a ulex resource

SUSTAINABLE ACTIVISM REGENERATIVE ORGANISING

integral activist training

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ULEX PROJECT WORK ON SUSTAINABLE ACTIVISM

This body of work offers a range of tools, collective and personal, which can make our activism more effective and sustainable. These are tools which can help us avoid burnout and stay in it for the long haul, adding continuity to our movement building. And they can be used to ensure the collective and organisational dimensions of our activism exemplify the values we're struggling for.

Those of us involved in social change face enormous challenges. Often, on a daily basis, we experience the injustice, loss, and suffering in the world around us. We also meet our own responses to that; our fears, frustrations and anger. It becomes important to ask: How can we best work with these responses creatively to achieve our goals? Where can we find the personal resources and skills that could make our action more effective and sustainable? And what collective tools can we use to enable our groups, organisations, and networks to better embody our values?

Engaging with these questions, these trainings take a 'regenerative' approach, which goes beyond sustainability, to explore how we can organise in ways that renew and revitalize our resources. It can help us stay inspired, nourished, and more creative in our strategic thinking and development of tactics.

These courses build on experience of running residential trainings for sustainable activism over many years. Originally tailored specifically towards people working in environmental direct action, it has since been developed in eight countries by us and a growing network of activist-trainers applying the approach in different situations. It has been reworked to meet the needs of activists and organisers from diverse fields.

The original course has become an international reference point for sustainable activism work. It has brought many people back form the edge of despondency and burnout to develop sustainable and effective approaches to their organising. Activists have been supported to take fresh ways of working back into their groups and organisations, catalysing important cultural changes that lead to healthier and more effective organising.

> Burnout is not only a personal issue, it's political.
> Without sustainable and resilient approaches our movements haemorrhage talent.

The approach is aimed at anyone engaged in work that seeks to support systemic change towards a more socially just and sustainable society. We use the term 'activist' in its broadest sense. We recognise that there are multiple strategic approaches that can contribute to systemic change. We don't valorise any one form of activism, but encourage a nuanced respect for a wide range of interventions and methodologies. Consequently, we consider activism to include: Resistance – action preventing further damage to ecosystems and social justice; Renewal – action focused on developing and creating alternatives for healthier societies and communities; and Building Resilience – action supporting increased resilience in communities to weather the uncertain times ahead.

Burnout is not only a personal issue, it is a political issue. Without sustainable and resilient approaches our movements haemorrhage talent. The strains lead to a loss of responsiveness and creativity in our work. Cynicism and internal conflicts drain the energy from our groups. We can find ourselves reproducing so many of the harmful tendencies that we are trying to change in the world at large. Our approach explores these issues using holistic and participatory methods – drawing on popular education, ecological and systems thinking, as well as reflective practices. We call it Integral Activist Training. It pro-actively brings together activists from different countries, working on diverse issues, and often representing a range of political identities. In this way we hope to support the sharing of practice and learning across movements, as well as connections that can strengthen transversal networking.

The core aims of these trainings are:

1. To explore methods of working effectively with the personal and inner dimension of activism, helping us take better care of ourselves, equipping us to avoid burnout and to better empower ourselves to bring our best to our work.

2. To offer tools which support more skilful inter-personal work in our groups and networks, supporting personal and organisational wellbeing and effectiveness, as well as enable us to exemplify the values we want to realise in the world.

3. To create a vibrant and supportive temporary community of activists, as a space for deep reflection, analysis, and the sharing of experience of the personal and inter-personal dimensions of our work – and as a space to find nourishment and inspiration.

To achieve that the trainings are designed to help participants to:

1.1 Gain an increased awareness of the importance of self-care, and be better equipped to incorporate it in their lives;

1.2 Learn ways of developing greater personal balance, clarity, inspiration, and resilience – including the use of reflective and contemplative practices;

1.3 Explore issues and techniques relevant to managing their energy, fears, frustrations, despair, and despondency – and become better able to avoid emotional hardening and cynicism;

2.1 Increase their understanding of group-work skills, including communication skills and ways of working with conflict, to transform energy depleting situations;

2.2 Gain experience of methods of organising and community building that can express the values we are working for and increase personal and group capacity;

2.3 Examine issues around empowerment, leadership, understanding power dynamics and collective processes;

3.1 Reflect deeply on their own personal history of activism, identifying patterns and tendencies, and find ways of skilfully transforming these where needed;

3.2 Identify and drawn upon the sources of nourishment and inspiration that support engagement and help them realise their potential as organisers and empowered agents for social change.

