



## Engaging communities in natural hazard and climate change conversations

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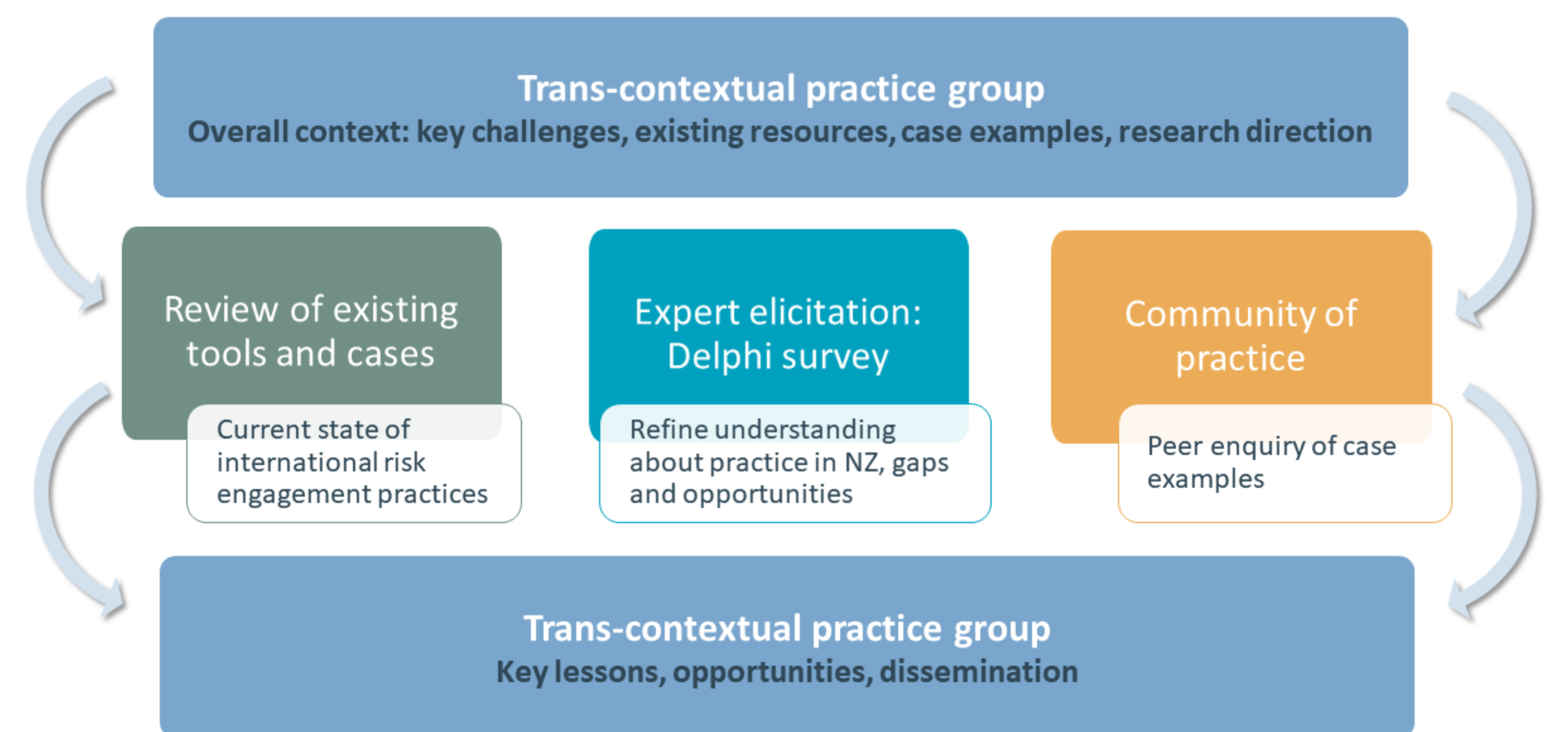
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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Conversations about hazard risk are happening between agencies and communities around Aotearoa for a variety of reasons, including planning for long-term change, preparing for emergency response, or making decisions about what risks communities are prepared to live with and what can be done to address those they cannot. These conversations can involve a wide range of different people within agencies: such as those involved in planning and policy development, technical and hazard science expertise, hazard response and resilience, community development and engagement, or iwi liaison.

