

# Tension Shifting Workshop Plan

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## **Check In (10 minutes)**

- Who are we? And introduce the team.

- Our first time doing this workshop. Be great to get feedback. We will record.
- We will be sending everything you need after this session (slides, workshop plan, minutes template)
- Share something you are grateful for & why you are here? Why is tension shifting exciting for you?
- Breakout Groups of 3. 2 minutes each. Ask someone to timekeep.

## Intro (10 minutes)

### What will we do in this session?

- We will role play a tension shifting session in our team.
- We'll go through each of the steps and share why we think they are important and show you how you can do them in your team.
- We will give you a chance to practice in your own role play groups.
- We will leave some space for clarifying questions at the end of the workshop. Please write anything down that comes up as we go.
- We will be recording the session so that we can all share this process with other rebels.

### What is a Tension?

- A tension could be a feeling of stress, frustration, pain, stuckness or confusion, that you get when something in how your team is working or being together doesn't feel right for you. You might be longing to be listened to, or for something to change... but don't know where to go to make that happen.

### Why Tension Shifting?

- Tensions are natural and will come up again and again. Any group that doesn't deal with tensions is likely to fall apart. Everything that doesn't work will eventually end up in conflict.
- It's a way to try to address tensions *before* they become bigger, more complex or painful conflicts.
- When we feel misunderstood or disagree, we start disconnecting from each other, and feel separatedness/lonely/isolated, like we don't belong, and perhaps that we want to find belonging elsewhere instead, in places or people that we think might meet our needs better.
- Tension shifting enables us to have a deeper and different kind of check in, to make visible what is hidden, and so that we can support and lean on each other as a community.
- We emphasise 'shifting' tensions as what is needed to make a team thrive is **not resolving** all tensions but instead creating a feeling of moving forwards rather than stuckness, where tensions are being addressed and held by the whole team.
- Note: the first few will feel clunky and stressful especially if there is a backlog of tensions until you get the hang of the process and everyone becomes more comfortable sharing and shifting tensions.
  - It can feel scary, and like opening up the closet!!
  - This is a muscle that we must practice regularly (with **regular spaces set up**) rather than setting it up *only* if and when we really need it.

- Transformative Conflict team metaphor of a 'conflict room' (the toilet)

## Tension Shifting Steps (1 hour)

### Start the meeting with:

- Check-in (format depending on size of the team)
- Round of celebration for each other/a game
- If the team is bigger than 5 people you might want two people to co-facilitate together.

### 1) Check Openness

- Ask everyone to show with their fingers 1-5, how available and open are you to receive feedback?
- Say something that acknowledges the responses from the group, eg. as a facilitator, you're noticing there's a broad spectrum of openness within the group today, or if there's a general sense of most people being on the same level of openness.
- Open up the space and check if there's anything anyone would like to share about their level of openness, or something they want to say in order to be more present or feel more connected.

### Why this is important

- This step is important so that everyone in the team has an awareness of where people are at and how comfortable they are going into tensions right now.
- We are trying to create a space where people feel safe enough to be honest about whether they feel sturdy enough to delve into tensions and feedback.
- We are also trying to see what other support might be needed in the group.
- Forcing/trying to make anyone hear something, if they're not ready and willing, will often not result in understanding and actual change.

### 2) Journaling & Sharing

- Give everyone 5 minutes to journal about any tensions that have come up in the last week.
  - Even if you think that you don't have any tensions, or that they're not 'big or important enough', take a moment to reflect and remember that someone else might be sharing the same tension or feel a 'shared dilemma' with your tension.
- If you have a big team (more than 5 people present) ask them to: Identify the biggest one.
- Otherwise they could each identify 3 tensions.
- Ask people to write the tension they would like to shift into the [minutes doc](#) so that everyone can see a short list of people's main tensions.

- If you find something as you're doing your journaling that feels too big for this meeting, you might park it and at a later point see if the [Conflict First Aid](#) steps could work, and if not, seek support from [conflict@rebellion.earth](mailto:conflict@rebellion.earth), before or instead of bringing it to a tension shifting meeting.

### **Why this is important**

- This step is important for people in the team to start building awareness of the tensions everyone is holding.
- It can also be really supportive for some people in particular to have a quiet space dedicated to think things through on their own and let any tensions come up.
- Sometimes we can feel that our tensions have shifted just from speaking/sharing them with others.
- We suggest that the facilitator does not participate through bringing their tensions, so that they can better hold space for others.
- Another option is to bring some other person familiar with tension-shifting meetings from outside the group if everyone wants to participate.

### **3) Sorting & Consent**

- In this step, the facilitator(s) can take a couple of minutes to try to put the tensions into categories and order them by level importance/impact on people or the team.
- They could put them into 3 categories:
  - Emergency / High Tensions
  - Tensions Regarding Group Functioning and Relationship with Entire Group
  - Individualised and Interpersonal Tensions
    - mostly naming, and seeking support to be dealt with outside of the meeting.
- While doing the sorting, the facilitator asks everyone to read through each others' tensions
- The facilitator asks people if anyone would like to prioritise a particular tension, or if they have a sense of wanting to put their tension further down on the agenda.
- The facilitator proposes in which order the tensions will be dealt with and checks consent from the rest of the team.
- It is also important that the facilitator(s) check with the person/people bringing the tension and anyone directly involved in it if they are willing to explore it in this meeting.
  - 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 or to bring in a trained TC facilitator.
  - If you can, try to be very supportive of anyone who might be feeling vulnerable, upset or fearful in any way, and bear in mind any power dynamics which might make things harder for some people.

- The team could have a group agreement to commit to addressing tensions when they have surfaced and how they can support each other to be resourced enough to address the tensions.
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### **Why this is important**

- Often there are too many tensions for a team to process in one session. The team must collectively decide (with the support of the facilitator) what is most preventing the team from carrying out its mission.

