



6Cs for Peacebuilding

Message from **Dr. Emma Leslie**, Executive Director of CPCS – Delivered to the Applied Conflict Transformation Studies (ACTS) Ma Students on August 4th, 2020

*I notice in most conversations we have been having, we always start framing our conversations with the starting point of speaking about **COVID**. But I really want to challenge us as peacebuilders to stop doing that – to stop talking about **COVID**, the disease, and to stop talking about the situation that we face in the world today. Because the pandemic is not the only thing that is going on.*

The letter C has become very important in the English language – **C** for COVID; **C** for Challenging, **C** for Crisis, **C** for Conspiracy, **C** for China. We have actually managed to get ourselves in history where things have really changed. So, I want to talk about a few Cs that CPCS has been picking up now.

Critical Analysis

Conflict analysis is absolutely fundamental to where we put our energy, what work is important how we work, and where we decide what we need to get done, when. Conflict analysis challenges us to ask, “Are we getting it right? Are we using the limited resources we have wisely? Are we focusing in on what is really driving the conflict? Or are we doing work that makes us feel good, makes us feel comfortable, but that will make no real difference?”

In this moment, a historical change is happening as we become more connected to China. We cannot assume that the conflicts we have been working on have stayed the same. In this moment of change, we have to re-evaluate. You can see change very obviously in the United States where significant power dynamics are coming to the surface. Sometimes as racism, sometimes as politics, sometimes as economic and these are not unique to the United States. Similar significant change is happening in Kashmir; it is happening on the China-India border; it is happening in how the DPRK has been shut down; it is happening in Rakhine where people’s villages are being burned every day and people are dying; it is happening in the hopes of an Afghanistan peace process; it is happening as Nepal straddles China and India. Some of you working in autonomous land conflicts may find your programs sidelined as Chinese companies are already taking the lands that we are negotiating on. This is true in the Karen state as a big tract of the autonomous area is already sold to China for online gaming and other things. So we have to do analysis that recognizes significant changes and factors them into our programming. Oddly, this is the time we can do it with people that we have never been able to contact before. We can reach out to people now in ways that we have never been able to do.

Creativity

As peacebuilders we are going to have to dig deeper into our creativity. We are always proud of how creative we are, but our creativity is being tested now. We have been stuck on the idea that we have to see each other in person to build trust and to develop peace strategies. In reality we have already adapted creatively to the limitations of travel. Here we are at no costs talking to one another across a community of people that share values and we organized it in a couple of days. This is powerful.

But is it powerful enough? Can we do more? Can we do better movement building using this technology? Can we think of new ways of speaking to each other? Can we actually reach out to people whom we could not reach before because we would not be allowed past the presidential gate or into the ambassador's office? Times challenge us to stretch our creativity and to dig deeper into who we think we can be and how we can work.

Collaboration

We need each other right now. We need deep collaboration. We assume that we are the ones who are doing the peacebuilding work. But recently, for example, in one of the conflicts where we work, we mapped and discovered there are at least 150 people who think they are doing what we are doing. So, how are we going to reach out to those people? How are we going to show them what we are doing, learn what they are doing, and how we are going to share more and work more closely together?

COVID 19 and other major changes seem designed to divide us, to keep us apart. But, we have proved that we do not need airplanes to be together. What we need is collaboration, deep collaboration. This means we have to take our egos out of it. We have to be aware of who is doing what. We have to communicate better. And seek ways to collaborate and connect. We must do so with other peace builders and with communities with whom we work.

Courage

Who are we in this moment? Are we calm? Have we eliminated the noise that takes us away from the work that we are doing? This is a personal challenge for me because I find suddenly that technology means I can be accessible to everybody all over the world. This forces me and CPCS to make harder decisions. Who do we talk to? Which conferences do we go to? How do we focus ourselves? And how do we stay really really calm in the midst of a pandemic, technological connections and significant other changes referred to above?

We must listen carefully to who we are and find a confident calm that gives us courage right now. Courage to deal with all the chatter around COVID but more than that to stay really focused on what we have decided to do with our lives. Most of you have committed your lives where you are not paid big salaries, you are not famous and well-known, you are not going to win awards. But you have all chosen a life of leadership in your setting. And leadership in this moment of history requires that extra special sourcing of your calm, of your confidence, your creativity and especially your courage. Because it takes courage right now to know where we are in the midst of powerful changes around us.

Consolidation

So we need to be confident, calm, creative, courageous, but we also need to consolidate. Peacebuilders are not talking and thinking enough about it. The economic crisis is going to hit us harder than we think. We need to consolidate financially, in terms of human resources and organizationally.

Consolidation is central to how we adapt to the change - not just to COVID - but to the broader changes in economies and politics and environment. This means you who run organizations need to look at your budgets. What can you negotiate to keep? What can you negotiate differently? Donors need to know that we are going to be doing our work differently (and creatively). What can you do with your team to ensure that you can support them and that they can keep going? How should you spend the budget you planned and raised money for twelve months ago, when you know you are not going to spend it the way you then intended? We cannot know the future. But we can be sure that to consolidate right now is really really critical.

Celebration

One of our admired peacebuilding colleagues, Sue Williams, reminds us to celebrate. If you are not in a celebration mindset right now, remember the importance of courage and creativity. Think about the opportunities we have been given. Find the things that bring you joy and happiness right now. In this moment we need to go back into ourselves and source what we think of as people of hope. Switch off any negative news. Look at what you have achieved.

We must hold ourselves, you must hold yourself, in the space of celebration. Be aware of whatever it is that brings you joy and happiness even if it is just for a short time. Do it each day. Celebrate the small things. This will help sustain all the other C's, so that we also will have big things to celebrate.

About the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS)

CPCS is a regional organization that accompanies peace leaders and peace processes, to transform violent conflict in Asia. A values-drive organization, CPCS practices: Grounded-ness; Continued Learning; Trust; Excellence; and Courage.

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