METHODOLOGY

The courses explore these issues using methods of Integral Activist Training – an approach that attends to the political, inter-personal and personal dimensions in an integrated way.

The methodology is **participatory** and **holistic**. It draws on popular and direct education, systems and ecological thinking, experiential and embodied learning, and applies reflective and introspective practices.

Integral Activist Training should:

- help us to analyse and strategize socio-politically
- support organisations to embody the values they strive for
- offer us the inter-personal skills & tools to create effective teams
- enable us to grow as individuals, to develop our skills, creativity, self-awareness, and inner resources to support our struggles.

Integral Activist Training is:

- holistic
- transformative
- participatory
- pro-actively inclusive
- connecting.

The courses are responsively designed to meet the emergent needs in groups and to incorporate new learning. Whilst the approach continues to evolve, key themes have surfaced, which feature again and again.

Key topics:

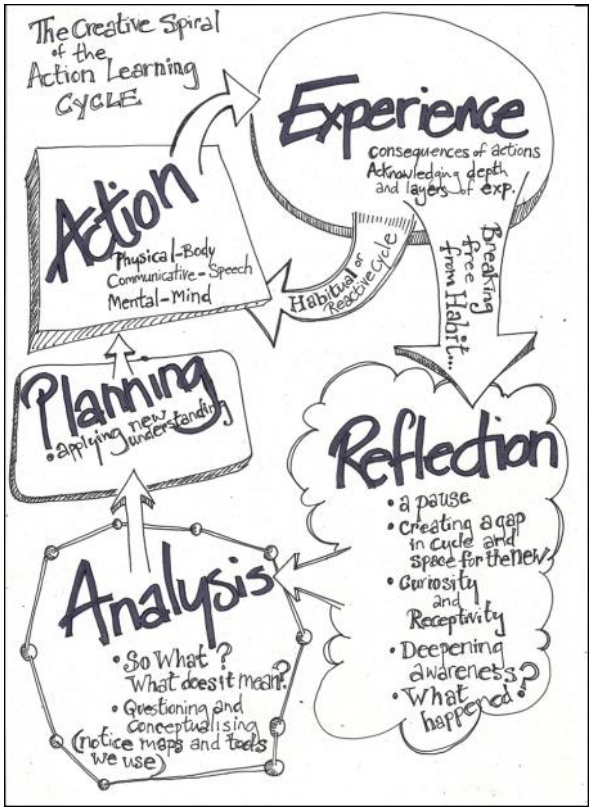
- Balancing Action-Reflection
- Taking a systems approach
- Exploring interventions at 3 levels:

  Personal, interpersonal, and collective
- 3 keys to personal empowerment
- Sharing methods of working at he intrapersonal level
- Working with views, beliefs and identity
- Reinventing activism: Regenerative organising
- Creating a culture of resilience
- Acknowledging that "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know"
- Developing approaches to shift group tendencies
- Addressing strategy and time management
- Supporting sustained change

BALANCING ACTION-REFLECTION

For many people involved in practices of social transformation the pressures to act can feel enormous. In our attempts to respond to the problems we perceive action follows action in a quick cycle of succession. As the common nomenclature "activist" suggests, we can feel impelled to action. The space to reflect and evaluate, to take stock, is relegated to a place of secondary importance against the backdrop of urgency and desperate demands we are responding to. We act and act again, and consequently we often reproduce strategies and tactics without creating opportunities to learn from our experience.

If only we could find the time to stop and reflect on our experience we would find opportunities to escape from ruts of habit and our action would actually benefit from the learning this makes possible. Very often the primary emphasis in trainings seeking to support deep changes is to create a safe and open space where deep reflection can take place. In rebalancing action and reflection in activist circles, all too often the first step is simply to stop, to pause, and to open up receptivity and curiosity to our lived experience.



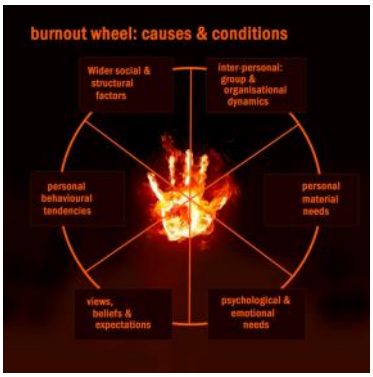
Our work applies an adaptation of the **Action Learning Cycle** used in direct and popular education. As well as using this in the learning methodology of the course we explore how participants might apply this approach in an ongoing way in their work and lives.

