

Transition Network's Learning Journey with Conflict Resilience

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Over the past several years the staff team at Transition Network (TN), including myself, has engaged in explorations around group culture which have supported conflict resilience, transforming potentially difficult conflicts into something positive. We've learned that conflict resilience is less about resolving a conflict after it happens, and more about creating a connective and collaborative group culture. This includes principles and practices which help people to feel:

- included, heard, and valued
- able to participate in development and decision making
- able to explore and navigate differences of opinions
- that there are clear agreements and accountability regarding individual and group conduct and process.

This kind of group culture reduces the frequency and severity of difficult conflicts. And it increases the likelihood of exploring with more trust, compassion, and skill the tensions and differences that often arise between individuals or work roles. This means that many aspects of TN's group culture - including its organisational principles and practices - are relevant to the topic of conflict resilience.

In addition to the wider approach of exploring organisational culture, the team at TN has also engaged in 6 learning sessions focused on conflict resilience, including how to:

- Engage constructively with conflict, as an opportunity for collaboration, community building, and finding creative solutions
- Recognise the different conflict styles and preferences individuals have
- Find and return to personal peace and wellbeing - particularly when 'triggered' by a behavior or an event
- Offer and receive appreciative and constructive feedback,
- Facilitate or participate in a conflict resolution process called a 'Clearing' (see [Clearing Procedure](#))
- Develop conflict resilience skills and capacities as a group.

Inner Transition & Head-Heart-Hands

Since the early days of both the Transition movement, and Transition Network as a support organisation, the inner dimensions of Transition have been recognised as important. This includes aspects like values, emotions, relationships, beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews. The principle of balancing the **Head, Heart, and Hands** is a good reminder of this. In addition to the 'Hands' -- the more tangible and practical aspects of Transition -- it can be helpful to attend to the 'Heart' (emotions, sensitivities, trauma history); the 'Head' (beliefs, attitudes, habits); and the group culture (worldview, bias, privilege). These 'inner' dimensions of Transition contribute to a good foundation for conflict resilience, as they play important parts in creating, navigating, and transforming differences and conflicts.

Shared Governance

In April 2018, Transition Network made a shift to [shared governance and consent-based decision making](#). This has supported conflict resilience by:

- Articulating a clear and co-created **Purpose** which helps guide and prioritise all work
- Regularly gathering, co-creating, and reviewing areas of focus for the year
- Ensuring clear pathways for communication and feedback within the team.

These aspects support the team's clarity of direction, while allowing for new and emergent things to arise.

Work areas are organised into circles, such as 'Supporting the Movement,' 'Infrastructure' and 'Organisational Culture.' Roles within these circles each have a clear purpose and set of accountabilities. This provides a structure where everyone can contribute and be heard, while maintaining some individual autonomy and creativity.

This blend of structure and emergence, clarity and autonomy, collaboration and communication helps the TN team to be more creative and resilient in the face of conflicts and difficulties when they do arise.

At regular circle '**sorting**' (operational) meetings, each role presents updates, after which anyone can raise a 'tension' to be explored. These tensions can reveal a blockage in the work, or an unfulfilled area of potential. An individual might raise a tension about their own work, or about the activities of another role in the circle. Tensions are considered gifts to help the circle improve roles, or circle activities, or to find tangible next steps. This practice allows small concerns to be raised early on, and to be addressed collaboratively and creatively. This reduces the potential for small issues, blocks, or confusions to become large issues or conflicts.

'**Governance**' meetings are for creating, modifying, or deleting roles within TN's organisational system. This helps address tensions regarding capacity, priorities, or activities which need more attention, or gaps where work is falling between roles.

At ‘**strategy**’ meetings, each circle explores how to best support the wider organisational Purpose and areas of focus for the year. Twice a year the whole team (including staff and trustees) has a strategy gathering to set or review the areas of focus. Every two weeks, a ‘Heart Circle’ meets -- including representatives from each operational circle -- to ensure good communication, feedback, and addressing of any tensions between circles.

