

TOOL | CONFLICT NAVIGATION: GUIDE TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION

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This tool developed by Tamarack's [Learning Centre](#) is designed to help you build a responsive strategic and inclusive approach to conflict transformation, drawing on proven methods and lessons learned from community practice.



Framework

This tool provides a comprehensive guide for individuals or organizations through the mindset shift from conflict resolution to a more transformative approach, emphasizing systemic change, cultural sensitivity, and long-term impact.



Goal

Support readers to understand and identify where your current approach lies and what needs to shift toward a transformational perspective.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

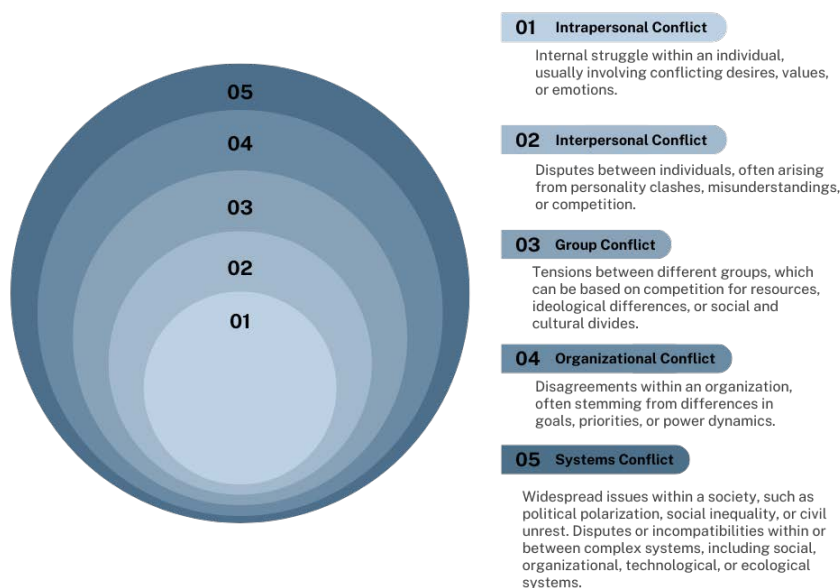
Conflict can be defined as a serious disagreement or argument arising from incompatible or opposing interests, needs, desires, or values. It involves a situation where one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. Conflict can manifest in various forms from internal to systemic but is typically characterized by efforts to assert one's position over another and can involve emotional, psychological, and/or physical manifestations.

Common Causes of Conflict

Understanding the root causes of conflict is essential for effective conflict transformation. Common causes include:

- **Unmet Needs:** Frustration from unfulfilled desires or needs, whether emotional, social, or economic.
- **Miscommunication:** Misunderstandings or poor communication leading to disputes.
- **Power Imbalances:** Struggles for control or dominance in various contexts.
- **Resource Scarcity:** Competition for limited resources like money, land, or energy.
- **Differing Values:** Clashes over beliefs, ethics, or ideologies.
- **Structural Incompatibilities:** When parts of a system don't work well together or are misaligned, causing problems or inefficiencies.
- **Differing Objectives:** Varied goals and priorities among system components or parties.
- **External Pressures:** Influences from outside the system, such as economic shifts, regulatory changes, or technological advancements.

Categories of Conflict



Understanding these categories and how they show in your context is crucial for addressing conflicts effectively. Each level of conflict requires a tailored approach that considers its unique characteristics and the context in which it occurs.

Key Differences Between Approaches to Conflict Navigation

Lens	Focus	Approach / Key Tools	Common Timeline	Common Outcomes
Avoidance	Involves sidestepping issues and avoiding confrontation to prevent disputes.	Avoidance through silence, diversion, postponement, changing the subject	Ongoing approach that can be both active and/or subconscious	May keep the peace short-term, but often leads to unresolved tensions and hinders open communication.
Mitigation	Refers to strategies aimed at reducing the intensity, scope, or impact of a conflict, preventing escalation, and fostering a less harmful resolution.	De-escalation, active listening, temporary agreements, mediation support	Short- to medium-term (weeks to months) depending on complexity	Aims to manage disputes, preventing escalation and harm, while the root causes may still exist.
Resolution	Conflict resolution seeks to reach an agreement that satisfies the immediate needs of the conflicting parties.	Mediation, arbitration, negotiation	Medium-term (weeks to months)	The issue is resolved, but the underlying systemic issues may persist.
Transformation	Seeks to shift and change the deeper paradigms, structures, and relationships that fuel conflicts by transforming underlying conditions.	Dialogue, community engagement, structural change, commitment to (un)learning	Long-term, ongoing process aimed at sustainable peace	Addresses immediate conflict and deeper systemic issues, fostering healthier, more accountable relationships.

