension 1:1. Peer supervision is also good space to support each other to bring tensions to the whole team.
* Facilitator and team make sure to support anyone who might be feeling vulnerable, upset or fearful in any way, and bear in mind any power dynamics which might make it harder for some people to bring up tensions or to receive feedback.
* The facilitator ideally will carefully ask the person/people who might be receiving a tension felt by others whether they feel OK to talk about this in this context, or whether they might prefer to speak about it in a separate meeting where they might feel less exposed, or have time to prepare themselves and whether they would like more support, either from a team member or external support.
* In order to explore and transform each tension, the facilitator makes sure that the team understands it fully. This might involve:  
  + Letting someone speak and describe their tension
  + Asking them questions to try to understand what they are experiencing
  + Making sure that they feel heard and understood by others in the team, possibly by asking someone else to say what they understood the tension to be - and checking if that was right.

**Examples of tensions**

(taken from the conflict system Navigate developed for XR, to be found [he](https://sites.google.com/view/xruk-transformativeconflict/conflict-steps-within-groups?authuser=0#h.phrpwuye33z)re)

An example of a tension might be someone finding it difficult to work in the team because they believe they are not being listened to and that their ideas are not respected. Hopefully the person bringing the tension would be able to share how painful it has been for them to not feel listened to or heard. The team would then try to understand where these feelings were coming from, what is happening that is shaping this experience, and could make an agreement to, for example, use more rounds in meetings (where everyone gets a turn), to give everyone a chance to be heard.

Another example of a tension might be that there is lack of clarity in the team about what the expectation of communication throughout the week and weekend is, and someone is finding that they feel pressure or expectation to reply at all times of the day. This might lead to the whole team working to clarify and agree the time commitments, expectations or boundaries of team communication.

**How to give feedback**

*Taken from* [*this article*](https://baynvc.org/feedback-without-criticism/) *written by Miki Kashtan*: Often confusions around feedback stem from a blending of two different motivations for letting others know of the effect of their actions. It’s important to learn to distinguish between feedback and personal trigger. Providing feedback is usually motivated by a desire to contribute to the learning of another person and to the functioning of the whole. Sharing a personal trigger is usually motivated by a desire to be heard, understood, or attended to. When we mix the two, we are likely to create confusion.

If we want to reduce the risk of being heard as criticizing, we need to do some (inner) work to transform our judgments and evaluations before we can effectively communicate our feedback. Using the following prompts can help, inspired by Non-Violent Communication (NVC):

**Specific Observations:** The more we are able to point succinctly to specific behaviors instead of vague generalizations and evaluative statements, the more the other person can keep their attention on what we are talking about without getting caught in evaluative words. In addition, using observational language can help shift our consciousness away from judgments and trigger, and to make room for the possibility of different ways of understanding the behavior.

**Why This Matters:** It can really help to share why changing these behaviours is important to us –either for us personally, or because of what’s at stake for the collective. When people understand why something matters, they are much more motivated to want to do what’s asked of them. Moreover, for the person providing the feedback, naming the values and needs that lie underneath our evaluations (and even judgments) tends to bring relief and clarity, and supports us in having feedback that’s less charged and therefore easier to hear.

**Concrete Suggestions:** Even when there is clear understanding of what the goals and values are, and what the significance of the requested change could be, many people can still find it difficult to digest feedback if it comes without specific strategies they could put in place to contribute to the desired outcome in terms of goals and values.

**Openness to Dialogue:** Even when we have clarity about what we want to see change, and we express it without intended criticism, our feedback may still generate defensiveness or resistance if we are completely set on having the outcome we want, without regard for what the other person might want. Forging and sustaining a sense of partnership, especially in contexts where we have structural power, is no small task. The more we are able to show understanding for the experiences of others and the choices that others make, including the understanding of what might have led them to take the actions we found challenging, the more of a sense of partnership others can experience, along with more goodwill towards us. Similarly, if we are able to remain open to creating a solution together instead of being attached to a particular outcome, others can sense that their well-being matters, and are likely to be much more willing to stretch in our direction.

**Minutes / Notes**

| **START TEMPLATE** |
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## **00/00/21**

### **Check-in**

*How are you feeling?*

### **Appreciation & Celebration**

### **Tensions**

### **Agreements**

### **Next Meeting’s Facilitator**

### **Check-out**

*How you feeling*

| **END TEMPLATE** |
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