



STAYING FOCUSED, STAYING CONNECTED AND STAYING HUMAN: PRINCIPLES FOR PEACEBUILDING ONLINE

What happens when peacebuilders go “online”



While COVID19 is a terrible tragedy that’s going on in our world, we feel strongly about holding onto peacebuilding right now; staying motivated and focusing on the terrible violent conflicts that are still in our region but equally the many possibilities for peace.

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In March 2020, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) began transitioning to an online peacebuilding organisation. The increasing travel restrictions and preventive measures linked to the COVID-19 pandemic became a catalyst for CPCS to critically reflect on ways in which we approach peace work and to imagine what could be the benefits and challenges of running an online organisation with staff working remotely. In assessing options for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that the violent conflicts that CPCS is engaged with would continue to unfold despite the global pandemic, and we would need to rapidly transition our organisation to adapt to continue our efforts to violent conflicts in Asia.

Having tested and adjusted the structure of our work, consulted with our partners, and deeply reflected within our team, CPCS has identified key lessons and principles for carrying forward our work, beyond the current climate of COVID19 restrictions.

This third article on *what happens when peacebuilders go “online”* shares our emerging principles and how we put them into practice.

Principles for Peacebuilding Online

Evolving Personal Leadership: Working remotely often means working alone, and each of us must reflect on and increase our personal leadership for our work.

- **Personal leadership is proactive** – we don’t wait to be asked or given permission;
- **it is clear** – on boundaries and line management when asking colleagues for support;
- **it is humble** – asking for support from colleagues and in identifying when outside resources are needed.

We must take our leadership and initiative to the next level, to communicate and make suggestions. Mindful communication is essential as is maximizing the tools of email, iCal, and Zoom to be as clear and concise as possible is essential to make sure all the members of your team can stay up to date with what is happening.

- Staying focused, staying balanced: Maintaining balance while working from home:** Maintaining a structured day while working from home, with clearly defined “online” hours, helps to create more balance for both personal and family time. Having designated “online” hours reduces the temptation or perceived expectation to be available 24 hours a day. CPCS expects staff to take responsibility to manage their work-life balance so that they can be fully present and focused during work hours, and know they can “switch off” and have time for other priorities and responsibilities in their life.

How we structure our days to increase focus while maintaining balance:

- **Designated “online” hours** (for us, this is 9:30 – 3:30 Monday to Friday). This schedule allows us to have set hours when all are working and can expect to be in (virtual) contact with each other for answers and setting meetings. Staff work additional hours according to their schedule, but this helps us to minimise the risk of staff being “online” 24-7 and not having proper breaks.
- Zoom calls, messaging, and other **direct communications should be reserved for working hours**, except for emergencies. Other information can be sent through email anytime.
- Designated **“Internal Housekeeping”** day each week. We schedule one day a week for no external Zoom calls or meetings, and this gives staff a day to focus on catching up on internal work and checking in with each other. Banking, signatures, and other administrative work are prepared on these days.
- **Planning work in 4-week blocks of time** – Since things continue to shift and change, we commit to schedules and deliverables in four-week blocks. At the end of each block, we review what we know and think we know about changes where our colleagues and partners live, to determine what is likely to happen and what is possible in the next four weeks.
- **Beware of “noise”** – CPCS uses “noise” to describe activities or requests that, while they may be interesting or important, do not fit within our scope of work or expertise. As such, these are things that take energy and focus from partners and projects that we have committed to. We practice saying “no” gracefully and clearly to “noise”, so that we can stay focused and engaged with our core priorities.

- Staying connected: Mindful communication:** The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) practises “mindful communication.” We use a variety of communication tools for messaging, emails, and video calls. Before initiating communication, THINK: Who needs this information? Is this the right platform to send this information? Have you clearly stated what you need, from whom, by when? Is this the right time to send it (for example, not outside online hours unless an emergency)?

Remember:

- **Be mindful** – Is this the right time, format, or person to receive this message?
- **Be explicit** – What do you need? Who do you need it from? When do you need it? What is the most effective way to communicate (email, message, phone call, Zoom, etc.)?
- **The power of CC** – Who needs to follow the conversation? Remember to carbon copy (cc) all relevant people on emails, group messages, among others, to make sure everyone who needs to know has access to information. This is not about monitoring and micro-managing; it is about transparency and clarity.
- **The power of the iCal** – schedule what you need (including the time to write, read, reflect) during your working hours. Make sure everyone who needs to see your iCal has access, and you can see colleagues’. When scheduling a meeting in iCal, include all relevant information, including; format, link, agenda points, among others. Ensure that you add all participants (not just colleagues).

- **Connection and debriefing** are as valid as scheduling meetings to design programs or meet partners. Communicate what you need.

○ **Staying human: maintaining relationships:** We find creative and fun ways to stay connected with our colleagues and partners when we cannot see each other in person. Set virtual lunch and coffee dates, celebratory zoom calls, among others, to remain connected and human.

- **Reflections** – Bi-weekly debrief, and reflection sessions with our peacebuilding team (via Zoom) to share what we are learning, how we are feeling, what we want to try, or change.
- Fun **“check-ins”** to open and close the workweek –Using telegram to send a word or sentence about outside life (Examples: something crazy or funny you did this weekend? Something you looking forward to? Celebrate a birthday with everyone sharing a word or photo of the person; share something you learned this week)
- **Get creative** with celebratory zooms – for example, a “zoom” baby shower for two new Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) babies, where everyone can dress up and “bring” a fun lunch or snack to “share” while we met our colleagues’ babies.
- **Virtual coffee dates** – Plan virtual coffee / lunches with your colleagues to catch up about life and stay connected with each other while we are unable to catch up at the office together.

Who is the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

The Centre for Peace and Conflicts Studies (CPCS) is a Cambodia-based, nongovernmental organisation that promotes strategic interventions to violent conflicts, with the aim of sustainable peace in Asia. CPCS emphasises strong partnerships with key people, both in terms of local partners who are working on conflicts in their communities and external partners who have invested in sustainable peace.

Specific interventions are developed in consultation with local partners, grounded in on-going analysis, and are flexible and adaptable to shifting dynamics.

CPCS is a value-driven organisation, and our core values continue to guide us in making decisions and developing interventions. **Our values are:**

Grounded: We are committed to mindful interventions into violent conflicts. We design conflict transformation initiatives rooted in the critical and on-going analysis.

Excellence: We are committed to outstanding work. We strive to be excellent by challenging ourselves to ongoing improvement in our work.

Trust: We create and nurture relationships with our partners and each other. Our relationships are honest, generous, heartfelt, and respectful. We practice humility, empathy, and solidarity. We value diversity.

Courageous: We embrace challenges, innovate, persevere, and push boundaries. We support and encourage others and ourselves to take the initiative and leadership.

Continued learning: We critically reflect, evaluate, and adapt our methods, programmes, and goals. We share our learning and learn from the approaches and experiences of others.