The Action Learning Cycle offers a simple framework for building learning, healthy feedback and responsiveness into our personal lives and organisational process. It is a simple framework within which a wide range of tools and approaches can be integrated, helping to bring more awareness and choice to our actions. Applying the Action Learning Cycle empowers us to build ongoing learning into our work and lives- to deepen our understanding and experience, to evaluate and redesign our approach based on our cumulative learning.

FIELDS OF CONDITIONS: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

Realising lasting change rarely involves a single factor or simple linear process. Both burnout and resilience arise out of a complex constellation of factors. To work with a greater appreciation of the complex and often multi-faceted nature of experience, it is useful to map out and analyse what these are and how they manifest in different situations. This enables us to explore what kinds of interventions and changes can be most useful. It helps us to see which changes are easily achieved but have a high impact, and which others require a long term strategic approach of putting conditions in place gradually over time. Understanding these factors can help us prioritise our efforts to create conditions for on-going sustainability – for ourselves and our groups/organisations.

We explore the conditions that lead to a lack of sustainability in our work in these areas:



Wider social/structural factors: The wider environment we are working in canbe stacked against us in ways that place enormous stress on our work. Structural factors such as social injustice, repression, forms of domination, economic pressures and precarity all contribute in obvious ways.

Interpersonal factors: Another broad area that includes the dynamics within our groups, ways we reproduce unhelpful tendencies in our own organisational cultures, habits of communication, and the nature of our personal relationships.

Personal material needs: It seems obvious, but sadly all too often we sacrifice basic needs (or just don't have the means to meet them adequately) so that a personal deficit gradually wears us down. Gaining clarity about our needs and incorporating them in our long term strategies is vital.

Personal behavioural tendencies: These include our work habits, how we deal with stress, and the balance we strike between work and other aspects of our lives. Sometimes simple methods for organising work and managing our time can make a big difference.

Psychological and emotional needs: What is it that drives our behaviour? Why don't we take rest when it's needed? Are there unrecognised needs that push us on? Understanding the mixture of motives can help us get free of unconscious and unhelpful tendencies.

Views, beliefs, expectations: The world views we carry, the ways we construct and hang on to our own sense of who we are, even deeply held assumptions about the future, all play a strong part in shaping our action and strategizing. Making these beliefs and attitudes conscious and susceptible to testing and analysis can lead to greater cognitive agility. It can help us to avoid repeating unhelpful approaches and to keep learning as we go.

3 ZONES: TRIPLE BRAIDED INTERVENTION

Taking into account the interplay of these conditions and causes, we can identify three zones of intervention – the personal, inter-personal and the structural. Burnout and resilience do have an important personal dimension. Often there is a lot we can achieve by understanding personal needs, transforming habits, and developing greater psychological integration and self-awareness. But we all grow as individuals in the context of others. We also need to look at the culture of our groups and the nature of the relationships we have with those around us. Both burn out and resilience in this sense are not so much personal issues or attributes, but social ones.

Our personal and group wellbeing are impacted by wider structural issues. So it is important to include awareness of those environmental influences in our planning and strategizing. Longer term resourcing, building networks of solidarity, and learning how to embody our values between us, can create structural conditions that enable our organising and activism to become a source of regenerative activity. We can develop an approach to our work that restores, renews and revitalizes our sources of energy and materials, just as it increases our impact on the wider structural conditions in society.

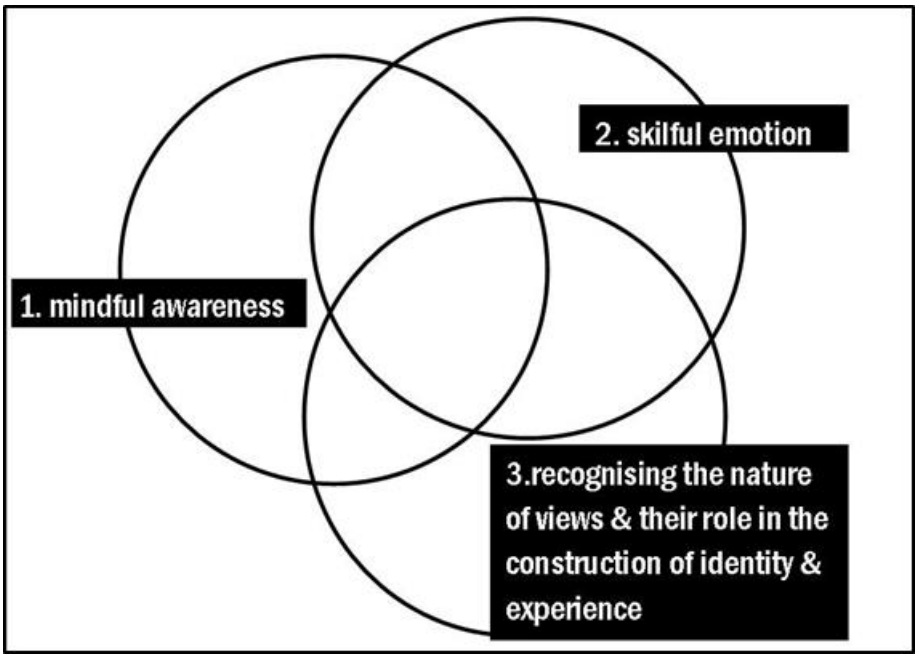
Our sustainable activism work pays attention to all three of these areas – the personal, interpersonal and structural – while remaining aware of the interplay and mutually conditioning influences between them. Thinking systemically we pay attention to the way interventions at each level can have reverberations and influence change at other levels.

