KNOWLEDGE ROUNDUP:

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE

This quick knowledge roundup is a compilation of knowledge intended for grassroots activists/advocates, those who provide grassroots support, and anyone else involved in a collective or organizational structure with an interest in moving away from traditional carceral and punishment cultures of handling conflict. It applies a simplified editing and vetting process before publishing. The thoughts and resources included in this guide were shared by individuals who participated in a peer-sharing event on conflict, co-organized by Alternative Justice, Gastivists Collective, RadHR and the Global Grassroots Support Network. Please feel free to share this around with others who could benefit from the knowledge. You can download this (under File menu top left) in several formats or link to it / embed it on a web page.

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Disclaimer / request for your help

This is a work in progress that is meant to evolve over time with new input. At the moment, the tips and ideas here reflect the voices of the contributors/reviewers listed below. We are always looking to add more voices of those that have knowledge and experience on this topic. If this is you, please contact us here: blueprintsfc@gmail.com.

Summary

The responses included in this guide come from members of Alternative Justice, Gastivists, RadHR and the Global Grassroots Support Network (GGSN). The GGSN develops 'knowledge roundups' in response to questions raised by members of the community. This format was applied to round up the collective knowledge on conflict shared by members that came together from the 4 aforementioned communities.

In this round up, we responded to several related topics, present across our respective communities:

- *Creating group cultures around conflict*
- *Tools for difficult conversations*
- *Generative and destructive elements of conflict*
- *Healthy vs unhealthy accountability*
- *Accountability processes (engaging when things get tough)*
- *Conflict and neurodivergence*

Alternative Justice

Alternative justice is a transnational collective of practitioners working towards building anti-carceral strategies to respond to harm, abuse and conflict. We base our practice in community sustaining frameworks like restorative justice, transformative justice and community accountability that seek to create conditions that cultivate real transformation in our communities. Together, we imagine a world without prisons & punishment - a world where people who experience harm have access to multiple and varied community-based processes that support their healing, allow them to seek tangible accountability from those who act in harmful ways, or, support them in taking accountability for the harm they've caused.

We organise across 3 core areas:

- LEARN - Creating spaces to come together to read and learn more about restorative justice, transformative justice, community accountability and abolition and what these mean in our contexts.

- PRACTICE - Moving from theory to action in communities of practice and by supporting each other in building our skills.
- SUPPORT - Helping those who have experienced/are experiencing conflict, harm or abuse, those who have caused harm and want to move through an accountability process, and directly impacted community members.

Gastivists Collective

The Gastivists are a small team of motivated people, active in a variety of climate and oppression-related struggles in several different countries. We aim to support grassroots groups who fight new gas infrastructure, facilitate the flow of information between NGOs and local groups, create connections between different groups around the world, and help build a movement that will stop gas and bring about an energy transition. We use gas as a lens to fight against many other injustices which are perpetuated by the fossil fuel industry.

As a collective, we aim to organize in the most horizontal and consensus-based way possible. We try to be aware of roles and power dynamics, and to adapt them towards ways that feel comfortable and sustainable for all members. We have a deep wish for this collective to integrate into our work the values of intersectional feminism, true anti-racism, anti-colonialism and inclusivity for all genders, ages, religions and backgrounds. We know this is a big ask, and that we will probably fail at times and have to try again. Your feedback on how we do so is welcome, and your support is needed.

RadHR

RadHR is about practically applying anti-oppressive ideas to how social change organisations and workplaces organise internally. It offers alternatives to off-the-shelf HR policies and processes, which tend to replicate the very oppressions that our organisations strive to challenge. In the way we organise our work together, many of us—without even realising it—are reinforcing the systems and values we wish to change or abolish. RadHR is a place where groups organising for social change can: share alternative policies and processes; learn from each other; and collectively dismantle the inherent oppressions and inequalities of ‘work’ within capitalism.

