Non-punitive Approaches to Conflict Resolution

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In many contemporary societies, the dominant approach to conflict resolution is *punitive* in nature: when harm occurs, we seek to achieve accountability, justice, and/or mitigation of further harm by identifying an offender and assigning them some sort of *punishment* — perhaps removing them from the group or from society at large (e.g. firing, suspension, imprisonment), or perhaps subjecting them to some sort of proportional harm (e.g. "an eye for an eye").

There are many philosophical and practical reasons to question the punitive approach (e.g. see this resource from UC Berkeley and this resource from the Harvard Business Review), and some of these become particularly salient in the context of field science. Field science presents a unique case for alternatives to the punitive approach because:

1. Every team member is important to the success of the campaign. Following an incident, ideally you want to keep everyone both in the field and "on side" because each person has a role to play in the team's success. Losing either a member's presence or their productivity can be a costly loss to the campaign in terms of money, data, time, or ability to accomplish goals.
2. Field teams are often in remote locations, so external resources may be unavailable to assist with negotiating interpersonal conflict. Also, extracting a person from the field (either victim or perpetrator) may not be possible.

For these reasons, among others, traditional "blame and consequence" approaches to incident management may not serve the group or the mission.

Below is a very brief introduction on several alternative conflict management strategies that may be helpful for managing challenging interactions in the field. These approaches universally require a willingness for members to remain open – to others' perspectives, needs, communication styles, everything. Community building and respectful communication are also tenants to these approaches. Several of the tools presented in the ADVANCEing FieldSafety MOOC can be helpful to setting these important foundations:

- Leadership roles to share community/team responsibilities (Module 2)

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- Leadership styles to better understand perspectives and needs of your teammates (Module 2 and Toolkit)
- Debriefing to protect a space for open group communication (Module 2)
- Group development of Code of Conduct to set group expectations on interactions (Module 3)

Calling-in Culture

Calling in is naming when someone says something hurtful in a way that has the potential to educate the other person and build our movements. Calling in is about doing the often uncomfortable, often behind-the-scenes work to change peoples' perspective and behavior and, ultimately, strengthen our movements. When you trust that you are safe to make mistakes and that, rather than randomly calling you out, people will hold you accountable with love, it becomes much easier to learn and grow.
                    -Katherine Golub, "How to Create a Call-In Culture: Part 1"

Calling-in is an approach to hurtful or offensive comments developed as a contrasting alternative to calling-out and "cancel culture." Calling-out is a form of social punishment that can feel aggressive, humiliating, shameful, and alienating, and the approach is increasingly viewed as unproductive or even toxic.

Loretta J. Ross's TED Talk, "Don't Call People Out - Call Them In" is a great resource for better understanding calling-in as an approach for both building understanding and for resolving conflict. Ross describes calling-in, calling-on, and calling-out as a spectrum of possibilities for disrupting oppression, holding each other accountable, and engaging across differences. Ross gives examples of showing grace and forgiveness as a way to call-in to help us understand how to do this in our own relationships and experiences.

As you watch Ross's TED Talk, please reflect in particular on the following quotes:

> *When many different people think many different thoughts and they move in the same direction, that's a movement. But when many different people think one thought and then move in the same direction, that's a cult. And when you treat potential allies like enemies, you're behaving like a cult; not the human rights movement. (2:25)*

> *Most people are calling others out out of fear. Or they're feeling like they need to belong to something. And some people think they'll feel better about themselves if they put somebody else down. [...] Most of us want all of this violence to stop*

but we don't know where to begin, and most of us stay silent because we're afraid that we'll become the next target. (4:23)

I invite you to join me in this calling-in culture, this calling-in world that we're building. I think you will have a lot of joy and satisfaction in it, like I've found. We don't actually risk anything, because all we risk losing is our pain. And then you'll learn the most powerful lesson I've learned from five decades of being a social justice activist: fighting hate should be fun. It's being a hater that sucks. (13:45)

Note that Ross's TED Talk echoes many of the same arguments that she makes in her 2019 New York Times Op-Ed entitled "I'm a Black Feminist. I Think Call-Out Culture Is Toxic." We encourage you to read this Op-Ed if you find her TED Talk to be compelling.

As you consider Ross's message, please reflect on the prompts below.

- What, if anything, resonated with you as you listened to this TED Talk? What gave you pause?
- To what extent does Ross's message seem relevant to your own past experiences, and to your ideas about building community?
- Ross describes calling-in, calling-on, and calling-out as a spectrum of possibilities for disrupting oppression, holding each other accountable, and engaging across differences. Can you think of circumstances in which you might use the "call in" or "call on" approaches she describes? Are there any circumstances in which you feel that a "call out" is still warranted?

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent communication is a process for engaging with conflict that was developed in the 1960s by psychologist, mediator, author, and teacher, Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg. The approach requires that we honestly express ourselves to others, and that we empathically hear others.