3 KEYS TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

We work with a model identifying three key factors that support personal empowerment and transformation. These are cognitive/psychological conditions that support self-awareness, emotional literacy, and empower us to cultivate important personal qualities.

1. The foundational factor is the development of **mindful awareness**. Cultivating the capacity to be mindfully present, to bring a clear and bright mind to our experience, and to increase our capacity to maintain a continuity of open and receptive attention, underpins the development of self-awareness. Mindfulness can be brought to our experience of the body, the senses, our emotional experience, behavioural tendencies, and to enable us to become more conscious of our thoughts and how they frame our experience. In addition to awareness of our own body, mind and heart, mindfulness is also a key factor in increasing awareness and understanding of others and our interactions with the world. Often the first step is to antidote tendencies towards distraction and dispersion of attention – learning to gather, settle and stabilise our attention. Body and breath based practices can support this kind of mental training.

2. Complementing this is the development of **skilful emotion**. While mindfulness emphasises the quality of awareness, skilful emotion directs our attention to the 'heart' dimension of our experience – the emotional tendencies of turning towards or away from our experience and the world. *Skilful* emotions are those which conduce towards increased awareness and more opening of the heart. *Unskilful* emotions, such as aversion and craving, tend to constrict the heart and mind. They close us down and perpetuate alienation and disconnection. In order to underpin an integrated and healthy sense of self (healing our internal fragmentation and conflicts), and our solidarity and connection with others, it is crucial to strengthen our skilful tendencies and reduce our unskilful ones. It is also important to balance the intention to cultivate skilful emotion with a willingness to come into a kind and open relationship to all dimensions of our experience (not only the skilful ones!)– otherwise we run the risk of our practice perpetuating the unskilful tendencies of excessive self-criticism and aversion. Balancing a developmental aspiration with a patient and accepting attitude requires practice. The cultivation of skilful emotion is also an important foundation to personal resilience and effective collaboration. Skilful emotion is supported by practices that help us to increase our emotional awareness, come into relationship withthe emotional body, and by a committed ethical practice in everyday life.



3. Over time these first two factors can help us to deepen a healthy and integrated sense of self. Foundational emotional resilience and mental clarity supports **an increasing ability to recognise the nature of views and the role they play in the construction of identity and our experience of the world**. Lack of mental clarity, unskilful emotion, and psychological fragmentation all obfuscate the way we hold and use views. Grasping attachment to our views, dogmas and ideologies – many of which are operating unconsciously – underpin behavioural strategies. Recognising the partial and provisional nature of our views and the stories we tell of our self and the world is a crucial step in freeing us from the traps of habit and delusion. As mindful awareness and skilful emotion deepen we also become more able to hold less tightly to our views, come into a more direct experience with the world, and (learning from experience) adapt and adjust our provisional models as we go. In this way we can help to ensure that our views serve our intentions rather than imprison us in limiting conceptions of our self and the world.

Methods of working with keys to personal transformation

Deeper Reflection:
We use numerous tools that support deeper reflection on experience. These support us to look at our previous experience and life history, as well as to reflect more deeply on the experiences arising within the trainings themselves. Using the Action Learning methodology enables us to take the time for deeper reflection as a basis for enriched analysis and future planning.

Contemplative Technologies:
Introspective methodologies are as old as human societies. In recent years these approaches have been increasingly freed from the religious and cosmological frameworks of the past and their psychological and cognitive values recognised. Practices such as mindfulness enable us to work directly with the quality of our attention, enhance our sense of presence, and work with our extraordinary capacity for neuroplasticity.

