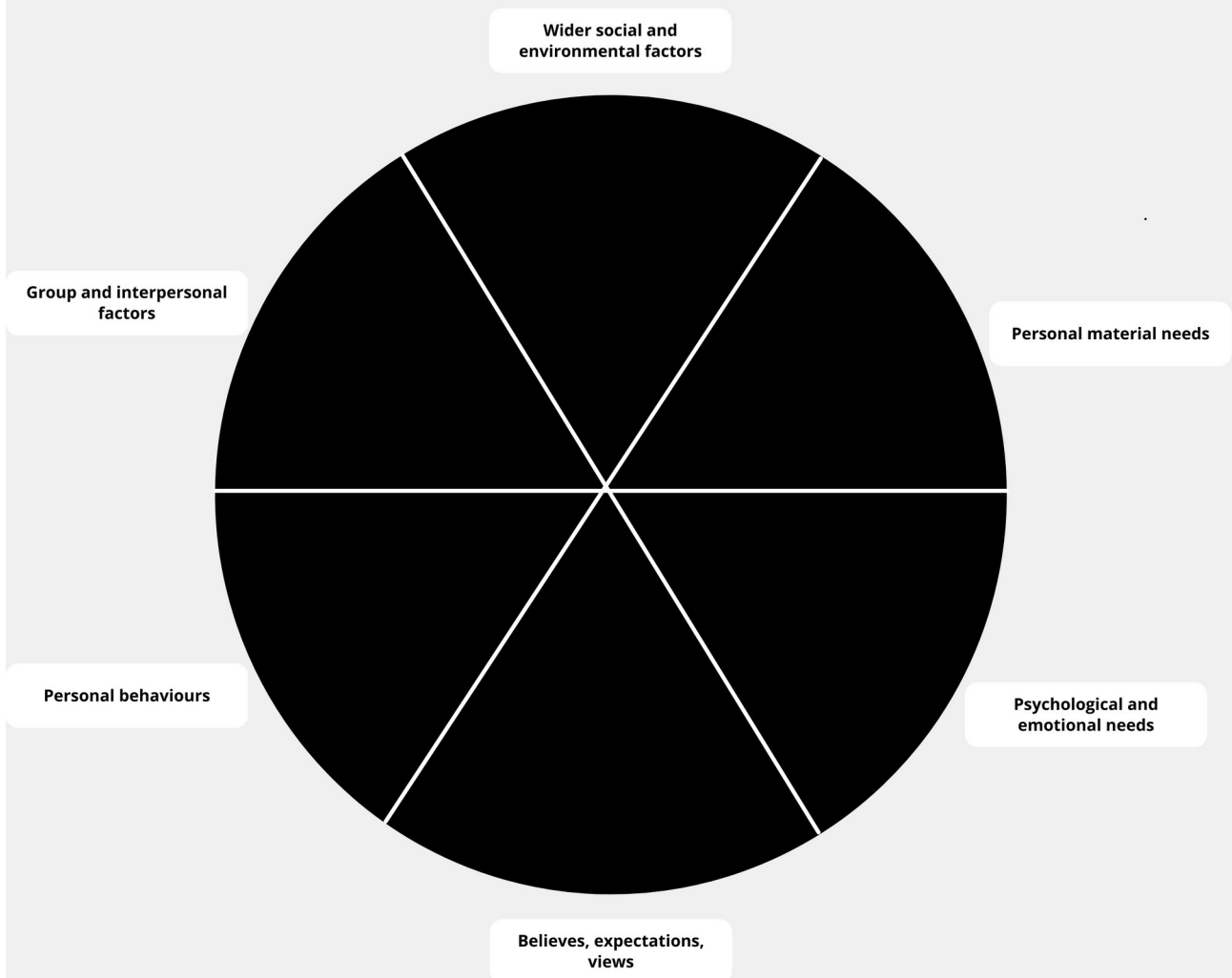


BURNOUT WHEEL
- factors that lead to lack of resilience



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/environmental factors:

The wider environment we are working in can be 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.

Examples: As a queer person, who lived in polish countryside I was exposed to structural transphobia and homophobia (connected to wider factors such as: right wing government rule, extremist catholic values embedded in education systems, lack of equity education, invisibility of LGBTQI+ community, hate speech, etc, etc) , as well as structural precarious work situation (connected to wider factors such as: no work available in the area, no or limited public transport to be able to get to areas where work is available, depopulation of the area and migration into the city, no available state unemployment support).

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.

Examples: I was doing unpaid activist work, that occupied most of my time. To be able to sustain myself and my family I needed to do extra paid work, often draining, physical work performed only for financial reward, often in places that did not share my life values. Most of the money I earned, I'd invest in the activist projects, neglecting my own material needs – eating poorly, not getting time off, not getting proper equipment to perform my activism, not getting enough sleep. It resulted in lack of financial safety, tiredness and emotional and physical exhaustion.

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.

Examples: My lack of rest and not prioritising my own needs came from underlying deeper need for love and recognition. I was afraid that if I'd stop doing as much, I'd lose my social contacts and appreciation of close ones (all my friendships and close relationships were based on/stemmed from activism)

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.

Examples: I was holding a view that change needs to happen now, quickly and suddenly. Not recognising the complex and long-term nature of change and systems led to my disillusionment with performed activism. I was not recognising myself as a part of bigger movement history, which led to feeling lonely and ineffective, as

oppose to feeling a connection to greater history of social movements. Taking for granted achievements of previous movements and fellow activists lead to me feeling bitter and helpless, not recognising and celebrating the victories and achievements that enabled me to perform and informed my activism.

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.

Examples: I have an internalised strong working culture ethos (connected to Wider structural factors – capitalism, working class background and to Psychological and emotional needs – need for recognition and measuring my worth through achievements and work/activism performance), resulting in my personal tendency to overwork. My behavioural tendency around stress is to “toughen up” and endure, without acknowledging the difficulties.

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.

Examples: The culture in my group was not to focus on difficulties and to dig the conflicts underneath the carpet. There was no culture of honest and direct feedback and a lot of talking” behind someone’s back”. We did not have the culture and courage to talk about class background and financial situations. Our relationships were based on work performed together and not intimacy build apart from activism.

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.