RadHR aims to be a collaboration between any of us who are thinking about how to organise ourselves according to our values. The team behind RadHR see our role as facilitating the sharing of wisdom between lots of groups and people. We’re starting from the perspective that none of us are ‘experts’ at the work of living our values—the answers need to come from all of us. The value of RadHR lies in the community surrounding it—sharing procedures that have worked and not worked, feeding back on

how others' processes have worked for us and building and adapting new ways of organising together. We hope sharing policies will spark new conversations—through the website and via events—about what it means to be radical in how we work and organise for change.

The Global Grassroots Support Network

The Global Grassroots Support Network (GGSN) is an initiative building upon the Blueprints for Change* project. The GGSN is building a community of practice that brings together projects and individuals supporting "grassroots justice-oriented"* activist groups in multiple regions and continents. Our objective is to share knowledge around common challenges that people providing support to activists face, and how each member has solved for them.

Folks in this network can learn from each others' experience, and swap ideas for trainings, coaching and resource materials (i.e. guides, workshops, media) they created in their own part of the world. The goal for the network is to compile our collective knowledge on good practices for supporting grassroots justice-oriented activist groups, to benefit from each others' innovations, and together,improve support for grassroots movements around the world.

**Founded in 2018, Blueprints for Change has brought together a network of volunteer helpers from around the world to create tactical 'how-to' guides for progressive campaigners. You can learn more about this project here. https://blueprintsfc.org/about/*

***See the following page for the GGSN definition of "grassroots."*

Anonymized responses

1. Reframe conflict as generative

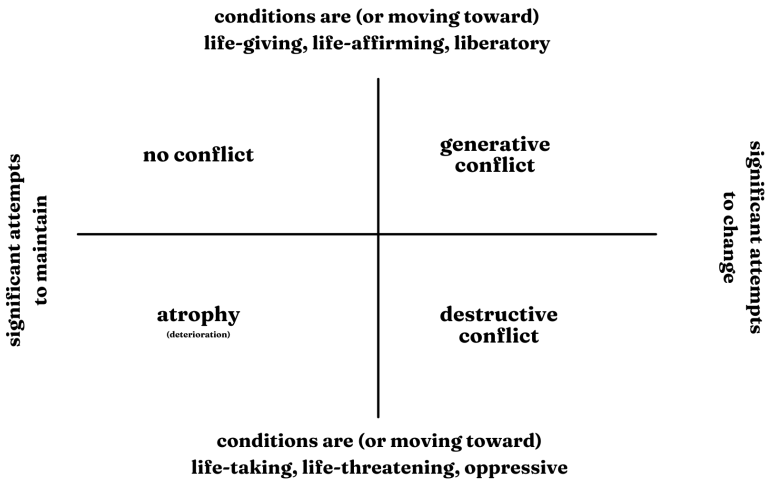
An organizing principle, used by parts of the Black Lives Matter movement, is that conflict operates on a spectrum. Before anything happens, before there's a conflict, reflect on; why is it important that we're able to disagree well? What do we gain? What does that look like?

- **The following chapter presented by Prentis Hemphill, with support from the Black Lives Matter Healing Justice Working Group**, describes their guiding principle around restorative justice, which *"at its very core asks us to rethink conflict. It asks us to see conflict, not necessarily as the splinters that lead*

inevitably to division, but to think of conflict instead as a generative moment, an opportunity to learn something about each other and the systems that we've created together." This restorative justice principle reframes conflict as an opportunity to change ourselves, and the ways we work together.

- For German speakers, the following zine on "**transformative organizing also means conflict**" is available.

- The diagram that follows below by conflict transformation depicts the conditions for 4 different outcomes; no conflict, atrophy (deterioration), destructive conflict and generative conflict. It demonstrates how liberatory conditions and significant attempts to change are necessary for generative conflict.



2. Proactively describe needs to help prevent/manage conflict

Proactively describing personal working styles and needs provides an opportunity to design systems and processes that inform how to work together. This mitigates conflicts that can arise due to needs being unmet. Often, people only come to a facilitator when something is really wrong. We spend more energy firefighting rather than proactively when mitigation measures can be adopted.