Somatic Work:
There is a growing acknowledgment of the importance of body-based awareness in the work of personal transformation. It is through the body and senses that we encounter the world and interact with it. It is also in the body that we hold patterns and memory that condition our future responses. This kind of somatic work covers a wide spectrum that ranges from Theatre of the Oppressed to Focusing.

Dialogue and Inquiry:
Self-awareness and understanding is supported through collective inquiry and processes of dialogue. We use methods adapted from popular and participatory education, as well as Insight Inquiry and Participatory Dialogue.

WORKING WITH VIEWS, BELIEFS AND IDENTITY

The behaviours and strategies that we adopt in our lives and our work are deeply conditioned by the views and beliefs we carry. Often these views sit in the shadows of our minds - unconscious, confused and contradictory. Sometimes these views are waved like banners as strongly articulated systems of belief that coalesce in ideology. In both cases it is important that we create space to expose them to the light of day, recognising the assumptions they contain and testing them against our experience.

On the one hand this involves developing our capacity to think critically. On the other hand it involves a deepening understanding of how existential and psychological drivers determine the ways we hold on to views, how our understanding can become rigidified, or function as rationalisations that mask deeper unconscious tendencies.

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Recognising the provisional and partial nature of our views helps us to refine and adapt them. Understanding how we hold on to them existentially, and testing them in the to and fro of theory and praxis, enables us to put our critical and conceptual models in service of our work, rather than leaving our work ensnared by our conceptual models.

We have noticed several constellations of views or core areas of belief that have an especially strong influence on how activism is conceptualise by activists, and therefore how we do it:

Human Nature:

Political ideologies tend to operate with a core view about the fundamental nature of human beings. Entire political systems grow out of assumptions about our intrinsically selfish or benevolent nature, or whether we are noble and perfectible or fundamentally corrupted and irredeemable. Our political goals and strategies are coloured by these beliefs – as are the ways we think about ourselves and our colleagues. Unpacking and testing such assumptions helps sharpen our analysis and inquire more deeply into our own experience.

How Change Happens:

Consciously or unconsciously, coherently or not, social change work is inevitably permeated by views about how change happens. Sometimes this is represented by specific theories of change. On other occasions they are embedded in a culture of action that gives rise to specific tactics, but isn't always clear about how those actions connect with the changes we want to see. Examining our understanding of social change grants us access to greater strategic clarity and tactical flexibility.

Causality and Complexity:

Related to our models of social change are more fundamental views about causality. Although the world exhibits great complexity and non-linear properties we can often hold on to basic assumptions about linear processes of cause and effect. These often fail to honour the complex processes of influence and transformation. Such views are also core components of how we see our own agency and impact.

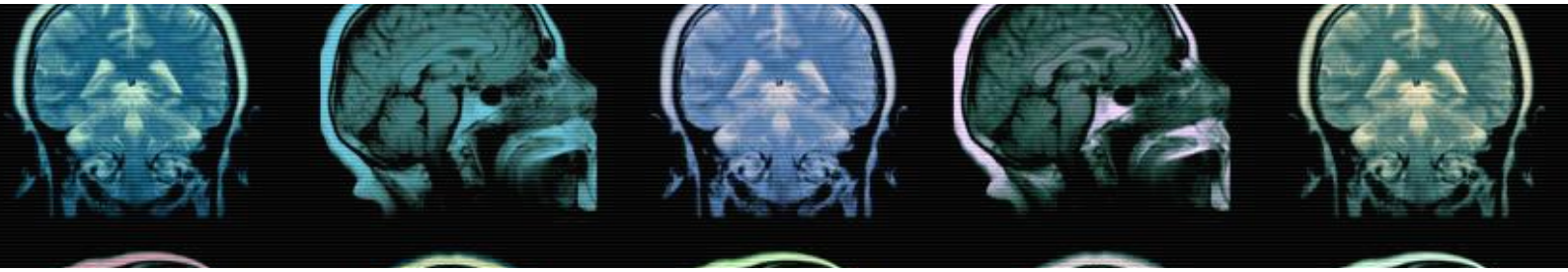
The Individual:

This is a fundamental category in the structuring of late modern consciousness. How we understand individuality and its relationship to community and society has a strong impact on our ways of working. The relationship between structure and agency, our capacity to balance autonomy and cooperation are all coloured by the way we hold this idea. Examining how we understand the self is key to being able to avoid reproducing prevailing atomistic and narcissistic tendencies in our activist work.