For challenging topics, or those which affect everyone (like salaries, or staff recruitment), a small circle forms to shape proposals. This small circle -- which can be composed of both trustees and staff -- consults the team to gather information, then brings its proposals to a whole-team meeting (a ‘Primary Circle’ meeting) where consent-based decisions are made. This process involves everyone, and can require some training in order to go smoothly.

Shared governance is a little complex, and it has taken TN a couple of years to get it all set up and working well. We feel it’s been worth the investment of time and energy. It helps TN as an organisation to function more collaboratively and creatively, to more easily navigate areas of tension and difference, and to transform these into constructive opportunities. This supports TN to respond better to rapidly changing complexities and contexts.

Several Transition Hubs and local groups are also working with shared governance, including the Hubs Heart Circle. [You can find out more about how to introduce shared governance to your group here.](#)

Organisational Culture

To support the exploration of collaborative group culture, TN first created a ‘Culture’ role, which then grew into an ‘Organisational Culture’ circle. It has been helpful to have a circle with clearly defined roles to support TN’s organisational culture. In addition to holding roles in various other circles, the people in this circle hold several roles: Learning, Feedback Loops, Team Well-being, Gatherings Coordinator, Practices of Change, and Transparency. This circle supports TN’s shift away from a more hierarchical ‘predict-and-control’ approach, toward a more collaborative and distributed approach.

An important aspect of transitioning TN’s organisational culture has been developing and implementing ‘**Relational Agreements**’. These include:

- Accountability
- Appreciation
- Awareness
- Sovereignty
- Communication
- Feedback
- Being Resourced and Available
- Conflict Resilience.

Together these agreements support a healthy and resilient group culture. They help to reduce the frequency and severity of difficult conflicts, and to increase the ability to transform conflict into community-building and creative solutions. [You can find out more about these agreements here.](#)

Team Well-being and Learning

Two roles, Team Well-being and Learning, offer opportunities for the staff team to continue learning about and embodying aspects of healthy group culture, supporting both individuals and the group as a whole. For example:

- Throughout TN's work and organisation, attention to well-being is encouraged; staff can bring their 'whole self' to work, including personal life, feelings, family or health issues e.g. every meeting -- whether between two people or ten -- starts with a brief 'check-in.' (How are you doing today? What does the group need to know in order for you to feel present and supported at this meeting?)
- The Team Well-being role has a budget to support individual team members with coaching, therapy, training, or skill development.
- TN has thoughtful policies for paid holiday, sickness, maternity & paternity, and compassionate leave.
- Once a month we have a well-being check-in for the whole team. Individuals can share what's happening in their personal lives, at work, and anything they are celebrating or finding challenging. This builds empathy and understanding across the team, particularly during times like the Covid pandemic, when many people are struggling.
- Tuesday mornings are for informal 'drop-in' sessions, where anyone who wants to can join a 30-minute video call to chat and socialise. This helps build social relationships, often benefiting individuals who live far apart, work remotely, and may not often work on the same projects.
- Monthly 'buddy chats' between different team members were used for several years and have been recently replaced with the Tuesday morning drop-in sessions.
- When new team members join, whether staff or trustees, they are supported by a 'steward' to help orient them during their first few months at TN.
- Twice a year, in-person or online, the 2-3 day TN strategy gatherings include informal time for relationship-building, to support a sense of community and well-being across the team.

- Regular learning sessions explore topics relevant to wellbeing, group culture, shared governance or conflict resilience. This can involve watching a short video, or exploring a helpful resource from another organisation, then discussing how this could apply within Transition Network.

The Conflict Resilience Resources

[This set of Conflict Resilience Resources](#) reflects some of what we at TN have been learning about conflict resilience and conflict transformation.

As an organisation which uses shared governance, and welcomes emergence and adaptation, some of the information presented in these resources may change over time.

These resources provide more details about the topics mentioned above, and practical ways to apply them in any group. We hope you find them helpful.