

Our Learning Journey with Conflict Resilience



Case Study: Transition Network International

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Over the past several years the team at Transition Network International (TNI) 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 strategy, governance, and decision making
- able to explore and navigate differences of opinions
- able to give and receive feedback with compassion and awareness
- 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. It increases the likelihood of exploring with more trust, compassion, and skill the tensions and differences that can arise between individuals or work roles. This means that many aspects of TNI'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 TNi has also engaged in learning sessions focused on conflict resilience, including how to:

- Engage constructively with conflict, as an opportunity for collaboration, community building, and finding creative solutions (see [Re-Framing Conflict](#))
- 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 (see [Peace Principles](#))
- [Offer and receive appreciative and constructive feedback](#)
- Facilitate or participate in a conflict resolution [process called a 'Clearing'](#)
- Develop conflict resilience skills and capacities as a group (see [Feedback Culture](#), see [Sharing and Celebrating Failings](#)).

Head-Heart-Hands

Since the early days of the Transition movement, the inner dimensions of any kind of transition have been recognised as central. 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 -- 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 dimensions 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 Mission, Vision, and Values which help guide and prioritise all work
- Regularly gathering, co-creating, and reviewing strategic objectives and priorities
- Ensuring clear pathways for communication and feedback within the team.

These aspects support the team's clarity of direction, while allowing for learning and for new needs or ideas to arise and be considered.



Work areas are organised into circles, such as 'Engagement', 'Infrastructure', 'Cultural Transformation' and 'Learning and Practising'. 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 TNi 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 responsibilities and roles within TNi'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 operational team, plus trustees, representatives from the wider movement, and other stakeholders, have a strategy gathering to review our overall work as a support organisation to the Transition movement, and how well we are delivering on this. Every two weeks, the 'Core Circle' meets -- including representatives from each operational circle -- to ensure the overall organisational strategy is being delivered, and 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 – which can be composed of both trustees and staff – is elected to shape proposals. They consult the wider team to gather information, then hold a consent based decision making process.

Shared governance is a little complex, and it has taken TNi a few years to get it all set up and working well. We feel it's been worth the investment of time and energy. It helps TNi 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 TNi to respond better to rapidly changing complexities and contexts.

Several Transition Hubs and local groups are also working with shared governance. (see [Shared Governance and Working in Circles](#)).



Organisational Culture

An important aspect of transitioning TNI's organisational culture from one that is more traditional and hierarchical, has been developing and implementing '[Relational Agreements](#)'. These include a commitment from all team members and trustees to both foster and role model:

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

Together these agreements support a healthy and resilient group culture (see [Transition in 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

The TNI Team Well-being working group offers opportunities for the operational team and Trustees to continue learning about and embodying aspects of healthy group culture, supporting both individuals and the group as a whole. For example:

- Throughout TNI'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. For example, 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?)
- TNI has thoughtful policies for paid holiday, sickness, maternity and paternity, and also 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.



- Monthly 'buddy chats' between different team members support people who may not work frequently or directly with each other, and a team which works internationally and remotely, to get to know each other as people, and build understanding and friendships.
- 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 TNi.
- Twice a year, the 2-3 day TNi strategy gatherings include informal time for relationship-building, to support a sense of community and well-being across the team.
- Internal learning sessions, and our regular Practising Transition series - open to the public - explore topics relevant to wellbeing, group culture, shared governance or conflict resilience. This can involve watching a short video, attending a webinar with a facilitator of a helpful process, or exploring a helpful resource from another organisation, then discussing how this could apply within TNi.

The Conflict Resilience Resources

This set of Conflict Resilience Resources reflects some of what we at TNi 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.

Related Resources

[Relational Agreements](#)
[Shared Governance and Working in Circles](#)
[Decision Making](#)
[Transition in Group Culture](#)
[Connective Activities for Meetings](#)
[Action-Reflection Cycle](#)

[Re-Framing Conflict](#)
[Conflict Styles](#)
[Peace Principles](#)
[Clearing Procedure](#)
[Offering And Receiving Feedback](#)
[Feedback Culture](#)
[Sharing and Celebrating Failings](#)



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