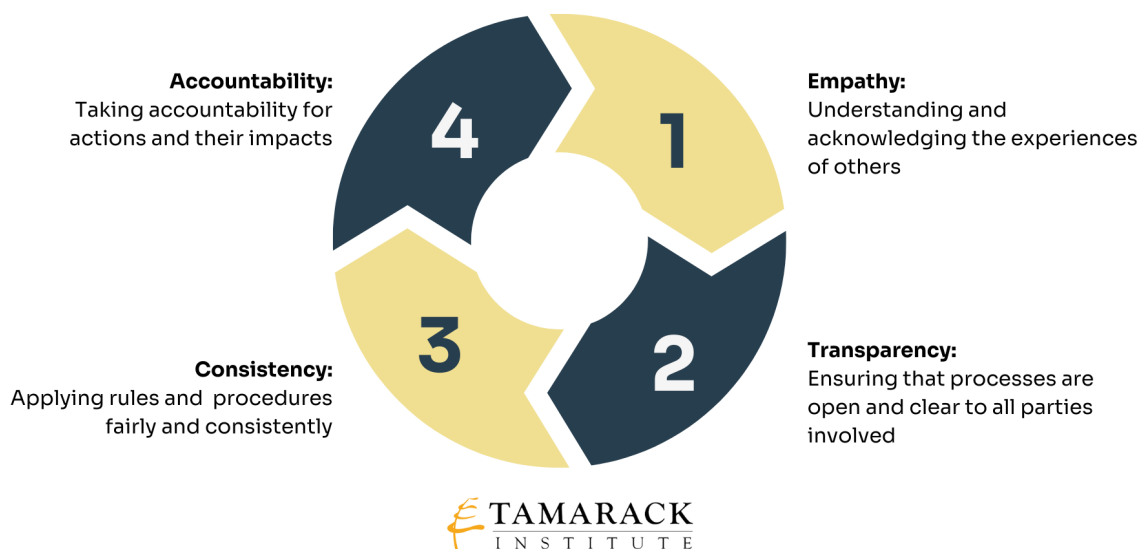
What is Conflict Transformation?

Conflict Transformation is an approach to addressing conflicts that goes beyond merely resolving immediate disputes. It seeks to change the underlying social structures, relationships, and dynamics that give rise to conflict. This process involves ongoing (un)learning and relearning how conflicts are understood and

managed. This approach requires a mindset shift that focuses on an ongoing, reflective process that prioritizes people's needs while transforming attitudes, behaviors, and social systems to create meaningful and holistic repair at individual, community, and/or societal levels.

Conflict transformation goes beyond resolving immediate issues to addressing deeper causes and fostering long-term change. This approach has deep roots in Black, Indigenous, and Racialized communities, drawing from traditional, cultural, and community-centered practices. It emphasizes the need for systemic change and recognizes the importance of building trust among all parties involved.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND TRANSFORMATION



Three key mindset shifts include:

1. **Seeing Beyond Immediate Issues:** In the heat of conflict, it's easy to become consumed by the immediate issues demanding quick solutions. However, a transformational approach requires us to develop the capacity to see these immediate situations as windows into deeper, underlying causes. Just as we look through a window to see what lies beyond, we

should look through immediate issues to uncover the relational context and root causes of conflict. This involves recognizing the difference between the content of a conflict and its emotional and **relational backdrop**. By doing so, we can address not just the surface problems but also the deeper dynamics that fuel conflict.

2. **Balancing Short-Term and Long-Term Perspectives:** One of the key challenges in conflict transformation is integrating multiple time frames. While short-term responses are often necessary, they should not constrain our vision for long-term change. Effective leaders must balance addressing immediate issues with fostering broader, enduring relationship patterns. This requires creating strategies that cater to both immediate and future needs, ensuring that our interventions are sustainable and promote lasting transformation. Understanding which processes and time frames are appropriate for different situations is crucial for this balanced approach.
3. **Shifting from Either/Or to Both/And:** Transformational leadership involves reframing conflicts from an either/or perspective to a both/and mindset. In complex conflict scenarios, decisions often seem to involve outright contradictions. For instance, during the humanitarian crisis in Somalia in the early 1990s, we faced the dilemma of providing aid, knowing it might be exploited by armed groups, versus not providing aid and worsening the humanitarian plight. By reframing our approach to consider humanitarian aid and building peace simultaneously, we opened up new avenues for action. This shift allows us to handle complexity more effectively and pursue multiple interdependent goals.

Use the reflection worksheet below to reflect upon recent conflicts you have faced.

REFLECTION WORKSHEET: UNPACKING CONFLICTS

Use the space below to describe and/or draw your reflections about a conflict:

1. What conflict approach do you most often use? Why do you gravitate toward this style, and how has it worked or not worked in your favour?

2. Refer to the *5 Categories of Conflict*. Which category or categories does this conflict fit into? How did this influence your approach to navigating it?

3. What was the nature of the conflict? What deeper root causes were at play (cultural, social, structural)? How did these causes manifest in the actions or responses of the parties involved? And if this conflict is still ongoing, what long-term effects and/or deeper dynamics could be influencing the conflict's persistence?

4. Reflecting on Mindset Shifts: Using the three key mindset shifts, outline 3 reflections on the ways you could you apply them to reframing this conflict:

5. Identify any potential structural or systemic influences on the conflict. Prompt: How did these elements contribute to the conflict? How could you address these structural changes that would need to occur at an organizational or community level?

6. Reflect on a conflict where you were in a leadership position. How did you manage both the immediate needs of those involved and the long-term relationships at stake?



Turtle Island (North America) is the ancestral home of Indigenous peoples of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit descent. Manitoba, Canada was originally inhabited by various Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota peoples.

We recognize that across this land Indigenous rights holders have endured historical oppression and continue to experience inequities that have resulted from the widespread colonialist systems and ideologies that perpetuate harm to Indigenous peoples to this day.

See our [community acknowledgements](#) and [land acknowledgement guide](#).

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