The following website provides an excellent primer for Nonviolent Communication:
> Basics of Nonviolent Communication by Inbal Kashtan and Miki Kashtan https://baynvc.org/basics-of-nonviolent-communication/

From the 'Basics of Nonviolent Communication' site (bold emphasis added):

> *Nonviolent Communication (NVC) has been described as a language of compassion, as a tool for positive social change, and as a spiritual practice.* ***NVC gives us the tools and consciousness to understand what triggers us, to take responsibility for our reactions, and to deepen our connection with ourselves and others, thereby transforming our habitual responses to life.*** *Ultimately, it involves a radical change in how we think about life and meaning. NVC is based on a fundamental principle:*

>> *Underlying all human actions are needs that people are seeking to meet, and understanding and acknowledging these needs can create a shared basis for connection, cooperation, and more globally – peace.*

> ***Understanding each other at the level of our needs creates such connection because, at this deeper human level, the similarities between us outweigh the differences, giving rise to greater compassion. When we focus on needs, without interpreting or conveying criticism, blame, or demands, our deeper creativity flourishes, and solutions arise that were previously blocked from our awareness. At this depth, conflicts and misunderstandings can be resolved with greater ease.***

Restorative Mindset

Next, we introduce the concept of restorative mindset and begin exploring the ways that it might strengthen our relationships and community within our teams.

The restorative approach is rooted in building community and relationships, because group members who feel included and safe in their space are less likely to cause harm. If an incident does occur, response is based around understanding needs and perspectives and seeking to repair harms, rather than focusing on blame and punishment. This requires the community to be reflective listeners, to intuit and/or identify critical values and drivers, and to generally approach the group and experience with an open mind.

To start learning more about this approach, please read the quotes below, and consider how a field science team might be impacted if all members adopted a restorative mindset.

> *A restorative mindset is a way of thinking. It is a worldview that values inclusive, collaborative approaches for being together in community. These approaches validate the needs and experiences of everyone, particularly those who may have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed.*
> > *Source: "Establishing a Restorative Mindset." (2018) Highmark Foundation.*
>
> *[Restorative mindset] is a mindset of knowing and respecting all life, knowing that we can all co-exist. We all bleed, we all hurt, and we all have the same feelings.*
> > *-David Espinoza, Lakota teacher at Pine Ridge, South Dakota*
> > *Source: "Restorative Mindset: An Overview." (2022) Minnesota Department of Education. https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/prac/*
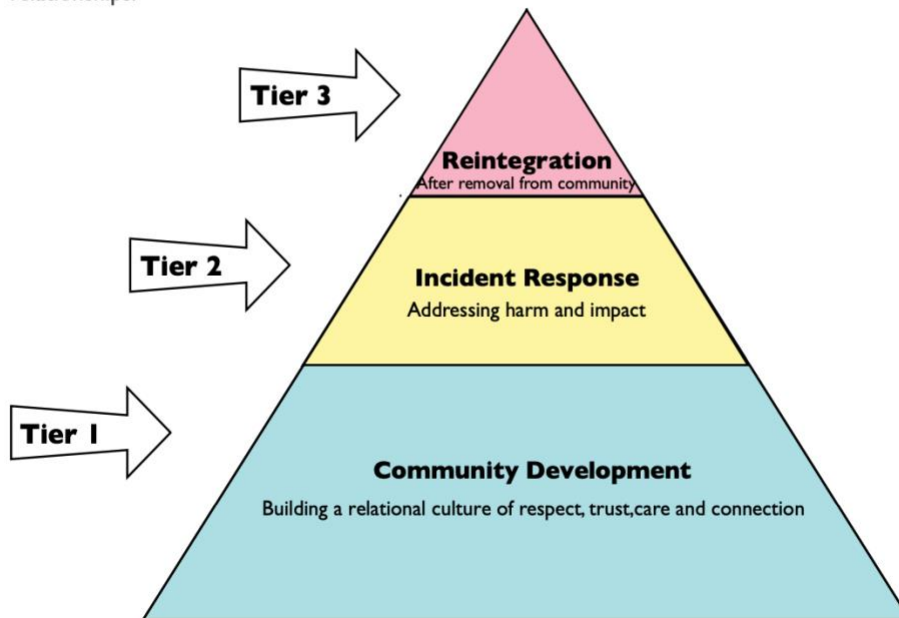
Next, please consider this visual representation of "The Restorative Approach" from Restorative Justice Project Maine:

The Restorative Approach

Restorative practices are a collection of actions that aim to build, maintain, and when necessary, repair relationships.

Tier 3 →

Reintegration
After removal from community

Tier 2 →

Incident Response
Addressing harm and impact

Tier 1 →

Community Development
Building a relational culture of respect, trust, care and connection

Source: Restorative Justice Project Maine. (2021) Participant Guide: pg. 15

The diagram above reminds us that a strong community — one grounded in respect, trust, care, and connection — is the necessary foundation for eventually repairing harms and addressing each other's needs.