- Navigate's Paul Kahawatte's uses a metaphor of making a cake to explain this: before starting the baking process, share your allergies and intolerances.

- **See the following write up** by the Climate Justice Organizing Hub which applies a three step process to using a support and accommodations tool to identify and advocate needs. The tool comes from "The Neurodivergent-Friendly Workbook of DBT skills" by Sonny Jane Wise.

- Spring Up also has a **3-page 'how to work with me' guide**.

3. Build trust to help move through conflict when it arises

Spending quality social time together is important to build trust, which builds a really helpful foundation when conflict comes up. It's easier to advocate and communicate your needs with someone you've fostered a relationship with.

- Prioritize a **long-term community-building and learning process** within organizations. This should be a marathon, rather than a race. For example, host book clubs, view documentaries, go to artistics events together etc.

- 'Our volunteer-run collective stopped all activities, and instead just did trust- and culture-building for a period. We can palpably feel the difference before and after. Communication is much easier now.'

- Tekmil uses an ideological framework that can influence culture by raising criticisms to reflect suggestions back collectively. **See the following for the history, tips and foundation of Tekmil**.

4. Intentionally create space for difficult conversations

The grassroots is constantly burnt out, and doesn't have the resources, time etc. Yet, explosive conflicts are inevitable if concerns go unaddressed, which takes up all your time and resources. Trying to quantify time can be a trap. Creating an intentional space provides an opportunity to set empathetic intentions before entering the conversation, and to get into the body, and connect with feelings and needs.

- 'Sometimes we have to be with individuals for that thing they are facing, before attending to our agenda.' Listen! Sometimes, that's all you need to do. Create space for voices that want or need to be heard, without reacting to it.

- Try providing a space to ask curious questions, without having to come to a solution everyone agrees on. Or, 'try something between a fishbowl and a panel setup, with representatives from different contexts/perspectives. Listen without looking for solutions.'

- Tipping Point UK makes intentional space to air out any tensions that arose from the previous month through what they call the '**Lemon Squeeze**.' Tipping Point

adapted this from a process used by Tripod, which they called '**Team dynamics meetings**'. Tripod took inspiration for their process from '**Tension shifting meetings**' that were developed as part of the Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK conflict system, with support from Paul Kahawatte from Navigate and others from the XR transformative conflict team. **The following webpage on tension shifting meetings** includes resources such as an explanation, considerations and guidance, guidelines, a meeting template, meeting minutes template and a workshop plan.

- Level Up also does a variation of making intentional time regularly using what they call '**Rupture Circles**', where they create a space as an organization to move through disagreements. This is intentionally done outside the heat of conflict moments. It provides an opportunity to practice disagreements, and to become familiar with the feelings that come with it.

- **The following book called Difficult Conversations** provides insights into how difficult conversations (between two people) might look 'between the lines', where and how they often go off track, and what to do about it. There are **difficult conversation book club sessions** upcoming, that will be announced here. There is also a **summary of the book available, with a 'difficult conversations' checklist**.

- **The following tool provides a 5 step process** for holding difficult reflective conversations. These steps (explained in detail in the short article linked above) are: 1) Review, 2) Agree on the process, 3) Discussion, 4) Action Points and 5) Reconnection

- The following episode of the podcast **Hidden Brain: Living With Our Differences**, explains how minor disagreements turn into big blowups, and how we can diffuse these situations.

- Try **roleplay games or conflict mapping** to surface ideas. There is a **conflict mapping tool in the following resource** by Seeds for Change. Conflict mapping helps people in conflict form a clearer picture of the issues that are underlying, by breaking the conflict down into 3 layers. It's more structured than an open discussion, which can help with facilitating the conversation. This tool could be facilitated by someone in your group, by a neutral friend or external facilitator. It can be used for conflicts between a few members, or by the whole group.