Time and History:

There is much to suggest that many modern approaches to social change have imbibed cultural and religious narratives. The relationship between political liberation and religious salvation, between revolution and apocalypse, end times and utopia can be seen to run through diverse political traditions from communism, anarchism and neoliberalism. Do we carry views about the directionality of history? How do these influence our action?

The Sustainable Activism and Regenerative Organising trainings all open up reflection and analysis around these kinds of views and how they condition our approach.



REINVENTING ACTIVISM: REGENERATIVE ORGANISING

Given that the way we conceive of activism itself will be coloured by the basic world view we carry, a truly sustainable, resilient and effective approach to activism will often require us to explore the ways we think about activism itself. As we bring a critical consciousness to bear on the views we carry, we might find it necessary to reinvent our activism and to ask: What for us constitutes an activist identity? How does that identity serve or hinder us?

Often we witness self-sacrificial tendencies, self-righteousness, heroic vanguardism, and activist sub-cultures that can't connect with other constituencies that they claim to be fighting for. While there is no getting away from opposition and conflict in politics, tendencies of antagonism often permeate activist cultures in unhelpful ways – as can a kind of competitive radicalism. These tendencies can foster a kind of activist ghetto, demands to conform to limiting ideologies, stagnant identities and dysfunctional cultural norms. All too often these perpetuate many obstacles to self-care.

But how do these kinds of activist identity serve our intentions? To what extent are they psychologically determined - efforts to resolve our own insecurity or wounding? To what extent do they simply reproduce a moral order or worldviews we have imbibed from a wider culture? We might need to be prepared to reinvent our activism from the ground up!

CREATING RESILIENCE – for ourselves and our organisations

Resilience is the capacity of a system to bounce back from shock or to recover after difficulties. It is a quality that encompasses robustness without rigidity, as well as the ability to adapt and learn. The resilience of both ecosystems and social systems is often said to be related to the range and number of connections within the system – diversity and connectivity are strong indicators of resilience.

As a way of talking about our personal and organisational sustainability, resilience can be very useful. There will be times when we have to give all of what we have got, when we are stretched and stressed. What do we need to put in place so that we bounce back and replenish ourselves and our teams?

Just as burnout arises from a multiplicity of forces, resilience is a quality that is supported by a range of interacting conditions:

Emotional and Psychological Resilience:

Our capacity to hold strong emotion in ourselves and others, weather disappointment without falling into despondenc avoid apathy and cynicism, and maintain deep and strong roots of motivation.

Social Support:

In studies of emotional resilience it has become increasingly clear that the connections we have with others are as important as the psychological aspect (if not more so in many cases). Good friends who can listen to us, empathise, let us offload and process our experience are invaluable. People who will feedback to us when they notice we are overstretched and who will step in to help us emotionally and practically when needed are indispensable at times. Mapping these connections out is an important step towards building greater resilience into our lives. Learning how to accept support can be just as important for some of us.

Behavioural Resilience:

Social change work is a marathon not a sprint. There will be boughts of sprinting. But we need to choose them wisely. Rather than continuously giving our all in a do or die mission, we need approaches that help us to maintain reserves and acknowledge the value of pacing. Rather than throwing ourselves desperately forwards lurching towards an uncertain future, we need to learn how to stay present in each step, able to choose our direction rather than being blindly thrown on by impulsive momentum. And when we do need to give it our all, we need to balance that with time for rest and recovery before another bout. We have to learn to balance giving our time and energy with time receiving and finding nourishment.

Organisational Resilience:

Lack of organisational resilience puts enormous pressure on us. Important aspects of organisational resilience include: Learning how to grow at a helpful rate; knowing how much we can take on so that the challenges stretch us creatively without overwhelming us; creating adequate levels of redundancy so that people can take time out; building cultures that encourages self-care as a duty to others; the capacity to resolve conflicts, to challenge domination and to empower each other.

Deeper Connection:

Resilient ecosystems exhibit the characteristic of multiple connections. Connectivity and diversity are indicators of resilience. Attending to three dimensions of connection – to ourselves, to others and to nature – can be a useful way to explore resilience. Connecting deeply to ourselves and our core motivation, by keeping our vision fresh and a sense of our values alive, can be important. The sense of shared purpose and capacity to embody our values with others keeps our inspiration fed. Connecting with nature – aspects of the non-human ecology – can also help us find nourishment and perspective, connecting our work to something so much bigger than us and our necessarily limited concerns.