## **4) Shifting**

- For each tension the team goes through this 4 step process to get to a place where something has shifted.
- Make sure to schedule in some room for breaks too so that people feel good in their bodies, try to notice when might be a good time, so that people are not losing capacity to listen in the middle of someone's tension sharing.
  - In the TC team we do 3min stretch-breaks every 25min.

### **Why this is important**

- We have 4 steps so that we have a clear process of moving through the tension that lets us know when it has been fully dealt with.

### **Step 1) Understanding**

- Ask the person bringing the tension to share a bit more about it while the others practice active listening.
- If it feels emotionally charged for the person, extend your empathy.
- Give a space for people in the team to ask clarifying questions (not to try to come up with solutions yet) to deepen their understanding of what is going on for the person.
- If you as the facilitator get the impression that someone is not feeling heard or understood by the team:
  - Try to capture yourself what the person is saying by reflecting back to them what you heard.
  - Try to capture what the person is feeling and/or needing, so the person feels understood
    - “So you’re feeling frustrated with the way that the team is making decisions and you really would like to have some clarity and feel included, is that right?”
  - Ask someone else in the team to say what they are hearing / understood.
  - Always check with the person if the guesses are correct ‘...is that right?’ (questionmark!)

### Why this is important

- When we feel heard, and empathy from others, this changes our fight/flight/freeze responses in parts of our brain, we feel more relaxed and comfortable when we feel we are understood.
- The facilitator tries to tease out some clarity, so that others in the group can also understand.
- The process of reflecting back helps slow the pace and energy down, which can create more spaciousness and groundedness (rather than escalation through quick responses, dismissiveness or defensiveness).

### Step 2) Explore

- What ideas might meet the needs, for example:
  - Support outside of this meeting.
  - Making some conversations happen outside of this meeting.
  - Changing roles and agreements, or ways of working.
  - Other requests from others and the group that they are willing and able to do.

### Step 3) Decide

- Use your team's normal decision making process to decide what the next steps are.
- This part of the meeting is more 'operational' or practical than the rest and is about *next steps*.
- Whether, when and how actions will be followed up with (and by who) is useful to agree on as a group.
  - There might be clear action points: an agreement to schedule another meeting, change accountabilities of someone's role, set up a new Mattermost channel, change something in [Group Agreements](#).

### Why this is important

- If we do not agree on next steps together in order to shift the tension, it might just feel like it's 'left hanging', which results in people perhaps not feeling heard/understood, or trust that the situation can result in meaningful change.
- Sharing and working through tensions is a vulnerable practice, and it's important that there is a sense that any tensions are held by the group *collectively*.

### Step 4) Check

- How does the person feel who brought the tension?
- Some helpful questions to explore this can be:
  - Is there a sense of movement about addressing this?
  - Does it feel shifted, or less stuck?
  - Is it sufficient enough to just see, and let it arise again if there is more tension?
  - Or is it that the team wants to actually 'check on it' and review the actions at some point in time? If so, agree on when and who will take on this action point and 'track' it on behalf of the team.

-> **When and if a tension feels shifted, move onto the next tension.**

## 5) Recap

- Have a review of the APs & Agreements that have been reached in the meeting.
- Put any tensions you didn't get to shift into the agenda for the next Tension Shifting Meeting.
- Is there any support needed for anyone after the meeting?
- Celebrate!
- Check out

### Why this is important

- Diving into tensions is challenging work.
- Celebrating what you have achieved is an important part of creating a feeling of moving forwards in the team.
- Also important is to track the tensions that you didn't manage to get to in the meeting so that people feel like their tensions are being held by the group.

**15 minute break if anyone has accessibility needs. Otherwise check consent for a 5 min break.**

## Tension Shifting Practice (20 minutes)

Exercise in Groups of 3 (5 minutes each)

- 1) One person is the facilitator. One the person with a tension. And one another team member.
- 2) Person with a tension picks a real 4/10 tension you have with your group.
- 3) The facilitator runs through the shift steps.
  - a) Understanding - does the person feel heard and understood in their tension?
  - b) Explore - what possibilities are there for shifting the tension?
  - c) Decide - go through your normal decision making procedure

- d) Check - does the person feel like the tension has shifted?

## Q&A (20 minutes)

Space for anyone in the call to ask any questions.

## Need Conflict Support?

- Explain website & email
  - <https://sites.google.com/view/xruk-transformativeconflict/home>
  - [conflict@rebellion.earth](mailto:conflict@rebellion.earth)
- Regularly check our website and social media for updates on workshops, practice spaces and supportive tools.

## Role Play - Example from Transformative Conflict Team

### Example Tensions

- Kit
  - You are frustrated because things in the team seem to be taking too much time. You worry that the team gets into long discussions but not much actual work is happening. You feel like the team is not focused enough on actually getting stuff done. You are wanting to be more effective in how we are working together. Especially in meetings.
  -
- Charleen



- You are annoyed at Matilde for not respecting the facilitator in many situations. For example not using hand signals and interrupting people often. You are worried that this represents an unhealthy power dynamic in the team because some other team members do not feel confident enough to speak up.
- Joana
  - You are feeling sad because you do not have enough time at the moment to come to meetings regularly or commit to the work of the team. You are wanting acknowledgement that the team does not feel like you are letting them down.
- Matilde
  - You feel overwhelmed by messages coming in from the wider movement. You feel like the team does not have clear enough external boundaries. This is making you feel stressed and lonely because it does not feel like the team is sharing the responsibilities.
- Julyan
  - Because we have a few big tensions I'm not going to share my tension so that I can better facilitate the session.