5. Reflect on how power dynamics, identities and systemic oppression influence conflict and accountability

To do the work meaningfully, we need to look at structures of how we're working

together and how that impacts the work. Raising the backgrounds/identities that may influence the impact and navigation of conflict can be helpful.

- For example: the neurodivergent umbrella is huge, it encompasses so much. And yet, there's still so much we don't understand about how our brains work, and the complex variety of ways they work differently from each other. It helps to foster curiosity about the ways we can work to accommodate one another's different ways of working, rather than conflicting on how we can work the same way.

- Spring Up has a **power map generator** to help surface power dynamics in groups.

- Accountability in some activist groups is more related to issues of privilege and power dynamics, rather than doing your work well or general ethical standards such as not stealing money. It can be about not having recognized privilege and how someone's behaviour, or an organization/institution's way of working, reinforces or replicates power structures.
    - Accountability is about **rebalancing existing power differentials**. We're accountable to each other, but also to injustices of the past, and for creating something better.
    - Also, recognize that perceptions of what is harming can vary considerably. Someone may do something thinking it's a way to educate people, while others perceive it as harm. We often are not in agreement on whether something that happened is harmful.
    - When harm is perceived, look for **non-punitive solutions** together to "heal" the harm and prevent a repeat. What should change in the way we work together? Come up with a collective response.
    - A transformative approach to accountability recognizes power dynamics. Page 11 of '**Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence**' from Generation FIVE provides a description of transformative justice. GenerationFIVE developed a **transformative justice handbook** that demonstrates applying a transformative justice approach to child sexual abuse.
    - Participants shared the following **video on accountability**, which includes many familiar movement faces!

- **The following book, Transformational Culture** by David Little touches on addressing toxic cultures and behaviours, how to shift towards restorative justice, and how to develop humane HR and management systems. Especially helpful in this book is a grievance procedure for investigating power structures through a collective approach.

- When delivering feedback, it can be helpful to frame it on a structural level rather than individual; share how it affects the whole community (group, organization), and how the system also plays a role.

6. Related, call in (not out) comrades when they make a mistake or upset us

When calling in, it can be helpful to hold this complexity: we replicate structures that exist in mainstream society, even in our attempts to be different. In some ways, it feels like we expect these [bad] things to happen in mainstream society. When it happens in 'our' spaces, that's to an extent inevitable, because we're coming from the mainstream world. But, it can feel even [worse] when the behaviours are coming from people who are trying to lead with the value of 'doing things differently'.

- It can be helpful to have someone assigned as a loose mediator to remind the group of the principles, and to support with a 'soft touch'.
- Loretta Ross, a reproductive justice activist, discusses the concept of calling in **on the following Ted Talk**.
- In case of harmful behaviour, it is okay to ask a person to leave (the space) - this doesn't need to be punitive. Call*out* culture can lead to further harm in itself.

7. Reflect on individual and group conflict patterns

Develop a 'conflict profile' to reflect on and share with the group when conflict arises. Asking individuals to consider what they think about conflict, and how it feels for them, helps when thinking about how conflict arises in the organization/group.

- Spring Up offers a **1-page 'questions to analyze conflict' guide** to reflect on power dynamics, systems of oppression, needs, and next steps.
- **The following resource** by Dragonfly partners at Interrupting Criminalization provides a series of reflective questions to reflect on the **sources of conflict, and a diagnostic tool** that points you to sections of the framework and associated tools to focus on." The resource includes several tools such as: acknowledging differences and embracing conflict, defining and respecting boundaries, practicing direct communication and feedback, having compassion for our struggles with learning and unlearning etc.

8. Related, encourage personal work

- Use reflections on individual conflict patterns as opportunities for personal work and accountability. 'As it's written somewhere wisely in a book I'm reading about

polyamory: "you can come with baggage, but it's your responsibility to know what's in the suitcase".' **The following workbook called 'Turning Towards Each Other'** by Movement Strategy Center includes **information and reflective prompts** related to: self-grounding, identifying your conflict patterns, common sources of conflict and dominant culture patterns. It then applies these reflections to group dynamics.