When incidents do occur that cause harm within a community (Tier 2), the restorative approach addresses the incident by identifying and repairing the harm done in a way that brings accountability, healing, and reintegration (Tier 3).

The following resource from Maine's Restorative Justice Project offers further detail about how a restorative mindset can help address harms within a community:

A restorative mindset describes how a person understands community and one's role in the community: When someone does something that harms a community, the goal of an effective response is to heal and repair harm. In order to do so, it is essential to identify the needs of all parties involved and provide them with

opportunities to voice those needs. Actions taken in response to harm must address these needs and the root cause of any behavior incident or conflict, rebuild impacted relationships and communities, and provide opportunities for people to reflect on, heal, fix, and learn from their actions. [...]

Source: Restorative Justice Project Maine. (2022) Participant Guide: pg. 15.

Restorative Skills and Practices

Now that we understand the framework for establishing a community rooted in restorative principles, let's explore the skills and practices that this approach requires.

First, please consider this excerpt from the New Zealand Report on Restorative Practice:

> *Restorative Practices include proactive practices that aim to build relationships and a sense of community to prevent wrongdoing and have built in processes for restoratively responding to harm and wrongdoing.*
> *Building a restorative community is an evolutionary process which needs everyone to be involved in a consistent application of restorative principles and practice over time.*
>
> *Source: Restorative Justice Project Maine. (2021) Participant Guide: pg. 14. (Emphasis added.)*

But what do these practices actually entail, and what skills do they require? To answer this question, please review the 6 skills shown below or view the full PDF linked here.
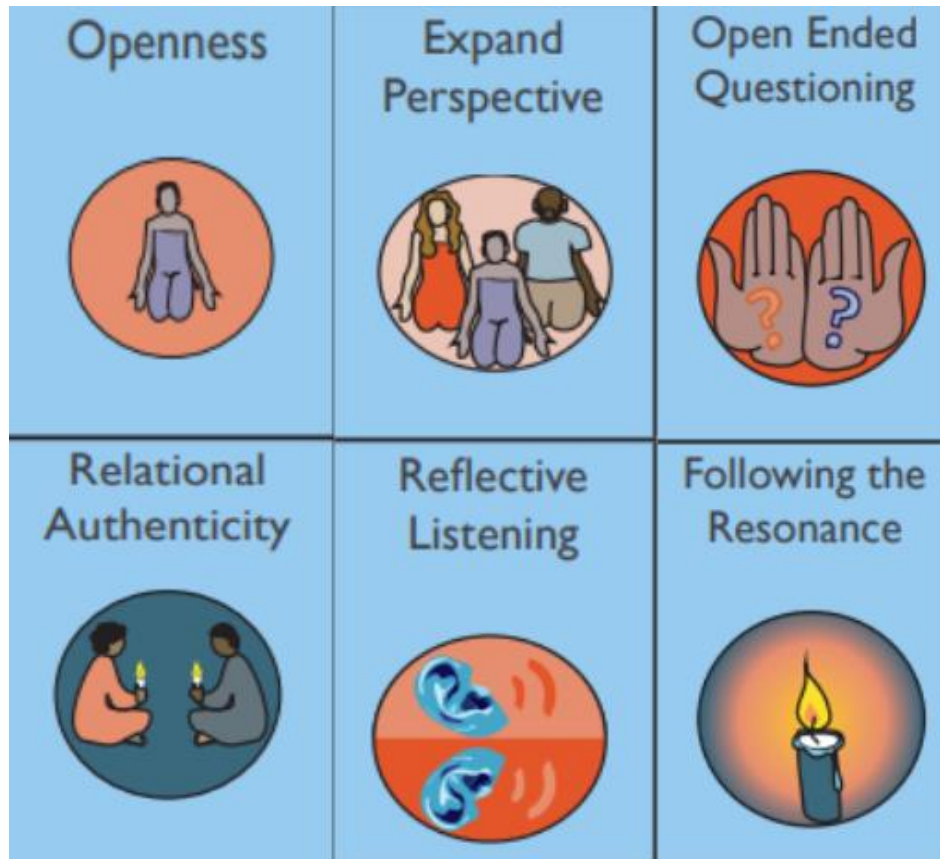
As you pause to reflect on the restorative mindset skills shown above, please think about a past situation in which you have been in conflict with someone. To what extent (if any) did this person practice any of the skills outlined above? To what extent (if any) did you practice them yourself? Which of these skills (if any) would you have wanted them to practice while navigating conflict with you?

Restorative Mindset in Practice

Finally, to help us envision what a restorative mindset might look like in practice we invite you to watch this short conversation with Sujatha Baliga, an attorney and restorative justice practitioner based in Berkeley, CA.