Our work aims to bring together the 'learning from experience' that is currently occurring and to share it with those involved in engaging with communities.

## METHODOLOGY



## Finding risk conversations hard? Here are 9 reasons why.

While all public engagement is hard to do well, during the first stage of our research we observed nine different reasons why conversations about natural hazards are particularly challenging.

### HIGH STAKES

Hazard risk conversations often involve high levels of emotion including anger, denial, fear, and distrust. Changes to the hazard risk status of an area trigger fears about loss of property value, loss of future opportunities, and rising insurance costs.

"For the people involved in the processes (running it) and engaging in it - it's hard professionally and personally hard."

### NEEDS MULTIPLE TYPES OF EXPERTISE

Engagement needs people with different skills and experience to collaborate, e.g. planners, engineers, and communication experts; across different departments and agencies. Coordinating and reaching the necessary people to build a team approach is challenging.

### TECHNICAL NATURE

Natural hazard information is inherently technical. There are challenges in putting technical aspects (i.e., frequency, probability, impact) into plain English. Also, people need time to understand and work through the personal impacts of the information being shared.

"Can the science community please come up with some better wording for 1 in a 100-year event that happens yearly?"

### HIGH VARIABILITY OF RISK APPETITE/RISK CAPACITY

Hazard risk conversations deal with all kinds of different people and no one-size-fits-all approach will work. Even in a small community views on the acceptability of a risk can be very different (risk appetite). Similarly, the resources of an individual and community to withstand the losses caused by a hazard event can vary widely (risk capacity). This raises issues of equity when applying solutions.

"Technical people can have a predetermined solution - actually risk perception is a highly variable thing"

### TEMPORAL ASPECTS

There are many temporal aspects to natural hazard risk engagement, including:

- envisaging risk outcomes over time and enabling communities to assess priorities for the present without burdening future generations;
- adopting engagement processes that are suitable for slow hazard vs immediate risk;
- dealing with community turnover impacting community buy-in to the outcomes of engagement processes.

"I often talk about how the imminent risk of a pandemic did more to increase the personal preparedness of our communities in 7 days than my multiple engagements over several years."

### CAPABILITY & CAPACITY CHALLENGES

Hazard risk engagement faces several capability and capacity challenges. It takes resources to ensure engagements are supported by good expertise and expertise from non-risk spaces require 'upskilling'.

There is also a lack of frameworks, national guidance, case examples, and 'how-to guides', and few opportunities for learning from the experiences of others and building consistency and professionalism.

"Lack of consistency also leads to groups reinventing the wheel in terms of materials and initiatives, both locally, nationally and internationally."

### LACK OF CLARITY BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL & COMMUNITY RISK OWNERSHIP

Lack of clarity about who owns and pays for the risk hinders the engagement process. For example, where only a subset of people is directly affected, but the wider community shares the cost, or when there are information gaps around financial liability in high-risk locations.

### UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty is present in many public engagement situations. In conversations about natural hazard risk, there are many uncertainties that cause tensions at all stages of the process - the nature of the hazard, options for mitigation/reduction, and how long the process will take to resolve. This uncertainty can lead to denial, lack of commitment to address the issue, or high emotional intensity.

"...the uncertainty around the science and modelling, the statutory context, the future of local government and the changes to the RM, the establishment of a new agency to look after stormwater infrastructure etc..."

### ENGAGEMENT UNDERUTILISATION

There is a lack of understanding of the value and role of community feedback in risk situations. This makes it hard to secure the resources needed upfront to design effective engagement processes that intersect well with statutory decision-making. The complexity of organisations involved in mitigating climate and natural hazard risk also hinders the extent to which community engagement can effectively inform decision-making.