- **Connect: Building Exceptional Relationships with Family, Friends, and Colleagues** by David Bradford, Ph.D. and Carole Robin, Ph.D. was suggested as a read on self-accountability. It includes actionable advice on vulnerability, healthy boundaries, trust, feedback and conflict, and relationship building.

9. Develop a common set of guidelines, practices and language

- It can be helpful to put in place a **set of guidelines** or criteria that everyone in the group agrees upon / is happy to be 'held accountable' to. These may need to do with a group's purpose. Healthy accountability can then be understood as being held accountable to something derived from the purpose of the group, as opposed to being held accountable to a set of rules not related to the group's purpose or some kind of 'universal' standard.

- 'We have some common phrases that help bring us closer to being on the same page. For example, when someone is vague, we say "what's your question, actually?" Sometimes this can create friction, but it's good for preventing misunderstandings and clarifying'.

- Spring Up (mentioned several times above) is building **common language and internal structures** to support this. They have a number of virtual classes, 'retreats' and webinar offerings related to; organizational accountability, community care and accountability, power and consent in decision making, conflict analysis, liberatory facilitation, harm systems design, unlearning through teaching etc. They also offer 6 month courses and virtual retreats through their **Bluelight academy**.

- Providing common phrases, or a structure, for delivering and receiving feedback can be helpful. Quick resource on giving and receiving feedback available **on the Commons Library here**.

- If you find you're having a lot of miscommunications between team members via written communication, some folks have found success playing around with AI to help focus and harmonize points.

- Non-violent communication can offer a helpful approach. There's also times that a NVC approach can be less than helpful. A **decolonized NVC approach**, which uses a trauma-informed lens, can help reek the benefits of NVC without

neglecting systemic influences. There's a PDF download ($12) of **the following workbook on decolonizing non-violent communication**, by the Feminist Center for Creative Work.

- Neurodiversity educators suggest a 4 step tool to deal with conflicts: Connect, explore, acknowledge and problem solve together.

- Foster ongoing inquiry about safety in the space to support collective learning.

10. Reframe conflicting needs as a problem solving opportunity

- **See the following write up** by the Climate Justice Organizing Hub which includes insight on moving through conflicting access needs as problem solving opportunities.

- Focus on 'what are you trying to protect', and figure out what we have in common. For example, Gastivists **Palestine position** write up was collectively written by members from different backgrounds, including Arabic and Jewish.

11. Be open to the process, rather than holding onto expectations

- 'We try to tell everyone in the team: which topics are personal to you? What is a 'red line' that isn't up for discussion? We have to stand behind what we are doing together as a team, but that starts with a conversation with oneself - what do you need to show up in a group?'

- Gastivists posted a **letter to the climate movement on instagram**, suggesting ways to talk about Palestine. Rather than asking organizations to take a position, we felt it's more important to be open to a process and have a conversation, and take a position further down the line, after a few months.'

- When in a (longer) meeting, don't be afraid to step away from the goal, or from what you thought you prepared/came for.

- Remember there is not one objective truth, there are only perspectives!

12. Develop a list of people/groups that can be consulted as needed

- Develop a **trust committee**; a group of people with whom you can be emotionally vulnerable, who are not involved directly in the meeting/event. A trust committee can help hold members through the conflict as the group works through challenging issues.

- Consult a dedicated person outside of the group to coach and work around the relational and power dynamics within the organization.

- Some countries have programs to support neurodivergent individuals with communication and advocating/meeting their needs in the workplace (e.g. the access to work program in the UK can fund coaches and trainers for this).

- At an event, let participants know there is a 'pivot person' to go to in the case of harmful behaviour.

- Consider creating spaces or a community with whom to try things/ideate. Some participants in the peer-sharing event proposed to create a 'navigating conflict' community of praxis, to explore these themes further: contact nishma.alternativejustice@gmail.com to find out more.

Attribution

Input and resources for this guide were provided by:

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