"THE HEART HAS IT'S REASONS THAT REASON DOES NOT KNOW"

It is important to acknowledge how much we have gained from the rational and empirical methodologies that have occupied such a central a place in the rise of modernity. And yet it is also clear that the singular maximisation of these traits leads to the loss of so much that gives life value.

Valuing the quantitative over the qualitative, or the reasoned over the felt, is common in the often hardnosed environment of socio-political engagement. Clearly we don't want to valorise vague and obfuscating mystification, but giving excessive priority to the rational faculty often blinds us to important factors. Reductive scientistic methods, the preferences of patriarchy, amongst other influences, have led many people to be suspicious of the emotional or intuitive dimensions. And yet it is almost always the case that these things of the heart are what drive our action and behaviour, and give meaning to our lives. As Pascal wrote, "The heart has its reasons that reason does not know."

Honouring the emotional dimension is important for many reasons. There is increasing awareness of the role that emotional intelligence plays in effective leadership and collaboration. Emotional intelligence underpins effective communication. So if we are going to work well with others we

will need to engage with our own hearts. On a day to day level our capacity to empathise will make the difference between dysfunctional and empowering communication. And unless we stay alive to the emotional dimension of our experience we can lose the vitality and dynamism it provides.

Without developing greater emotional literacy we can remain victims to unconscious drives and reactions. Often our stated reasons for doing things are post-choice rationalisations. Understanding our emotional selves empowers us to choose more consciously. It also enables us to benefit from the differentiated perspectives of both our feeling and thinking faculties – rather than one merely justifying the other.

Unless we learn to acknowledge and process our feelings, we often get stuck in frustration, allow unnamed conflicts to distort our relationships, and carry past difficulties around like heavy sacks on our backs. Team work requires patience and almost certainly times of forgiveness. These too are qualities we can build capacity in, developing greater empathy and understanding that can underpin effective team building.

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Social engagement brings us into contact with suffering, injustice and pain. We need to build our capacity to stay open to these experiences, to remain empathetic and compassionate, rather than shrink into cynicism or apathy. We need to become more able to hold strong emotions like rage and anger, so we can channel that energy in ourselves and others, rather than turning it in on ourselves or taking it out on each other.

As activists it can also be valuable to understand how emotional experiences of fear and violence can become locked into the body, patterning future responses. Recognising this in ourselves or those we work with can help us to find ways to release these patterns and really help our team work. A minimal understanding of how trauma and post-traumatic experiences unfold, accessing a few self-help tools for managing cumulative tension, and knowing where to access on-going support when needed, is indispensable.

SHIFTING GROUP CULTURE

Burnout and resilience are political issues. The social injustice, discrimination and multiple forms of repression that surround us wear us down. Amidst the enormity of the task of addressing these issues the least we can do is to ensure that our own organisations don't replicate those depleting and oppressive tendencies.

Our organisations need to be able to help us rebuild trust, to embody meaning in our social relationships, and enable the individuals within them to grow. Our personal sustainability, resilience, and effectiveness will only be as good as that of the organisations and groups we work in. So it is important to build understanding and skills around the following key factors into our organisations.

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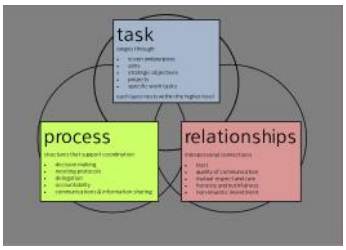
From Control to Collaboration:

We need to create the right kind of group culture in order to enable each of us to bring the best of ourselves to our work and to become more effective collectively. A useful way to explore the embodiment of the values we are working towards is to understand the skills and tools that lead from a culture of control to one of collaboration.

The Balance of Task-Process-Relationships:



Staying clear about our purpose is important. Applying processes that are congruent with our values help us to walk the talk. Social change organisations are often good at the first of these – focusing on task. Many grassroots organisers can be hyper-conscious (geek-like even) about the second - process. But unless we attend to the quality of our relationships, however clear our strategic pathways or sharp our command of 'process' method and language, things can just keep on getting undermined up. Taking care of each other needs to be part of the bigger political mission.

Understanding Power:

The way power operates within our groups is a complex but important issue. Developing a clear analysis of power is essential to finding potency as individuals and collectively. We need to be able to recognise the different ways it manifests: Legitimately and illegitimately, overtly and hidden, constructively and destructively. Understanding the ways in which

we respond to power is also important. Denial, fear, conforming, and resisting, are all natural responses, but are they conscious and do they empower us and those around us? We need to explore how to transform unhelpful power dynamics, how to distribute power appropriately, as well as how to use it well and consciously.

