



Session outline

session title	Understanding motivation and commitment
duration	90 minutes
objectives of the session	• Reflect on what motivates young people to engage in organisations and activism. • Understand the difference between initial motivation and long-term commitment. • Identify common pitfalls when motivation and commitment don't align. • Develop a collective sense of what supports healthy, thriving engagement.
when and how to use this session	This session helps reflect on what drives young people to engage and what enables them to stay committed over time. It is particularly useful for exploring challenges such as burnout, disengagement, or high turnover in youth organisations and activist spaces. The session is also useful for teams that want to have open conversations about participation, responsibility, burnout, engagement, and the different ways people contribute to a collective effort. It can be used as a stand-alone reflection session or as part of a broader discussion on organisational culture and participation.

session description and outline	Young people engage in organisations and activism for many different reasons: a sense of purpose, belonging, friendship, values, personal growth, or a desire to create change. Yet motivation and commitment are not the same thing. While motivation often brings people into a movement or organisation, commitment shapes how and whether they stay involved over time. This session invites participants to reflect on their own experiences of engagement and to better understand the experiences of others. Through individual reflection, group discussions, and practical exercises, participants will explore what motivates people, what can make participation difficult, and how different needs, capacities, and circumstances influence long-term engagement.	
methodology	Step 1: Introduction on Motivation and Commitment Welcome participants and briefly introduce the session. You can start with a grounding exercise so people have time to come to themselves as this session requires a lot of personal reflection. Facilitator input <i>"Young people often join organisations because they feel motivated by a cause, a community, or a desire to make a difference. However, remaining engaged over time requires something more than motivation alone."</i> Introduce the distinction: Motivation = the energy, passion, urgency, or interest that brings people into an organisation. Commitment = the decision and ability to stay engaged over time, even when motivation fluctuates.	15 mins

	Explain that: • Motivation can be strong but short-lived. • Commitment often depends on support, relationships, structure, recognition, and wellbeing. • Problems arise when organisations rely on motivation alone without creating conditions that support commitment Pulse check Raise your hand if: • You joined an organisation because you felt strongly about a cause. • You have experienced burnout or considered stepping back from a role. • You have seen people leave an organisation despite being highly motivated. • Your organisation struggles with long-term engagement. Transition recommendation: <i>"Today we'll explore what brings people into organisations, what makes them leave, and what helps them stay."</i>	
	Step 2: What motivates people to engage? Individual reflection (5 mins) Ask participants: • Why did I first engage in youth organisations or activism? • What motivated me to join? • What keeps me engaged today? Participants write their answers on post-its. Pair discussion (5 mins) Participants share their reflections in pairs.	20 mins

	Group debrief (10 mins) Collect themes on a flipchart. Facilitator highlights common motivations such as: • Values and beliefs • Desire for change • Community and belonging • Learning and personal development • Friendship and connection • Representation and advocacy Transition recommendation <i>"Motivation brings people in, but motivation alone does not always keep people engaged."</i>	
	Step 3: What gets in the way? Divide participants into small groups. Ask groups to discuss: What makes it difficult for young people to stay engaged over time? You can decide whether you give the groups freedom to explore the questions however they like, or you can use the following format: Heart: emotional needs Possible outcomes: • Recognition • Care • Belonging • Joy • Purpose	15 mins

Head: organisational needs

Possible outcomes:

- Clear roles
- Good communication
- Participation in decisions
- Transparency
- Fair governance

Body: material needs

Possible outcomes:

- Time
- Income
- Energy
- Accessibility
- Workload

Groups write their ideas on flipcharts.

Debrief

Identify recurring themes and highlights that disengagement is often not caused by a lack of motivation, but by barriers that make commitment difficult.

Step 4: What supports sustainable engagement?

20 mins

Sustainable Engagement Exercise

In small groups, participants create a fictional young activist. They should give a background story to this activist, for example, what role they have in the organisation, what other activities they engage in in their life and so on. Then they are invited to use the "life bars" template to track the reality of the activist. Ask them to use the reflection questions to discuss commitment and motivation of the activist they created.

Life bars may include (you can adapt them based on your reality):

- Energy / Rest
- Income / Stability
- Motivation / Optimism
- Fun / Joy
- Support / Community

Groups discuss:

- What drains these resources?
- What helps sustain them?
- What would help this person stay involved for the next three years?

Debrief

Guiding questions:

- What do young people need to thrive?
- Which needs are often overlooked?
- Which of these needs can organisations influence?

Highlights that sustainable engagement requires attention to emotional, organisational, and material realities and not just motivation.

Step 5: Closing Reflection

20 mins

Choose one of the following reflection options depending on the purpose of the session and the group. You can decide to do both, but consider this so you have enough time for the session.

Option 1: Individual reflection

Invite participants to reflect on their own engagement:

- Is the motivation that brought me here still something I have?
- What can help me maintain my commitment over time? How can I help myself and how can my organisation

help me?

- What is one thing I want to pay more attention to in my own engagement moving forward?
- How could my organisation support me better/create conditions that would support me?

Participants can write down one personal takeaway or action point.

Option 2: Organisational reflection

If participants belong to the same organisation or team, invite them to reflect collectively on how they sustain or support motivation and commitment in their organisation.

- Do we pay attention to the motivation of our activists/volunteers? If so, how?
- Do we create opportunities and spaces that match the motivation/commitment of our activists/volunteers?
- How do we pay attention to different needs?
- What do we do well? What could we do better?

Invite participants to discuss their answers in pairs, small groups, or as a full team, depending on the size of the group.

Key message:

Motivation brings people in.

Commitment helps people stay.

Sustainable engagement requires understanding that people contribute in different ways and at different moments in their lives.

By recognising these differences and creating supportive conditions, organisations can help people engage in ways that are meaningful, healthy, and sustainable over time.

preparation	Familiarise yourself with the concepts introduced in the session. Printouts of the handout for step 4 can be helpful, or you can decide to project it and participants create their own.
material/ space needed	• Post-its • Flipcharts • Markers • You can print the annexes if you find that helpful
results/ takeaway/ outcomes	• Better understand the difference between motivation and commitment • Identify key challenges to sustained engagement • Reflect on emotional, organisational, and material needs • Define concrete ways to support long-term involvement

Handout

Youth activist: Sustainable Engagement

character name	----- -----
context (optional)	----- -----

Life Bars (rate 1-10)

energy / rest	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
income / stability	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
motivation / optimism	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
fun / joy	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
support / community	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

what drains this character?

- -----

- -----

- -----

- -----

what sustains this character?

- -----

- -----

- -----

- -----

what happens if bars drop too low?

- -----

what would help this character thrive long-term?

- -----

- -----

- -----

- -----