Decision Making:

It is often clear enough how decisions taken by unaccountable authority or in ways that perpetuate unjust hierarchical relationships can drain energy and motivation in our organisations. It is also common enough to find that attempts to replace traditional hierarchies with horizontal flat structures which fetishize consensus processes can also lead to deep frustration, stagnation or dissipation. Developing greater agility in adopting differentiated and distributed forms of decision making can often help us to better express our values and free up energy and initiative.

Communication Skills:

These are so fundamental to a good work culture and group empowerment, and yet so often we don't take the time to develop and hone these skills. Small adjustments and changes to the ways we speak and listen can lay the ground for much greater synergy, shared understanding, and a culture of mutual respect.

Transforming Conflict:

There can be real creativity that comes out of conflict. But too often it becomes entrenched, gets hidden, and underpins a corrosive low key animosity as a baseline atmosphere - draining the energy out of our groups. Knowing how to face and work directly with conflicts that arise is a crucial skill for individuals and groups wanting to work well with others.

Feedback and Responsiveness:

As we act we change the world around us. The world also changes in its own ways. As we act we change, gain new perspectives and fresh experience. To remain responsive we need to build the capacity to learn from experience, to re-evaluate and adapt our approaches. To develop our individual capacity we also need to learn from each other. Building a culture that values feedback, personally and organisationally, keeps us properly alive, learning and growing.

These factors are all important for the health and vitality of our groups and the people in them. Exploring sustainability and resilience involves touching on these themes and exploring how we can build them more fully into our ways of working. A deeper focus on these themes is the purpose of our Transformative Collaboration training.

STRATEGY AND TIME MANAGEMENT

There are always going to be simple efficiencies that reduce our predisposition to become worn out. Improvements in our strategizing are an obvious place to start, as is improved distribution of tasks and responsibilities. Especially important are strategic approaches which take account of capacity building and increasing spheres of influence. If our organising overly focuses on direct impact we will surely find ourselves overstretched and under resourced. We need to apply some of our time and energy to strategic objectives that actually increase our internal capacity, secure further resources, and gain us time and potency. Similarly understanding leverage points, exponential impacts, and the relationship between direct and indirect influence is important.

At a day to day level the way we organise our work can make a surprising difference. How can we find better strategies to deal with the 'PAID Reality': Pressure, Always on, Information overload, and Distractedness? Often rather innocuous and simple changes can have a big impact. Picking up a few tried and tested time management methods and working practices shouldn't be beneath anyone who cares about being effective and maintaining their wellbeing. Time management extends not only to how we get our work done, but how we use our time more generally. Ensuring we balance productivity with uselessness, action with reflection, output with nourishment and work with sheer enjoyment! These are all crucial aspects of long term and effective engagement.

MAKING CHANGES

Finally, we always take time to explore what all this learning means and how we can carry it back into our lives and organisations. We know that making changes is a gradual and challenging process. Often trainings alone are not enough. But our follow up work has shown that previous participants report a very high level of change in their sustainability. We put this down to two factors. Firstly we give a significant amount of session time to exploring implementation and personal pathways to change. We help participants to ask: Where to start? What to prioritise? How can we make our learning about sustainable and resilient activism something other than a vast and overwhelming to-do list? How can we avoid getting burnt out trying to revamp an entire organisational culture? Where can we find support and on going resources? Secondly, we help establish peer support networks and a level of on-going mentored support. With the Ulex Project we hope this will be enhanced by the dedicated community forums associated with the project.

CONCLUSION

Socio-political projects that aim to help us shift towards life-affirming cultures and societies require long term energetic participation. Personal and organisational sustainability are crucial. Inquiry into approaches that are effective, sustainable and regenerative is crucial. We hope that the work we are developing in this área offers a useful contribution.

Burnout Related Reading

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Wineman Steve (2003) Power Under: trauma and non violent social change. Self Published: Cambridge MA. Online at http://www.traumaandnonviolence.com

Not directly about burnout but useful analysis of approach- with burnout and empowerment in mind

Eisenstein, C (2013) The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible. North Atlantic Books.

Shields, Katrina (1993) In the Tiger's Mouth: An Empowerment Guide for Social Action. New Society Publishers.

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Lorde, Audre. (2007) Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches. Crossing Press.

Macy, Joanna and Johnstone, Chris (2012) Active Hope. How to face the mess we're in without going crazy. New World Library.

Macy, Joanna and Young Brown (2014) Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects.

Solnit, Rebecca (2016) Hope in the Dark. Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities. Haymarket Books